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Inhaltsverzeichnis

Intercultural communication within institutional and bureaucratic settings –
"adults-in-mobility" and "adults-professionally-in-contact-with-mobility" in Malta and in Italy

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1   Introduction

It is a well-known fact that in many European countries, contact between natives and foreigners has become extremely commonplace. Whereas problematic situations are infrequent when one has to interact with people sharing a common background and culture, problems arise frequently when one does not share such common features, and more so when there is no knowledge of a mutual verbal language which can facilitate the communicative exchange.

A context in which communicative problems are often present is the institutional-bureaucratic one. This occurs because in such contexts a foreigner has to make very specific requests to his/her interlocutor, who, from his/her side, at times may not have the necessary means and skills to facilitate the communicative context. Furthermore, in these situations, one is often required to fill in forms which may include personal or confidential information that one may be reluctant to share with a stranger. The linguistic context, especially when one is required to fill in written forms, does not necessarily facilitate the exchange. In many cases one may be required to answer questions which may be formulated in a complex manner or which require information unfamiliar to the person filling in the form.

The physical setting in which the institutional-bureaucratic interaction occurs may be unattractive and uninviting and the officials working in these contexts at times do not have any visual materials which may be useful if he/she is to receive a person who may not speak his/her language. Institutional-bureaucratic forms normally have a very plain layout and illustrations or visual

cues are rarely included. This clearly may have a negative effect on the communicative context (cf. Dossou 2007) which, as stated above, becomes highly problematic especially when the interlocutors have to rely mainly on gestures as they may only share a limited knowledge of a common verbal language, if any at all.

The main objective of this paper is to highlight both positive and problematic aspects within these communicative situations by referring to two specific contexts, namely Italy and Malta. The data commented in this paper were collected during a European project funded by the European Commission, namely the SPICES (Social Promotion of Intercultural Communication Expertise and Skills) Project (1).

In the cases of the Italian and the Maltese situations it is deemed necessary to promote further insight into issues pertaining to interaction within institutional-bureaucratic settings and, at a more practical level, to promote training courses which prepare those involved in such situations to gain awareness of the difficulties and problems which intercultural communication often entails. Within the paper the terms *adults-in-mobility* (AMs) and *adults-professionally-in-contact-with-mobility* (ACMs), as defined in SPICES (cf. http://www.trainingspices.net/glossary.htm) will be utilised in order to refer to the participants of such communicative events. These terms are utilised as other terms used in the field (such as *foreigner, immigrant, local*) may be ambiguous and culturally-laden and therefore might cause misunderstandings and may be associated with stereotypes.

2   Adults-in-mobility in Italy and in Malta: different backgrounds, similar communication problems

2.1   The Italian background

Until the 1980s, Italy was mainly known for its emigration fluxes of the end of the 18th century to distant countries. After the Second World War many Italians also started emigrating to other West and North European countries as well as internally, from Southern and North-Eastern regions to North-West Italy. Italy started being perceived as an "immigration country" only in the 1980s, as during

this decade immigration fluxes started to be considered as a relevant social phenomenon, and since 1981 several specific legislative interventions have attempted to regularise these fluxes.

At present most of the AMs in Italy are mainly from European countries that are not part of the EU. These are followed, as far as official numbers are concerned, by AMs from Africa, from Asia and eventually from the Americas and from EU countries.

The reasons for immigration can be classified as follows: in the first place, work (1,449,746 = 66.1 %), in the second place, family including adoptions (532,670 = 24.3 %), medium-stable insertion for religion, residence, study (146,371 = 6.7 %), refugees and asylum seekers (17,318 = 0.8 %), other reasons (47,894 = 2.1 %) (these data are included in Caritas/Migrantes 2004: 6).

The presence of these immigrants in Italy has determined an increase in courses and publications (e.g. Balboni 1994, Favaro 2002) regarding the teaching of Italian as a foreign language.

2.2   The Maltese background

The current situation in Malta as far as AMs and ACMs are concerned is just as complex as the situation in Italy, both from a social and from a linguistic perspective. The most notable difference, however, lies in the fact that in Malta both Maltese and English are widely used (2) and therefore English is often used as a lingua franca during communicative events involving AMs and locals. Since Malta has always been a meeting point at a crossroads in the centre of the Mediterranean, the presence of foreigners is natural and widely accepted.

