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## One Country, Two Languages?

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**M**ALTESE belongs to the Semitic language family. Other languages such as English and German belong to the Germanic group, while Latin, French, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish are members of the Romance language family. As members of their families, languages display similarities with other languages in their own language group. Thus, as a member of the Semitic language family, Maltese displays greater similarities with languages in the same group, such as Arabic, rather than with Germanic and Romance languages. But unlike Arabic, Maltese is written in Roman script.

In fact, Maltese is basically Arabic in structure, word formation and vocabulary and is undoubtedly the most striking living heritage of one of Malta's numerous colonisers, the Arabs (870-1090). Subsequent rulers in Malta's chequered history, namely the Normans (1090-1266); the Angevins (1266-1283); the Aragonese (1283-1410); the Castilians (1412-1530); the Order of St John (1530-1798) and the British (1800-1964), mainly spoke Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, French and English respectively. Inevitably so, an indelible mark was left on the Maltese lexicon which is replete with loan-words derived from the diverse linguistic backgrounds of these rulers. (Sciriha 1996: ix)

Of particular note is the fact that even though Maltese had been spoken by the majority of the islanders for a long time, it did not obtain official status until 1936, when Maltese became the language of the courts, and English the language of administration. When Malta

became an independent state within the Commonwealth in 1964, Maltese became the national language of Malta and one of the two official languages. Section 5 of the Constitution declares that:

*The national language of Malta is the Maltese language: The Maltese and English languages and such others as may be prescribed by parliament shall be*



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*the official languages of Malta and the administration may for all official purposes use any such language.*

*The language of the Courts shall be the Maltese language: Save as otherwise provided by Parliament, every law shall be enacted in both Maltese and English and if there is any conflict between the Maltese and English texts of any law, the Maltese text shall prevail.*

Through this constitutional clause, Malta became officially a bilingual country. But, Maltese, being the national language, receives preferential treatment since the use of Maltese is enforced in specific domains, such as parliament, the law courts and primary schools. Thus, it would seem that governance of the country is monolingual, namely in Maltese and only in particular circumstances is the country run in a bilingual manner. (Sciriha 1994a: 314)

However as Mackey (1976) stresses, there is a world of difference between the official *de jure* language policy of a country and the actual *de facto* language use by its inhabitants. Though Maltese has been given more importance than English, yet in real social context, is Maltese effectively the dominant language in Malta? This paper seeks to address this difficult issue and proposes tentative answers that throw light on social processes at play at both macro and micro level of social interaction in the island's social life as they transpire through language use in Malta.

### ***Language Choice***

When two languages come in contact, one is inevitably given more power and prestige since languages reflect competing market values which, like other commodities, fluctuate during different times (Haugen 1987: 144). Although Maltese is the mother tongue of most of the islanders, English with its status as an international language has a higher language market value than Maltese which belongs to a minute nation state.

### ***Diglossia***

In view of the differing market values and concomitant statuses of languages, it is often the case that when two languages are used in a community, one is considered to be more prestigious than the other. Ferguson (1959) introduced the notion of *diglossia* to describe linguistic situations in which two languages co-exist in a community. He describes a linguistic situation in Greece or Arabic-speaking countries which have two distinct varieties of the same language (e.g. Katharevousa *versus* Demotiki Greek; Classical Arabic *versus* Colloquial Arabic) where the use of these distinct varieties takes place in different domains.

### ***Domain Analysis***

According to Fishman (1965) language choice is not random; choice follows a pattern which is governed by what he calls *domains*. These are institutional contexts in which one variety is likely to occur more than the other. As noted in

Fasold (1984: 183), *domain analysis* is closely related to Ferguson's (1959) notion of *diglossia* since, underlying the theory of domain analysis lies the assumption that the choice of one variety over the other varies from one domain to another. Some domains, such as the family domain, are less formal than others. Hence the low variety tends to be chosen in such a domain. Moreover, domain analysis suggests that, before choosing one variety over the other, a speaker has to take into consideration a host of factors such as the 'setting' (e.g. home, school); the 'interlocutors' (e.g. parents; teachers) and the 'topic' being discussed.

Ferguson's diglossia has been further extended to linguistic situations where there are two distinct, separate and unrelated languages. In such a linguistic setting, the two languages which are both standard languages and are both taught at school (as are English and Maltese in the Maltese case) may also be considered to be in a diglossic situation if the two languages are used only in particular domains by interlocutors.

What is the current linguistic situation in Malta? Is Malta a case of bilingualism with diglossia and which, according to Fishman (1965), results in stable bilingualism? Or has Malta bilingualism without diglossia in which there is no separation of the languages in particular domains? What are the implications of such a situation if as Fishman (1965) notes, bilingualism without diglossia usually tends to usher in monolingualism?

