

# The Vitality of Maltese Dialects in Gozo

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## Gozitan Dialects: a Challenge to Sociolinguistic Theory

The editorial of *The Gozo Observer* No 19 in December 2008 was entitled ‘The demise of Gozitan dialects’. Ten years later, in 2018, I decided to examine the claim that Gozitan dialects were disappearing, from a linguistic point of view, as well as by examining the perceptions of the Gozitans about the vitality of their Maltese language varieties. In a questionnaire I conducted in 2018, a few Gozitans expressed a concern that immigration of foreigners to Gozo and of young Gozitans to Malta might be causing a reduction in opportunities for the use of Gozitan-Maltese varieties. However, several other respondents interpreted the use of their Gozitan dialect as an inalienable attribute of culture and identity.

The present-day Gozitan (and Maltese) linguistic landscape can best be described as a continuum ranging from the use of a variety of dialects of Maltese at one end, through to bilingual usage of Standard Maltese and Maltese-English at the other end (Borg, 2011; Camilleri Grima 2009).

There are no national statistics about the number of dialects and their use in Malta and Gozo, and none of the national censuses ever included any reference to the dialects, presumably because the dialects are not considered as a standard form of speech. However, several scientific linguistic and sociolinguistic studies have recorded, described and analysed the rich linguistic variation found on the Maltese Islands, and in Gozo in particular (Azzopardi-Alexander, 2011; Farrugia, 2016; Rapa, 1995; Said, 2007; Spiteri, 2016).

The knowledge and use of a number of linguistic varieties is known as plurilingualism, and it can be an individual as well as a societal phenomenon. Plurilingualism includes multidialectism, as in the case of several dialects in Gozo, and it can be considered as a stable phenomenon. Its resilience is explained through the concepts of ‘bonding’ and ‘bridging’ (Newman and Dale, 2005). Social ‘bonding’ refers to links of trust created by the use of a particular language, which strengthen a community’s cohesion. ‘Bridging’ through the use of other languages by the same community links it to the rest of the world. It is through this



duality of bonding and bridging that the Gozitan population has sustained linguistic resilience and stability, rather than reorganisation (Roche, 2017), or homogenisation (Leonard, 2011), over time.

The theoretical interest of this discussion stems from the fact that Gozo is a micro-territory, with a 'double' island status (European Commission, 2003: 4). It covers an area of sixty-seven square kilometres, and has a high population density of six hundred persons per square kilometre. Sociolinguists argue that a high population density which results in dense social networks is generally considered to function as a norm-enforcement mechanism (Milroy, 1980). In a plurilingual and/or multidialectal context this would normally result in a reduction of language variation (Schilling-Estes and Wolfram, 1999; Perea, 2007; Côté, Knooihuizen and Narbonne, 2016). On the other hand, in a context of insularity, dialects have a stronger chance of survival (Maumoon, 2002; Schreier, 2003).

Gozo presents a challenging scenario on both fronts. First of all, in spite of a high population density and dense social networks, there is no evidence of a significant reduction of language variation. Secondly, the concept of insularity needs to be contested with reference to language and culture in Malta and Gozo. Although insularity refers to islandness, it generally denotes isolation, remoteness and a narrow-minded or provincial mentality, 'not willing to accept different or foreign ideas' (McIntosh, 2013: 810). Although Malta and Gozo are separate from other countries because they are surrounded by the Mediterranean Sea, they cannot be ascribed cultural or linguistic seclusion. Sciriba/Vassallo (2015) argue that 'Malta has never been culturally insular' (p. 123), and that Malta's current multilingual linguistic landscape reveals that Malta is 'far from insular' (p. 134). The Mediterranean Sea cannot be interpreted only as a separating factor, because for many centuries it was also the carrier of many cultures to Malta and Gozo, and of the Maltese and Gozitans to other lands and back, including third generation returned migrants who speak Gozitan dialects (Xerri, 2002).