Figures from the Maltese National Statistics Office (www.nso.gov.mt) reveal that at the end of 2004, the total population stood at 402,668, out of which 11,999 (3 %) were foreigners residing in Malta. A large number of these foreign residents are knowledgeable in English and some of them also attempt to learn Maltese so as to integrate better with locals. In a few cases Maltese is learnt spontaneously through regular contacts with speakers.

Besides the tourist industry, a number of AMs work and reside in Malta for short spans of time. This is due to the fact that many Maltese private compa-

nies have regular contacts with their foreign counterparts and in some cases also act as representatives for European companies for commerce and trade in North Africa. The University of Malta has also benefited from the advantages offered by a number of international projects and students are attracted by the fact that lectures are held in English and are based on English texts. In cases involving tourists, foreigners on work-related sojourns and tertiary-level students, there is virtually no inclination to learn Maltese, as the communicative needs of these short-term visitors are fulfilled by using English.

The arrival of immigrants from North Africa in Southern Mediterranean countries is a well-known phenomenon and Malta has been affected significantly by these migratory movements. Immigration has led to some considerable logistical problems and the island's migrant centres, run by the Maltese security forces, currently house over 1,000 people. On the local Jesuit Refugee Service's (JRS) website (www.jrsmalta.org) it is reported that "[T]here were 1,686 arrivals in 2002 compared to 24 in 2000". Frendo (2006) offers some extremely interesting insight regarding the background of these asylum seekers. Whilst re-iterating the fact that this social situation is indeed raising great concern within the general public in Malta, the author reveals that most of these asylum seekers who depart from North Africa, are of extremely heterogeneous nationalities and in most cases possess only a basic, if any, form of education.

Some immigrants who come to Malta, both legally or illegally, seek to learn basic English or Maltese in order to enable them to communicate success-fully. Needless to say, most of these immigrants do not have the opportunity to attend classes and therefore strive to learn the basic words and phrases of either language in order to manage to get their message across (cf. Caruana 2006).

Finally, another recent phenomenon which is often unaccounted for even in the local media, is the arrival of young adults from Eastern European coun-tries who are employed (legally or illegally) or exploited in various sectors of the local community – from workers in the building and manufacturing industry, to cleaners or waiters in restaurants and hotels, or to dancers in local establish-ments and prostitutes.

3   Methodology

Data collected within institutional and bureaucratic settings include both written and spoken material. The written forms presented hereunder were collected from a number of offices and institutions in Malta and in Italy. The oral interactions, on the other hand, are based on semi-simulated situations. In this case, both the AM and the ACM were informed that the interaction would be video and audio recorded. The setting where the recording was done was a real setting in which actual ACM-AM interactions take place (e.g. governmental or municipal offices, university offices, language schools, etc.). However the recording took place at a date and at a time which was convenient to all parties involved and was carried out behind closed doors, i.e. not in a situation in which the AM would normally be after having waited for his/her turn after queueing. These semi-simulated interactions were therefore carried out in a situation which was not entirely faithful to the one which may be encountered in real life, but the verbal, paraverbal and non-verbal exchanges that occurred were spontaneous and the researcher was only present to carry out the video and audio recordings. Consequently, the considerations emerging from the data analysis of the oral interactions must also take account of the *observer effect*, which normally entails that participants in the interaction would do their utmost to give a positive impression since they are aware of being recorded.

The video recording was deemed to be essential due to the relevance of visual, non-verbal and paraverbal communication within such contexts. In fact, in the case of any interaction, elements such as facial expressions, gestures, posture, tone and volume of voice are all central issues within the communicative context and at times can be indeed more meaningful that the actual verbal interaction.