### ***Language Use***

A few small-scale studies (see Sciriha: 1994a: 314-318 for review of the literature) have analysed code-switching, negative transfer and language use in Malta in specific social contexts such as at home, school and at the university. Unfortunately, the population sampled in these studies was far too small to warrant scientifically based conclusions.

In order to overcome the paucity of research in this area, two large scale surveys, representative of the population under study, were undertaken in 1993 and 1996. The objectives of these surveys were mainly to discover which of Malta's two official languages is generally spoken and whether language choice is conditioned by factors such as domains and participants during the interaction.

### ***Code-Switching***

Both surveys focus on the use of both Maltese and English in specific domains. It is important to note at the outset that code-switching which Di Pietro (1977) defines as 'the use of more than one language by communicants in the execution of a speech act' or the 'alternate use of two or more languages in the same utterance or conversation' Grosjean (1982: 145), is a common phenomenon and most Maltese have a tendency to switch from one code to the other. The reasons why interlocutors code-switch are varied, but usually they do so either because they do not know the equivalent word when speaking about a particular topic, or else

because they do not have a particular word readily available. This might display a certain amount of mental sloth on the part of the speaker who does not bother to search for the equivalent in the language he is using at that point in time.

The following two examples taken from a television programme shown on Malta's national broadcasting station illustrate how code-switching operates. During this programme, the art of flower decoration was being demonstrated by a Maltese speaking female. Whilst explaining to viewers how to make a simple flower arrangement her commentary ran as follows:

(1) 'Ghalhekk tridu tnehhu l-leaves, miz-zokk tal-flower' (*thus, you have to remove the leaves from the stem of the flower*).

(2) 'Għax il-flowers, jekk ma tpoggiehomx sew, ma jkunux nice' (*Because the flowers, if you do not put them in a correct way, will not be nice*).

It is important to note that all three of the English words which pepper these two Maltese sentences have high frequency equivalents in Maltese, namely *fjuri* (flowers), *sbieb* (nice), *weraq* (leaves). What is striking about these examples is that probably few viewers even noticed such intrusive code-switching, since there is a growing tendency for the Maltese to switch intra sententially. As will be shown in the results of the surveys, it is thus hardly surprising that some Maltese declare speaking both languages in their conversations. In fact, in the above examples, the TV presenter has used more Maltese than English in her utterances (Me). Conversely, code-switching from English to Maltese is evident in the following sentence uttered by a female Maltese university student who uses more English than Maltese (Em) in her speech act:

(3) I parked my car in the *nizla* (downhill) till I went to buy a *bobza* (bread).

One can also say that some switches from one language to another are roughly equal (ME) as in example (4):

(4) Of course I know. *Hu veru stupidu* (he is really stupid!)

From the above examples it is evident that it is becoming increasingly difficult for some Maltese people to speak whole stretches of conversation entirely in Maltese or in English.

### ***First Sociolinguistic Survey, 1993***

What follows is based on results obtained in a sociolinguistic survey carried out in 1993. The survey focused primarily on the use of Maltese and English by respondents with their interlocutors.

#### *Research Methodology*

The study was quantitative in nature, and made use of a structured questionnaire as the main instrument whereby data on aspects of language use were collected. As Romaine (1994) notes, such methodology is not without its problems. Among the disadvantages she mentions the fact that at times self-reporting is not always

accurate and that respondents have a tendency to over-report. Moreover, as Labov (1972) remarks, the researcher has to deal with the observer's paradox. 'Notwithstanding the disadvantages of this survey data gathering method, it has been proved to be useful in studies on maintenance and shift of languages' (Fasold 1984: 216).

A two stage probability sampling technique was used to interview those aged eighteen years and over. Malta was grid divided into blocks, each with the same estimated residential population. A number of blocks was randomly selected using the standard system of regular intervals after a random starting point. For each block, the interviewers were assigned a given quota based on the ideal sampling distribution, based on the known demographic structure for the island, in such a way that the quota for each block numerically represented the total quota. The quota for the survey was then stratified by gender and age group

The 501 respondents were individually interviewed by trained and experienced interviewers during the summer months of 1993.

### *The Questionnaire*

The questionnaire comprised two parts: (i) a section on demographic attributes in which questions sought information regarding the respondents' age, gender, social class, geographical region in which they lived; and (ii) questions set to discover the respondents' language use, based on the previously mentioned factors of domain, interlocutor and role-relationship.

The structure of this questionnaire is a language background one, in that both direct and indirect questions about the language environment of the respondents were used. For example one of the questions was: 'What language do your children use when speaking with other children?' This is an indirect question since the respondent questioned experiences language receptively as opposed to direct questions as in 'What language do you use when speaking with your mother?' (Baker 1985)

In the set questionnaire for this survey, questions pertaining to one domain, namely the family domain were asked. These questions on language use were presented in the form of dyads (respondent to mother; respondent to siblings) in order to explore whether language choice depends on role relations as represented by the person spoken to by the respondent.