### **A Historical Perspective**

The existence of dialectal varieties of Maltese in Gozo and Malta is documented historically as

from the eighteenth century. The earliest linguistic descriptions are given by Vassalli (1796) who divided Malta into four dialectal areas and referred to Gozo as a fifth, distinct, dialectal region. Furthermore, Vassalli stated that the Gozitan dialect could be divided into smaller units or sub-dialects, though the differences were small (Fenech, 1981). One of the earliest written documents in a Gozitan dialect is a two-page letter written by someone from Gharb in 1838 in dialect (the Maltese language was standardised at the beginning of the 20th century), and published in a newspaper of the time (Galea, 2018). According to Galea (2018), the dialect used in this letter is similar to today's Gharb dialect. Following Vassalli's (1796) claim of phonological and morphological dialectal differences among the Gozitan varieties of Maltese, similar attestations followed by Stumme (1904), and later by Aquilina and Isserlin (1981), and by Agius (1992). Aquilina and Isserlin (1981) produced a detailed description of vowel realisation in the dialects of Gozo. Among other conclusions, they state that diphthongisation is well-represented in Gozo, and that 'Gozo tends to present a somewhat archaic picture, comparable in some degree to the Maltese represented in the few documents available for the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries' (Aquilina and Isserlin, 1981: 202). This is not surprising considering that Gozo was re-populated with many Maltese after 1551 (Curmi, 2014; Mifsud, 2012). As mentioned above, linguistic studies have attested the use of several varieties of Maltese in Gozo in the past. I will now deal in more detail with the current setting.

### **A Synchronic View**

Standard Maltese (SM) is the native variety of many speakers on the island of Malta, but it is also a superimposed variety for speakers of another variety of Maltese, in Malta and in Gozo. Speakers of the dialects use dialectal Maltese in their home and village or town environment, with family and friends from the same town, but switch to SM in formal occasions, and with other speakers of Maltese. Generally speaking, all varieties of Maltese are mutually intelligible, but there can also be significant phonological and lexical differences that make it difficult for persons from Malta to follow discourse in a Gozitan dialect, and for Gozitans to understand some Maltese dialects (Camilleri Grima, 2009). In this chapter, I use the term dialect to refer to varieties of Maltese because as Borg (2011) explains,



Figure 1: Map of Gozo (courtesy of Joel Grima)

Maltese and Maltese-Gozitan varieties ‘constitute different dialects since they differ systematically on all levels of linguistic analysis’ (p. 11). Scholars have written about Maltese dialectology (Vanhove, 1999), and Gozitan dialects have been investigated and identified as dialects on the basis of their phonetic and phonological (Aquilina and Isserlin, 1981; Azzopardi-Alexander, 2011; Farrugia, 2016), morphological (Agius, 1992; Borg, 2011), syntactic (Borg, 2011) and lexical properties (Rapa, 1995; Said, 2007; Spiteri, 2016).

### Dialectal Differences in Gozo

The distinctive characteristics of the Gozitan dialects are not only a perception held by the Gozitans and Maltese alike, but they are also evidenced in sociolinguistic studies carried out scientifically. One of the recent studies of Gozitan dialects was conducted by Farrugia (2016) who analysed the vocalic systems of the dialects of Nadur and Sannat, using acoustic tools. He found that there are acoustic characteristics that are idiosyncratic to these dialects. This means that the metalinguistic representations expressed by the respondents of my 2018 questionnaire (see below) have been verified by linguistic studies. The Gozitan community is conscious of its multidialectal repertoire and is able to express itself even about minute elements. This is one of the signs of this community’s language vitality, and its sense of bonding through discursive practices.

But apart from phonetic/phonological and morphological distinctions, scholars have also described lexical variation among the Gozitan dialects. For instance, Rapa (1995) studied the etymology of names given to eighty sweets and biscuits in six parts of Gozo (Victoria, Xewkija, Xagħra, Qala, Għarb, and Sannat). She collected data from seventy-seven informants representative of age groups, educational background, and towns. Table 1 presents some examples of major lexical variation among these towns (based on Rapa, 1995).