4   The data: written texts and talk-in-interaction

4.1   Bureaucratic texts in Malta

University students who come from overseas to pursue their studies in Malta are required to fill in a form. Maltese ACMs point out that the following terms are the cause of communicative and cultural difficulties for these students: *nationality/immigration office; police headquarters; visa application; transcript; undergraduate; registrar; referees/references; proficiency test; tuition fees.* Whilst some of these terms may be difficult to comprehend if the AM does not possess an adequate competence of English, others are specifically related to the sectorial context in which they are used. For example, the word *transcript* refers specifically to an official document which includes the applicant's record and academic results from his/her home university, while the *registrar* is a senior university official who is responsible for record-keeping and administration. As stated in paragraph 2.2, Malta has also been affected by the arrival of a number of immigrants, who often come ashore illegally. Text 1 below is the written form that AMs are required to fill in on arrival in Malta. This form is normally given to the officials at the local police headquarters and the information provided may also have an impact on the AM's claim for refugee status. Besides the fact that the layout of this form is unattractive, one may note the considerable lexical and syntactic complexity of the questions formulated. For example, the initial question reads as follows: "Did you ever apply for refugee status in another country?" It therefore refers to a past event, with an adverbial form *ever* which could refer to any stage of the applicant's life, and it includes technical terminology such as *refugee status*. A second question follows, which actually contains three interrogatives: "If yes when, where and what was the result?" The syntactic structure of this question is incoherent and inevitably requires a lengthy answer. In this form, technical terminology abounds (e.g. *affiliations, detentions, asylum*), there is no rational distinction between parts written entirely in capital or small characters and the syntactic formulation of some statements/questions is ambiguous (e.g. *basic reasons for requesting asylum in Malta*).

Text 1 – Extract from the preliminary questionnaire to register desire to apply for recognition of refugee status in Malta

DID YOU EVER APPLY FOR REFUGEE STATUS IN AN-
OTHER COUNTRY?:

IF YES WHEN, WHERE AND WHAT WAS THE RESULT:

If NO, why not?

ARRIVAL IN MALTA:

Did you enter Malta by sea or by air?

Did you enter Malta legally or illegally?

Have you been in contact with our Embassy or Consulate since your last departure from your home country?

DOCUMENT/S AVAILABLE:

Are these documents genuine and regularly obtained?

AFFILIATIONS:

Have you or any members of your family (including these with you) ever belonged to any political, religious, armed, social or other group or movement?

MILITARY SERVICE:

Dates:

IMPRISONMENT/DETENTIONS:

BASIC REASONS FOR REQUESTING ASYLUM IN MALTA:

4.2   Bureaucratic texts in Italy

A number of issues which arose in the Italian context are remarkably similar to those described above with regard to the Maltese situation. First and foremost, AMs in Italy encounter a number of problems related to terminological issues as well as the use of technical formulations (Fioritti 1997) (3). In this case, translating the form into one or more other languages will not resolve the problems as reference is made to bureaucratic procedures and to a number of concepts which are not the same within different cultural contexts. For example, *codice fiscale* (literally: *fiscal code*) refers to an identification number any resident adult (Italian or not) is obliged to have in Italy for fiscal purposes, while *numero civico* (literally: *civic number*) refers specifically to one's residence number included in one's address.

The following terms and phrases extracted from the Italian *permesso di soggiorno* (residential or stay permit) were identified both by ACMs and by AMs as problematic. In some cases, problems are language-related, in other cases, it is the cultural context or the concept itself which may be ambiguous, as made evident by the translations provided and by comments added:

1. *allegare tre foto firmate a margine* (include three photos signed at the margin): There is no indication of where one should actually place his/her signature and whether this should be on the front, on the back or on the side of the photograph.
2. *cittadinanza* (citizenship)
3. *cognome* (surname): The concept of the surname, while obvious in European contexts, is not this clearly defined in many communities around the world.
4. *condizione o stato di rifugiato* (refugee status or condition): Two different terms are used, *condizione* and *stato*, but the difference between the two is not clear.
5. *firma del dichiarante* (signature of the "declarant"): The "declarant" refers to the person who has filled in the form.
6. *lavoro (professionale, autonomo, subordinato, dipendente)* (occupation (professional, autonomous, subordinate, dependant)): In this case, instead of the term *impiegato* (employee), technical terms *(subordinato, dipendente)* are

utilised. Furthermore the differences between *professionale* and *autonomo* on the one hand and between *subordinato* and *dipendente* on the other are highly subtle, if not completely ambiguous.