### *Sample Profile*

Table 1 summarises the sample profile by gender, age and socio-economic status. The random sample comprised 501 respondents, of whom 271 were females and 230 males. These were divided into four age groups: 18-30; 31-50; 51-65; 65+. The social class of respondents was later correlated with language use. For the purposes of this survey, 'the notion of social class has been simplified into five groups only as reflected in the family's socio-economic category, as this is reflected

in the occupation of the breadwinner of the family' (Vassallo *et al.* 1994: 26). Moreover, the social class of respondents who are homemakers was obtained by means of the husband's occupation or, alternatively, of that person who was considered to be the main provider for the household. On the basis of standard practices in the social grading of occupations as found in sociological literature the following groups were adopted for this study:

**Group A:** Persons exercising a profession.

**Group B:** Persons in managerial and administrative grades.

**Group C1:** Persons in higher clerical, clerical supervisory grades, skilled craftsmen and technicians owners/managers of small businesses.

**Group C2:** Skilled manual workers and foremen.

**Group D:** Semi-skilled, unskilled workers, labourers and casual workers.

**Group E:** Persons whose income is completely provided by the State.

As is evident in Table 1, the largest number of respondents in absolute figures (256) is between the ages of 31-50, while the smallest number (57: 11.4%) is composed of persons over 65 years of age. There are more females (271) than males (230); many of the respondents fall under the C1 (150) and D (148) socio-economic groups. The highest socio-economic group A is represented by 31 respondents.

### *Survey Findings*

The importance of the family as a social unit, especially as regards the use of particular languages can hardly be over-stressed. After all, the child is first socialised in the family and it is within this environment that he acquires his mother tongue. The functions of the language in the child's interaction are very important for his language development. Thus, the onus lies with the family to provide the necessary linguistic input for the child to acquire.

The findings regarding the respondents' language use in the family domain are presented in Table 2. In this table, respondents were asked which language they use when interacting with other adults at home. A total of 90.4% of respondents claimed to speak Maltese; only 1% stated that they communicated in English, while 1.8% said that they use more English than Maltese (Em) in their utterances.

**Table 1:** Sample Profile

Total		Gender		Socio-Economic Group					
		Male	Female	A	B	C1	C2	D	E
<b>N=</b>	501	230	271	31	45	150	87	148	19
<b>Age</b>	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>18-30</b>	20.6	21.7	19.6	16.1	13.3	20.7	23.0	23.0	26.3
<b>31-50</b>	<b>51.1</b>	<b>48.7</b>	<b>53.1</b>	<b>61.3</b>	<b>68.9</b>	<b>52.0</b>	<b>47.1</b>	<b>45.9</b>	<b>36.8</b>
<b>51-65</b>	17.0	16.5	17.3	12.9	11.1	19.3	16.1	16.2	26.3
<b>65+</b>	11.4	13.0	10.0	9.7	6.7	8.0	13.8	14.9	10.5

*Base = All Respondents*

A closer look at this table reveals that the lowest percentages of Maltese language speakers belong to the youngest age group (86.4%), while the highest percentages of respondents are those who are over 51 years (94.1% and 93.0%). One should also point out the fact that in general females (88.6%) claimed that they use Maltese less than their male (92.6%) counterparts.

The results in Table 3 give a breakdown of language use among respondents when speaking to their children. What is immediately striking is the fact that when compared with language use among adults, the percentages in the use of Maltese decrease (from 90.4% to 76.6%), whereas the figures in English language use go up (from 1.8% to 2.6%). Of particular note is the fact that code-switching from Maltese to English (Me) and vice versa (Em) is used more when respondents are speaking to their children than when interacting with adults. In fact, 11% of the respondents claimed that they use more Maltese than English (Me) in their utterances, while 4.4% use more English than Maltese (Em). Such results are telling in that it seems more acceptable to code-switch with children than with adults.

One should also highlight the fact that although female respondents have a tendency to code-switch (Me and Em) more than males, yet the difference is really minimal. Both male and female respondents seem to feel the need to code-switch when speaking with their children. Besides, a further breakdown of the results in this table shows us that respondents pertaining to the highest socio-economic category (16.1%) are those who interact in English more with their children. In fact, the results in Table 3 show that only respondents who belong to the first three social groupings claimed to use English when interacting with their children. It seems to be the case that the higher one's socio-economic category is, the less likely is Maltese used with children. This is evident as the percentages in the use of Maltese are nearly twice as high for respondents in the C1 (75.3%); C2 (87.4%; D (89.2%) and E (89.5%), when compared with those for respondents in the A (45.2%) and B (42.6%) social groupings.