Rapa (1995) noted that there was a tendency for the younger generation to use some terms in English, such as ‘jam tart’ for what older people called ‘xirek’; ‘rock bun’ for ‘ħbejża ħelwa’ or ‘pasta tal-frott’; and ‘fingers’ or ‘sponge’ for ‘felli ta’ Spanja’ in Xagħra; and ‘peni ta’ Spanja’ in Sannat.

Spiteri (2016) conducted a lexical analysis related to clothing. She worked with forty Gozitan informants, equally distributed between San Lawrenz, Victoria, Xewkija and Nadur and across age groups. She presented her informants with 66 pictures of different clothes (summerwear, winterwear, swimwear, underwear, headwear etc.) and asked them to name each item. She obtained huge variation from her informants for almost all items. In Table 2, I present some of the geographically determined variation, which might not be absolute, but shows clear tendencies. In the case of clothes,

SM	Victoria	Xewkija	Xaghra	Qala	Gharb	Sannat
qassatella	qassatella/ kassatella (by people living behind St Frances church)	kasrija			ftira tal-ħaxu kannella	barmil tal- lewż
biskuttini tal- lewż (almond biscuits)	bankuncini				bronkoncini	
biskuttell (rusk)		felli	baskuttin	baskuttel	fettul/bezzun	baskuttajn
pasta tal-krema (cream cake)	kassatella				ftira tal-ġamm	torta
pasta tal- kowkonat (coconut cake)		balla tal- kowkonat		plattini tal- kowkonat	ftira tal- kowkonat	balla tal- kowkonat
pudina tal-ħobż (bread pudding)		ħobża sewda	baskuttin kbir		ftira	
prinolata (a carnival cake)	muntanja tas- silġ			torri	fanal	
kannol (filled horn)					lembut	

Table 1: Lexical variation in the domain of sweets and biscuits (based on Rapa 1995).

English	San Lawrenz	Victoria	Xewkija	Nadur
raincoat	raincoat	windcheater	(various)	ġakketta tax-xita
bathrobe	dressng gown	dressng gown	(various)	robe/bathrobe
tank top	single	body	(various)	tank top
beanie	kappun	beanie	beritta	(various)

Table 2: Lexical differences identified by Spiteri (2016).

many more words in English were used across the age groups than for food items as found by Rapa (1995). This could be as a result of the fact that twenty years passed since Rapa's study. The young generation of 1995 was the older group in Spiteri's study, and clothing habits now also included items imported along with their name in English (e.g. beanie, tank top).

### The 2018 Questionnaire

Teacher respondents of my 2018 questionnaire said that Gozitan children speak the dialect at home and at school, and they translanguage (shift) between the dialect, Maltese and English during lesson time. This shows that in 2018 the situation is more or less similar to that found by Buttigieg (1998), Casha

<p><b>T:</b> <i>What does the word chat mean?</i></p> <p><b>P12:</b> <i>Jikliw</i></p> <p><b>T:</b> <i>Le, jieklu to eat. X'taghmlu fuq l-internet. Fuq l-internet taghmlu hekk.</i></p> <p><b>P9:</b> <i>Nixeliwh</i></p> <p><b>T:</b> <i>Le to chat meta titkellem ma' xi hadd.</i></p> <p><b>P 10:</b> <i>Iwa ahne anne ħabejp mill-Kanada u naqadow nitkellmiw mijew</i></p>
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Figure 2: A transcript from an English lesson.

(2006), Xerri (2009), and Farrugia and Xerri (2016). In 2016, Farrugia & Xerri observed, recorded and transcribed four lessons in an Early Childhood Education environment in Gozo. In all lessons, SM, English and dialectal varieties were used. During Maltese lessons, although SM was the main language of communication between the teacher and the learners, the dialect was substantially used more than English. However, in a mathematics lesson, English was more frequently used than dialectal Maltese, although SM played an important role and was used for about 50% of the lesson time. Thus, from the early years, Gozitan children translanguage between dialect, SM and English (read more on translanguage in Malta and Gozo in Camilleri Grima, 2013).