7. *luogo di nascita* (place of birth): It is not clear whether this refers to the country or to the city where the applicant was born.

8. *mezzi di sostentamento* (means of sustainment): The use of a technical term "sustainment" in this context leads to ambiguity.

9. *referenze in Italia* (references in Italy): There is no specification what sort of reference is required. Furthermore it is not clear whether some sort of declaration is required from the referee or whether the applicant should just include a name of a person or of some organisation.

10. *rinnovo* (renewal)

Other cases of ambiguity are documented in other forms, including those used for international students' exchange schemes. For example, *Docente Coordinatore dello scambio presso l'Università di...* (Lecturer responsible for the coordination of exchanges within the University of...) shows an ambiguity with regard to the use of the preposition *presso*, which syntactically can refer to either the noun *docente* or *scambio*. In other cases even the title of a form can lead to misinterpretation: *Richiesta di prolungamento Socrates – Erasmus* (request for extension Socrates – Erasmus), for example, does not refer to the fact that in reality the extension in question refers specifically to the study period (and possibly to the scholarship) being carried out within a foreign institution. The words highlighted in gray in the form presented in text 2, to which reference has also been made in the above paragraph, present difficulties to foreign students of different origin who have been in Italy for varying amounts of time:

Text 2 – Socrates-Erasmus form from the University of Perugia, Italy

UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI PERUGIA

RICHIESTA DI PROLUNGAMENTO SOCRATES – ERASMUS

Cognome _____**Nome** _____

Docente Coordinatore dello scambio presso **l'Università di Perugia**_____

Università ospitante:_____

Numero dei mesi inizialmente assegnati: _____

Dal: _____ /_____/_____ (gg/mm/aa) **al:** _____/_____/_____ (gg/mm/aa)

Numero dei mesi di prolungamento: _____

Dal: _____/_____/_____ (gg/mm/aa) **al:** _____/_____/_____ (gg/mm/aa)

Per ottenere il prolungamento occorre presentare all'Ufficio Studenti Stranieri, oltre alla presente richiesta:

1. la dichiarazione di accettazione da parte dell'Università ospitante **(allegare)**;

2. la dichiarazione di accettazione firmata dal Docente Coordinatore dello scambio presso l'Università di Perugia **(allegare).**

Il sottoscritto è consapevole che il prolungamento dello "Status Erasmus" non garantisce il finanziamento delle mensilità aggiuntive.

Gli studenti devono avere lo "Status Erasmus" nel periodo in cui si sostengono gli esami all'estero.

Data _____ **Firma** _____

Consegnare, spedire o inviare via fax a:

UNIVERSITA' DEGLI STUDI DI PERUGIA
UFFICIO Mobilità ERASMUS
Piazza Università, 1 - 06123 Perugia
tel. +39.075.5852351 – fax. +39.075.5852260
E-mail: studenti.erasmus@unipg.it

4.3   Counter interactions in Malta

The following three texts come from the semi-structured data collection sessions in Malta. By means of these texts different issues pertaining to the communicative and cultural contexts will be illustrated and commented. In the first of these texts (text 3) a doctor (ACM) is examining a patient (AM) in a Maltese private clinic:

Text 3 – Interaction doctor (DOCF) – patient (PATF) in a clinic: clinical examination

```
1  DOCF  okay * any serious operations or serious
2  PATF  eh eh i don't know how you call it in *
3        english  ** vesicule/ * you say * vesicule
4        you know
5 DOCTF  cysts/
6  PATF  no * its * you have the liver * and then
7        you have the small which keeps the * bil *
8 DOCTF  yes * the gall bladder
9  PATF  the gAll bladder it's been removed
```

In text 3 doctor and patient negotiate in order to come to terms with regard to the nature of an operation the patient has undergone in the past. The patient uses the French word *vésicule* (line 3; gall bladder), but the doctor is unfamiliar with the term. Though the doctor fails to understand, her disposition is positive, as she asks the patient whether her interpretation is correct: cysts/ (line 5). This is a positive example of negotiation of meaning between ACM and AM and mainly occurs because of the patient's ability of circumlocution (you have the liver and then you have the small which keeps the bil; line 7) and also through the use of the French term *bil* which through its resemblance to the equivalent form *bile* in English clearly helps the doctor to come to the conclusion that the organ being referred to is the gall bladder.

In the next situation a University of Malta international student exchange programme official (ACM) interacts with a Chinese student who is carrying out partsof his studies on the island:

Text 4 – Interaction university official (OPF) – university student (STUM): fill-
ing in an application

```
1     OPF   do you have any questions about ah the
2     STUM  and i found the application they have ref-
3           ref- referees like this
4     OPF   oh
5     COMM  STUM'S PHONE RINGS
6     OPF   referees okay
7     STUM  okay
8     COMM  STUM SWITCHES OFF PHONE
9     OPF   ehm the referees * are people who know you
10    STUM  #aha AFFIRMATIVE#
11    OPF   not your mother or your father
12    STUM  #aha AFFIRMATIVE#
13    OPF   but for example a teacher
14          or someone you worked with
15    STUM  #aha AFFIRMATIVE#
16    OPF   okay
17    STUM  okay
18    COMM  STUM'S PHONE RINGS
19    OPF   do you want to answer it/
20    STUM  sorry
21    COMM  STUM SWITCHES OFF PHONE
22    OPF   so ehm they are people whom we can call and
23          ask information about you
24    STUM  aha
25    OPF   okay/
26    STUM  aha
27    OPF   but nOt anyone who you are related to * no
28          relatives
```

In text 4 the ACM leads the interaction and produces a number of utterances in
order to explain the term *referee*, which is unclear to the AM because of its
technical meaning within the cultural context. Consequently, the ACM uses
elaboration and by providing a number of examples she attempts to illustrate the
meaning of this special term (lines 9, 11, 13-14, 22-23, 27-28). This text is an
example of how such interactions are normally led by the ACMs who also con-
trol turn-taking in most circumstances. Once an ACM seems to be sure that
his/her interlocutor can understand English, he/she takes a commanding role

and, while repeating often and slowing down the speed of his/her intervention, he/she dominates the communicative event.

The next text comes from a Maltese language school of English as a foreign language. A foreign student (AM) is asking for information about this school from a teacher (ACM):

Text 5 – Interaction teacher (TCHF) – student (STUM): at a language school

```
 1    TCHF  i i this is the reason i'm telling you this
 2          because three weeks and over there i there is
 3          a discount involved like you for if you stAy
 4          here for three weeks you get five per cent
 5          discount ** on your tuition fees
 6          four weeks a and mo- eh five weeks and more **
 7          you get like tEn per cent discount
 8    STUM  okay [(…)  ]
 9    TCHF       [so it] makes a a little bit of a
10          difference * the only thing i haven't s- s-
11          spoken to you about is eh there is an added
12          toll eh charge * a one time charge a student
13          registration fee of three pounds *** this you
14          pAy [once]
15    STUM      [okay]
16    TCHF  if you come back again you're not you won't
17          be [** asked      ]
18    STUM      [yes okay okay]
19    TCHF  to pay this again and besides that there is five
20          pounds course material ** because the and
21          teacher we will provide you with a file *
22          teacher will give you handouts rather than
23          books ** so you have there'll be a diversity
24          of ** books involved you knOw because you'll
25          be she'll give you exercises for home and
26          obviously for school too
```

Text 5 is a typical example of asymmetric interaction as it is almost completely dominated by the ACM who has a better command of the language than the AM. The latter, consequently, just produces a series of affirmatives (okay, yes; lines 8, 15, 18), but the ACM never attempts to verify whether the AM is really

understanding what he is being told. Another interesting point is represented by the paraverbal cues characterising this interaction. In fact, the ACM often lowers her voice (lines 1-20) when she introduces the issue regarding the course fee to the student, thereby treating the issue as if it were a topic which could potentially cause some discomfort to the AM. On the other hand she clearly emphasises the amount of the discount when in line 7 she stresses the word tEn within the phrase tEn percent discount.