As already mentioned, in 2018 I decided to survey the perceptions of the Gozitans themselves about their language practices, particularly their understanding of their use of dialectal Maltese. It is important to consider ‘insiders’ perceptions’ (Belew, 2018: 235), and to find out how they position themselves in relation to patterns of language use. This is necessary as linguists’ descriptions ‘may not correspond to the categorizations made by the speech community’ itself (Evans, 2001: 260), and the actions of group members are more likely to be governed by their perception of the actual vitality of their group (Giles & Johnson, 1987).

In the summer of 2018 I distributed one hundred copies of a three-page questionnaire in Gozo through personal contacts, namely ex-students of mine and family friends. Ninety-seven respondents gave me their filled-in questionnaire when I personally collected it about a month later (a response rate of 97%). The questionnaire consisted of three sections:

the first section requested basic information such as the place of residence of the respondent, their gender, age bracket and level of education. In the second section the respondents were asked to tick a box to indicate with whom (e.g. parents, siblings, offspring, people from the same town), and where (in Gozo, in Malta, at work), they spoke the dialect (or did not). The third part consisted of nine open-ended questions seeking the respondents’ view of the survival and value of Gozitan dialects in the long term.

The respondents were mainly female (78%), but had various educational backgrounds and hailed from all of the Gozitan regions, encompassing small towns, villages and the surrounding rural areas known by the same name (see Tables 3, 4 and 5).

Town in Gozo	Number of respondents
Fontana	1
Għajnsielem	8
Għarb	6
Għasri	2
Munxar	10
Nadur	7
Qala	7
San Lawrenz	2
Ta’ Kercem	2
Ta’ Sannat	4
Victoria	29
Xagħra	8
Xewkija	8
Iż-Żebbuġ	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>97</b>

Table 3: Localities where the respondents resided.

Level of education	Secondary school		Advanced level		Undergraduate		Postgraduate	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
	5	10	4	14	4	21	8	31

Table 4: The number of male (M) and female (F) respondents and their level of education.

Age range	18-30		31-45		46-60		60+	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
	9	20	5	37	5	14	2	5

Table 5: The number of respondents by age range.

***Which language (variety) do Gozitans speak, where, with whom?***

The vast majority (80%) of respondents said that they speak in dialect with all family members (Table 6). Out of the 7% who said they did not, two persons specified that they switch between dialect, SM and English, and another one explained that she speaks SM because her husband and his mother are from Malta and they do not know the dialect. In answer to the question about the use of language with friends and colleagues from Gozo (Table 6), all respondents answered they spoke in dialect, irrespective of whether the friend or colleague spoke the same Gozitan variety or a different one. On the other hand, when talking with people from Malta, both in Gozo (73%) and in Malta (81%), most Gozitans would resort to SM, while with Gozitans in Malta and in Gozo 90% said they would retain the dialect for communication. My 2018 questionnaire results confirm the results obtained by Xuereb in 1996 who concluded that in formal situations Gozitans resort to SM when the degree of formality is high, but in informal situations when all participants are Gozitan they would speak in dialect.

I speak in dialect.....		
	YES	NO
with family members	80%	7%
with friends and colleagues from Gozo	100%	0%
with Maltese people in Gozo	24%	73%
with Maltese people in Malta	16%	81%
with Gozitan people in Malta	90%	2%

Table 6: Use of Gozitan and SM.

In the questionnaire respondents were asked to mention any identifying features of Gozitan dialects. Ninety percent (90%) of respondents said they could recognise one Gozitan dialect from another. They referred to their varieties as, for example, 'Ghasri' (of Ghasri), 'Naduri' (of Nadur) and 'Xewkija' (of Xewkija). Thus, the names of the dialects coincide with the names of the area where it is spoken. In order to explain how they identified one dialect from another, the respondents referred to phonetic differences, as follows:

- 64% of respondents mentioned that in Xewkija people speak with a 'k' (jitektellmu bil-k), meaning that speakers of Xewki pronounce the voiceless velar plosive /k/ where other speakers of Maltese would have a glottal stop. The examples given in the questionnaire were kalb for 'qalb' (heart), imkass for 'imqass' (scissors), and bakra for 'baqra' (cow);
- 18% of respondents mentioned that in Nadur the dialect speakers use the vowel 'e' instead of 'a', for example, beher for 'bahar' (sea), lehem for 'laham' (meat) and ieqef for 'ieqaf' (stop);
- 16% of respondents mentioned that in Xaghra the vowel 'e' is replaced by 'a', and gave these examples: bajt for 'bejt' (roof), xajn for 'xejn' (nothing), żajt for 'żejt' (oil). They also mentioned the pronunciation of najd for 'nghid' (I say), and intawh for 'intuh' (we give him);
- 13% of respondents mentioned that in Għarb the 'r' is very strongly pronounced, and another three mentioned that the gh (a remnant of Arabic pronunciation) is voiced, whereas in the other varieties of Maltese it is silent;
- 4% of respondents mentioned that in Munxar and Sannat they say plott for 'platt' (plate) and cott for 'catt' (flat);
- one person said that in Sannat the vowel 'a' is lengthened, and wrote the following words to

5. Tista' tagħti xi eżempji kif tagħraf minn liema raħal ikun il-kelliem?

Xewkija - jitektellmu bil-k

Nadur - bahar → beher

Xaghra - bejt → bajt

Figure 3: An answer to question 5 of the 2018 questionnaire.

explain this: ‘taaaaadam’ for ‘tadam’ (tomatoes), ‘baaaaard’ for ‘bard’ (cold weather);

- other comments were: in Kerċem the words are ‘dragged along’ (ikaxkru l-kliem, i.e. they pronounce the words very slowly); in Żebbuġ they emphasise the ‘ie’; in Ghasri they emphasise the ‘r’; in Qala they use the ‘e’ as in rehi for ‘ruhi’ (my soul).

Furthermore, respondents clarified that there is a distinction in the dialect of Victoria depending on whether one lives behind the church of St Francis (wara San Frangisk) or in front of it. Eight respondents in my questionnaire mentioned that Gozitans who live behind the church of St Francis speak like people of Xewkija (bil-k), that is, they substitute q with k. The symbols q and k represent two phonemes that cannot be substituted without changing the meaning of a word in all varieties of Maltese (e.g. kari refers to ‘curry’, and qari refers to ‘reading’), and their substitution can easily lead to misunderstanding. Presumably, two different communities originally occupied the space in front and behind the church of St Francis, and developed an idiosyncratic pronunciation which has been retained to this day.

### ***What perceptions/attitudes do Gozitans have about the present and future vitality of their varieties?***

As shown in Table 7, 13% of respondents expressed a negative opinion when asked to compare the dialects’ vitality today with that of fifty years’ ago, but 50% said they did not know whether there had been any changes in dialect usage. Twenty-nine percent (29%) replied that they thought there were fewer speakers of Gozitan dialects. The respondents were also asked whether Gozitan parents nowadays

spoke the dialect at home with their children. Twenty percent (20%) said ‘yes’ and 17% said ‘they should’, while 11% said ‘no’ and almost half of the replies were in the ‘I don’t know’ category (Table 7). In answer to the question about what they thought the situation will be in fifty years’ time (Table 7), 8% thought that it will be the same, 29% said that there will be fewer speakers and 13% said that the dialects will no longer be used. Overall, about half of the respondents avoided answering these questions seemingly because they felt unsure, around 13% held negative opinions, but many others specified that while the number of speakers is becoming smaller this does not mean that there is dialect attrition.

Section 3 of the questionnaire consisted of seven open-ended questions probing the respondents to give reasons for their previous answers. Several respondents said that they feel shy or ashamed (nisthi) using the dialect when the interlocutor is a SM speaker, and they worry that the Maltese might make fun of them:

*Jekk nitkellem bid-djalett mal-Maltin jgħadduni biż-żmien.*

(If I speak in dialect with the Maltese they make fun of me.)

(Female, postgraduate, age bracket 18-30).