4.4 Counter interactions in Italy

The following texts are selected from the semi-simulated audio-video recordings held in Italy. In text 6 hesitation phenomena are particularly evident:

Text 6 – Interaction foreign student (SEM) – Erasmus official (OPF): enrolment of foreign student

```
 1 OPF   buongiOrno
 2 SEM   buongiorno
 3 OPF   buongiOrno dimmi
   SEM   ehm piacere sono john (…) di malta
 4 OPF   ah benvenuto/ t'aspettavo siedi prego/
 5 SEM   infatti sono venuto in ritardo credo perché non sapevo *
 6       che devo venire * qui in questo ufficio
 7 OPF   nessuno te l'ha ditto/
 8 SEM   no non sapevo infatti sono qua forse * già da un
 9       #mese RIDENDO#
10 OPF   Un mese/
11 SEM   sì
12 OPF   ah ecco [io ti ho cercato            ]
13 SEM   [e non so che cosa devo fare]
14 OPF   innanzitutto ti devi registrare
15 SEM   sì [che devo fare    ]
16 OPF   [altrimenti se non] vieni registrato nella nostra univer-
17       sità tu non mhm praticamente non sei uno studente [nostro]
18 SEM   [ah sì ]
19 OPF   erAsmus e va bene facciamo così
20 SEM   [io ho preso]
21 OPF   [intanto     ] dimmi
```

```
22 SEM   ehm alcune fotocopie del mio passaporto [e anche del docu-
          mento ]
23 OPF   [bravo e il certificato] dello di status [erasmus/]
24
25 SEM   [ehm      ]
26 OPF   ce l'hai/
27 SEM   no non no non ce l'ho
28 OPF   non ti hanno dato il [certificato da malta/]
29 SEM   [no * no            ]
30 OPF   allora senti facciamo una cosa cortesemente * dovresti *
31       scrivere un'e-mail o telefonare fai come vuoi/ ehm magari *
32       eh farci mandare per fAx il tuo certificato da malta
33 COMM  **
34 SEM   [certificato da malta]
35 OPF   [certificato         ] che sei uno studente erAsmus che ha
36       vinto la borsa erasmus per * perugia per non so quanti mesi
37       quanti mesi hai/
38 SEM   tre mesi
39 OPF   [tre mesi] va benè
40 SEM   [tre mesi]
41 OPF   allora il nostro numero di fAx è questo
```

In the text above, probably the fact that the ACM is unsure whether the AM has understood or not, leads to a verbal behaviour with a number of hesitations and the use of a verb in the Conditional Mode *dovresti* ... (you should ...) as well as other utterances such as fai come vuoi (do as you please) and ehm magari ... (uhm, maybe ...): * dovresti * scrivere un'e-mail o telefonare fai come vuoi/ ehm magari * eh farci mandare per fAx il tuo certificato da malta (lines 31-33). This may also make the AM reckon that the ACM is unsure about the procedures concerned.

In text 7 below issues regarding negotiation of meaning are highlighted showing how, in this case, this leads to a case of intercultural miscommunication.