Some respondents explained that a few possibly give up speaking the dialect because it is denigrated:

*Sfortunatament id-djaletti huma meqjusa bħala xi haġa baxxa. Għaldaqstant issib min biex jidher ikkulturat iwarraġ dan il-wirt.*

(Unfortunately, dialects are considered to be lowly. For this reason, there are people who abandon them to appear acculturated.)

(Male undergraduate, age bracket 31-45).

Do you think the Gozitan dialects are used today as much as they were 50 years ago?			
Yes	No	Fewer speakers	I don’t know
8%	13%	29%	50%
Do parents nowadays speak the dialect at home to their children?			
Yes	No	They should	I don’t know
20%	11%	17%	48%
Do you think the Gozitan dialects will be used as much as today in 50 years’ time?			
Yes	No	Fewer speakers	I don’t know
8%	13%	29%	50%

Table 7: Perceptions of dialectal vitality.

On the other hand, many respondents expressed clear and positive opinions about the importance of speaking in dialect:

*Jekk inżommu d-djalett tagħna aħna nżommu l-kultura tagħna hajja.*

(If we retain our dialect we will be keeping our culture alive.)

(Female, Advanced level education, age bracket 46-60)

*Id-djaletti jagħmlu l-lingwa rikka.*

(The dialects enrich the Maltese language.)

(Female, undergraduate, age bracket 31-45).

*Id-djalett ma jtellifx l-edukazzjoni għax qiegħed biss għat-taħdit.*

(The dialects do not hinder one's educational advancement because they are used only in speaking.)

(Male, Advanced level education, age bracket 31-45).

As shown in Table 8, many more positive views were expressed about the values that Gozitans ascribe to their dialects, although it is not clear what the 39% who did not reply to this question think. Only 1% stated that they do not think the dialects are important.

Those respondents who expressed a negative opinion about the vitality of multidialectism in Gozo mentioned the threat posed by globalisation and the spread of English, the increased levels of education among the Gozitans, that young Gozitans were moving to Malta to set up home, and the immigration of foreigners to Gozo. Seven respondents felt very negative about the situation and stated that 'not even Maltese will still be alive because English is taking over'.

The last two questions in the questionnaire were about the importance Gozitans attributed to their dialects, and whether they wished to add any further comments. Thirty-three percent (33%) of respondents specified that their dialects were important tokens of identity (Table 8). Eight percent (8%) stressed that they were unique languages, and 19% mentioned their historical and cultural value. There was only one respondent who said that the dialects were not important because 'our language is Maltese'.

In spite of the doubtful comments by a few respondents about the vitality of multidialectism, my prognosis for the retention of current sociolinguistic processes in the future in Gozo is overall positive. I base my conclusion on the evidence that indicates that the use of Gozitan dialects represents social bonding and a strong sense of identity, while a balance has been in place for decades with bridging to other cultures and communities through the use of other languages. This duality of bonding and bridging within a community living on a micro-territory presents an interesting scenario. In Gozo, there has been a relatively high degree of cultural and linguistic contact for a very long time, and dialects have been kept alive on a daily basis in co-existence with SM, English and other languages.

Milroy (2000) argues that dense social networks lead to strong social ties which lead to closer maintenance of community norms. This applies to Gozo not only because of dense social networks but also because the Gozitans have a strong sense of identity. They feel Gozitan first and foremost (Mamo, 2012), then Maltese, and then European

Do you think the Gozitan dialects are important? Why?				
Yes, for identity	Yes, they are unique	Yes, cultural & historical value	No answer	Not important
33%	8%	19%	39%	1%

Table 8: Importance ascribed to Gozitan dialects by questionnaire respondents

and citizens of the world (Spiteri, Mercieca & Camilleri, 2015). The nomenclature *Għawdx* for Gozitan dialects explicitly associates language with territory, and highlights the distinction of Gozitans from speakers of SM and Maltese varieties on the island of Malta. While in Malta two speakers of different dialects would resort to SM to interact, in Gozo interlocutors use their own variety of Gozitan irrespective of the dialect of their interlocutor/s. This is also a clear sign that the use of dialectal varieties is more strictly tied to their identity as Gozitan.

The Gozitans' sense of identity is backed by important institutions and facilities. Gozo has its own Ministry that oversees most of its affairs, and it has its own Catholic Bishop, being a diocese in its own right. Furthermore, there is a branch of the University of Malta called the Gozo Campus; the Gozo hospital; the Gozo law courts; the Gozo Tourism Authority; the Gozo Press Club; the Gozo Sports Complex and two beautiful opera theatres of international repute. These institutions render Gozo as little dependent on Malta as possible.

Perhaps globalisation, the social media and recent waves of immigration are not completely new phenomena and are merely substituting the previous forms of foreign presence experienced in Gozo and Malta for many centuries (Friggieri, 2008).

Gozo remains home for the Gozitans, and as one questionnaire respondent put it:

*Titkellem bid-djalett jew le xorta tasal fejn trid tasal. L-Għawdxin hafna drabi Għawdxin jibqgħu f'darhom.*

(Whether you speak in dialect or not you will still get to where you want to be in life. Gozitans will always remain Gozitan at home.)

(Female, Advanced-level education, age bracket 31-45).

For this respondent, having a Gozitan identity is a fixed, static, personal attribute, related to territory, and she believes that the dialect is never an impediment to progressing in life. This resonates a strong sense of Gozitan identity, represented in linguistic practices as outlined above.

According to Milroy (2000), due to the digital media and globalisation, many more individuals can nowadays be reached through 'weak ties' (p. 219). A person with weak ties, which operate through the use of digital media, occupies a position marginal to any cohesive group, unlike strong ties. Strong ties are represented in Gozo through multidialectism, which confirm and support a community's identity. It is not clear whether weak ties can overcome strong ties and change the sociolinguistic configuration in Gozo. Like Klieger (2013) I think that although globalism is inevitable, the homogenisation of difference is

9. Taħseb li sa 50 sena oħra d-djaletti Għawdxin ikunu għadhom haġġin? Iva ☐ Le ☐

B'liema mod, u għaliex?

*Min jaf!! Nispera li iwa*

10. Tixtieq tgħidli xi haġa oħra dwar id-djaletti Għawdxin u x'importanza għandhom?

*Panti mill-identità tagħne l-Għawdxin*

Figure 4: Replies to questions 9 and 10 of the 2018 questionnaire.

not, and small European states including Malta 'have successfully articulated a concept of nation or sovereignty for centuries and have no intention of doing away with it' (p. 196), and this includes discursive conventions.

## Conclusion

A number of my 2018 questionnaire respondents included some valuable suggestions with the aim of promoting respect for the dialects. For instance, one respondent recommended the broadcasting of radio and TV programmes about the dialects, and to include reading and personal narratives in dialect in such programmes. Another idea concerned the education of children in school, so that they could learn to appreciate and value linguistic diversity. Other suggestions were related to the promotion of research on Gozitan dialects and the publication of research in a way that can be easily accessed by the general public. A number of respondents mentioned the need to promote the Maltese language in its entirety, and to provide more opportunities for its use in school, for example, by expanding its implementation as a medium of instruction. One person called for sponsorships so that initiatives favouring language and dialect could be supported.

Overall, my Gozitan respondents transmitted their pride in the use of their dialects in the questionnaire. I conjecture that plurilingualism and multidialectism in Gozo will survive. A positive prognosis results from the Gozitans' strong sense of identity, and the fact that for the Gozitans, SM symbolises non-local values (Xuereb 1996). The relationship between territory and language is personified in a multi-layered identity: a Gozitan is first of all a member of the local area community (e.g. Xewki, Naduri), then Gozitan, then Maltese, and then a citizen of the world. Insularity is overcome by travelling and through the use of social media, by educational advancement namely through English, and by supporting one's own income and the national economy through the use of other languages. In keeping with Romaine's 2013 interpretation, 'the sense of perceived solidarity and interaction based on reference to a particular language' is crucial in understanding a speech community. In Gozo, national cohesion is expressed through multidialectal and plurilingual practices which serve as social bonding and bridging processes respectively.

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