Text 7 – Interaction foreign citizen (CITF) – civil servant responsible for public relations in an Italian town (OPF): requesting a *"Carta Giovani"*

```
1    OPF buonasera =
2    CITF = buonasera * ah ho sentito c'è un tipo di schEda molto
3         avvantaggiata per la i studenti che studiano qua hm
4         [(...)]
5    OPF [lei] studia qui nel comune di →[perugia/]←
6    CITF                                [sì    ] #hm AFFERMA-
          TIVO# =
7    OPF = perfetto * sì penso che lei parli della carta giovani
8    CITF #mhm AFFERMATIVO#
9    OPF che è una carta che rilascia il comune di perugia per
10        avere delle agevolazioni e degli sconti su diverse cate-
11        gorie di di commercio come l'abbigliamento i parcheggi i
12        trasporti tante cose/ e basta essere basta studiare qua a
13        perugia o lavorare * o semplicemente essere abitare qui
14        nel comune di perugia * deve compilare questo foglio/ *
15        mettendo il numero di documento * e che tipo di documento
          è/
16   CITF ah carta di identità/
17   OPF sì =
18   CITF = #hm hm  AFFERMATIVO# =
19   OPF = quindi scrive ci punto i e il numero di matricola
20   CITF [ah  ]
21   OPF [della] sua carta di identità/ e poi le rilasciamo quEsta
22        * è la carta giovani/ che vale fino al compimento dei
23        suoi trenta anni
24   CITF Grazie
25   OPF #SORRIDENDO prego# grazie a lei e ha degli sconti su
26        tutti i negozi su su moltissimi negozi del centro e anche
27        nelle farmacie
28   CITF [ah  ]
29   OPF [dove] ci sono gli sconti del dieci percento su tutti i
30        prodotti su tutti i prodotti tranne quelli che richiedono
31        la ricetta medica ** e anche in periferia si stanno
32        estendendo e accettano questa carta giovani per hm per
33        gli studenti per i lavoratori per i residenti
34   CITF (ottimo) =
35   OPF = fino al compimento dei trentanni
36   CITF #SORRIDENDO grazie#
37   OPF di nulla
```

```
38   CITF ahm ** pos- hm grazie (hm) oggi ho dimenticato della hm
39        carta di identità =
40    OPF = va bene non c'è problema se lei ripassa quando vuole
41        noi siamo aperti dalle otto e trenta alle diciotto e
42        trenta mi porta questo foglio compilato/ con * scritto il
43        numero di documento e le facciamo subito la carta giovani
44   CITF perfetto #SORRIDENDO grazie# [(tantissimo)]
45    OPF                        [grazie a lei] ** arrivederci =
46   CITF = arrivederci =
47    OPF = buonasera =
48   CITF = buonasera
49    OPF la ringrazio
50   CITF di nulla
```

In this text there are examples of negotiation of meaning and of terminology that lead to an over-abundance of information. This is due to the fact that ACMs are often convinced that AMs do not possess enough lexical competence to use the appropriate terminology. Therefore the civil servant uses strategies in order to negotiate meaning and to make sure that the AM is understanding what is being stated as well as to make sure that the ACM herself has understood what the AM means to say.

In the utterances in lines 2-3 and 7 the negotiation of meaning is evident when the AM uses a non-technical term *scheda* (slip/card) in agreement with an incorrect adjective, *avvantaggiata* (advantaged) instead of *vantaggiosa* (advantageous), which, however, does not create problems within the communicative context. In line 7 the ACM points out, through an other-repair, that she is referring to the *carta giovani* (a youth card) and whilst doing this she implicitly emphasizes the fact that the AM used an imprecise term (*scheda*).

This aspect is stressed by further interventions during which the ACM stresses the benefits of the *carta giovani*, repeating them in various utterances, whereas the AM seems to get frustrated and in line 36 smiles and thanks the ACM (*grazie*) because she has evidently understood enough and requires no further information on this. The ACM then uses a form in perfect line with the adjacency pair of thanking: *di nulla* (don't mention it). The AM thanks the civil servant once again (line 38), but the latter, prompted by the fact that the AM does not have all the documentation required in order to receive this card, goes

on with her detailed explanation and provides even more information, in some instances repeating what she had already stated previously. The AM herself, after this semi-simulated interview, confirmed with the researcher that intercultural miscommunication occurred, as by uttering *grazie* (line 36) she wanted to say that she had enough information and wished to move on, whereas the ACM merely answered her (line 37), but went on elaborating the same topic probably because she felt that the issue required further clarification.

The final text highlights a case of repair through reformulations and elaboration:

Text 8 – Interaction foreign citizen (CITF) – civil servant responsible for public relations in an Italian town (OPF): request for an identity card

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 1    CITM buonasera
 2     OPF buonasera
 3    CITM signora mi serviva hm far la carta di identità che devo
           fare/
 4     OPF lei ha la residenza nel comune di perugia/
 5    CITM sì
 6     OPF quindi deve produrre * il permesso di soggiorno o la carta
 7          di soggiorno insieme al suo passaporto
 8    CITM (hm) * mi ci vuole del tempo per avere/ =
 9     OPF = dopo l'iscrizione anagrafica le occorrerà circa un mese
10          (em-) un mese circa deve venire il vigile a verificare la
11          sua residenza * dopodiché ci porta la risposta * e imme-
12          diatamente la trascriviamo all'anagrafe * poco dopo può
13          fare la carta di identità
14    CITM va bene grazie =
15     OPF = prego
```

The operators of public services are generally conscious of the fact that institutional-bureaucratic terms (e.g. *l'iscrizione anagrafica*, line 9) are not easy to understand, especially for AMs, and therefore even without checking if the AM understands or not, the ACM uses a strategy of repair through conversational techniques such as reformulation and elaboration (lines 10-12).

5 Conclusion

Overall, when in contact with AMs, ACMs often use lengthy sentences which are usually syntactically complex. They may also adopt strategies normally found in foreigner talk, including simplification, elaboration, regularization. Code-switching is totally avoided and not even present in discourse markers. This shows how the ACMs' speech is far more controlled than normal, spontaneous speech. This is particularly noteworthy in Malta, where even when locals speak English, there is a tendency to switch codes by inserting terms in Maltese. Such terms are most notably present in discourse markers.

Furthermore, it is important to note that there is usually an extensive use of non-verbal and paraverbal cues (e.g. ample gesticulation, eye contact, rising intonation for questioning, raising volume), especially from the side of the ACM. In this case, it is noteworthy to point out that very often ACMs tend to raise the volume of their utterances when they think that the AM is not understanding what he/she is being told. There seems to be the misconception that raising one's voice may help an interlocutor understand more, when actually, as reported by the AMs themselves, this is rather intimidating and, instead of helping, hinders conversation.

On the other hand the AMs often use short initial interrogatives often followed by systematic interventions which are brief and syntactically contained. AMs rely very much on their linguistic competence and on the "support" provided by the ACM within the communicative situation. When filling in forms in institutional-bureaucratic settings AMs often refer to it directly and occasionally resort to their own L1 when there is the possibility the ACM will understand (4). AMs request clarification quite often and it is therefore the ACMs' responsibility to create a positive communicative setting in which the AM can feel comfortable if he/she wishes to seek further advice or if he/she wishes to ask questions whenever he/she does not understand.

The written documentation also led to some interesting considerations, namely that at times one expects a high level of the local language (in our case English or Italian) from the AM in order to complete a form in writing. Of course, this is not always the case and the complex nature of the written variety

and the fact that within certain contexts it may have legal bearing, entails a simplification and a better presentation of a number of forms being currently used.

From the oral and written documentation gathered, it becomes clear that both in Malta and in Italy there is a great amount of work that could be done in order to improve ACM-AM interaction. In most occasions, the semi-simulated interactions offered a number of instances of good practice as outlined in section 4 of this paper. However, it must be stated that in all cases the AM possessed at least a fair degree of competence in English or in Italian which largely facilitated the interaction. Undoubtedly, in the absence of a common verbal code, major problems would have arisen and this is why Maltese and Italian ACMs need to be provided with the right materials in order to carry out their duties professionally even when faced with AMs whose competence in English or in Italian is very limited (cf. Klein et al. 2007).

Conventions used in transcripts

* _ ** _ ***	short – medium – long pause
xxxxxx =	no pause in turn taking
= xxxxxxxxxxx	
xxxxxx<u>x</u>	sound lengthening (letter underlined)
xxXxx	sound emphasised (capital letter)
(xxxxxxxxxxxx)	utterance that cannot be heard clearly (within brackets)
(...)	utterance which cannot be understood
xxx-	incomplete word
/	rising intonation
→xxxxxx←	accelerated speech
[xxxxxx]	overlapping utterances
COMM	COMMENT regarding the situation
F / M	at the end of the speaker's identification code: female (woman)/ male (man); e.g. OPF stands for a female official

Notes

1) SOCRATES Programme, Grundtvig Training Courses – Reference: 224945-CP-1-2005-1 IT-GRUNDTVIG-G11.

2) For further information on the Maltese linguistic situation see Sciriha/Vassallo 2006 and Caruana 2007.

3) This is sometimes defined as *burocratese* (for example in Sobrero 2003), i.e. the language variety of institutional-bureaucratic settings characterised by rich terminology and complex syntax.

4) For example, Italian students recorded in the Erasmus Office in Malta at times use Italian terms when it becomes clear that the Erasmus official has quite a good competence of Italian.

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