Age is also an important variable in the use of Maltese and English. Respondents who are in the two younger age groups (18-30 years: 76.7%; 31-50 years: 74.2%) reported using less Maltese with their children than those in the two older age groups.

Table 2: Language Spoken at Home among Adults

	Total	Age			Gender		Socio-Economic Category					
		18-30	31-50	51-65	65+	Male	Female	A	B	C1	C2	D
N=	501	103	256	85	57	230	271	31	41	150	87	148
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
NA	0.6	-	0.8	-	1.8	-	1.1	-	-	0.7	-	0.7
English	1.0	1.0	1.2	1.2	-	1.3	0.7	3.2	4.4	1.3	-	-
Maltese	90.4	86.4	90.2	94.1	93.0	92.6	88.6	77.4	71.1	90.7	96.6	94.6
Em	1.8	4.9	1.2	1.2	-	1.3	2.2	-	3.2	6.7	2.0	1.1
Me	5.0	6.8	5.5	2.4	3.5	3.9	5.9	16.1	15.6	4.0	-	4.1
Other	1.2	1.0	1.2	1.2	1.8	0.9	1.5	-	2.2	1.3	2.3	0.7

Base = All respondents

Table 4 gives a breakdown of the findings to the indirect question 'What language do your children speak with other children.' When one compares the results of this table with those in Table 3, one notices a decline in the use of Maltese (73.7% versus 76.6% in Table 3) and an increase in English language use (4.6% versus 2.6% in Table 3). Besides, the decline in the use of Maltese is a reflection of the socio-economic group of respondents. In fact, those respondents in the C1 category report lower Maltese language use when their children communicate with one another, when these are compared with the findings in the previous table. As a matter of fact, it is in the third social category where the decline is noticeable: 70% of respondents claim their children use Maltese whereas in the previous table, 75.3% of respondents in this social category had reported speaking Maltese with their children.

This decline in Maltese language use is not merely a social class factor; gender seems to be another important variable that one needs to consider. In fact, 71.6% of the females report that their children interact with one another in Maltese, as opposed to 75.3% of females who claimed using Maltese with their children. Of note is the fact that although there is also a decline in the use of Maltese as reported by male respondents in Table 4 (76.1%) when this is compared with Table 3 (78.3%), the decline is less sharp than that of their female counterparts.

**Table 3:** Language Spoken at Home with Children

	Total	Age				Gender		Socio-Economic Category					
		18-30	31-50	51-65	65+	Male	Female	A	B	C1	C2	D	E
<b>N=</b>	501	103	256	85	57	230	271	31	41	150	87	148	19
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>NA</b>	2.2	8.7	3.5	1.2	5.3	4.8	4.1	3.2	4.4	4.7	3.4	3.4	-
<b>English</b>	2.6	1.9	2.7	3.5	1.8	1.7	3.3	16.1	13.3	1.3	-	-	-
<b>Maltese</b>	76.6	76.7	74.2	80.0	82.5	78.3	75.3	45.2	42.6	75.3	87.4	89.2	89.5
<b>Em</b>	4.4	6.8	5.1	-	3.5	3.9	4.8	6.5	17.8	4.7	-	1.4	10.5
<b>Me</b>	11.0	5.8	13.3	14.1	5.3	10.9	11.1	29.0	20.0	12.7	6.9	6.1	-
<b>Other</b>	1.0	-	1.2	1.2	1.8	0.4	1.5	-	2.2	1.3	2.3	-	-

Base = All Respondents

**Table 4:** Language Spoken at Home Among Children

	Total	Age				Gender		Socio-Economic Category					
		18-30	31-50	51-65	65+	Male	Female	A	B	C1	C2	D	E
<b>N=</b>	501	103	256	85	57	230	271	31	41	150	87	148	19
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>NA</b>	7.6	13.6	7.4	2.4	5.3	7.4	7.7	12.9	6.7	8.0	4.6	6.1	-
<b>English</b>	4.6	2.9	4.7	5.9	5.3	4.8	4.4	16.1	26.7	2.0	1.1	-	10.5
<b>Maltese</b>	73.7	71.8	73.4	72.9	78.9	76.1	71.6	45.2	46.7	70.0	83.9	85.8	18.2
<b>Em</b>	3.6	2.9	3.5	4.7	3.5	1.7	5.2	9.7	11.1	4.7	1.1	0.7	-
<b>Me</b>	10.4	8.7	10.5	14.1	7.0	10.0	10.7	16.1	8.9	15.3	8.0	7.4	5.3
<b>Other</b>	0.2	-	0.4	-	-	-	0.4	-	-	-	1.1	-	.0

Base = All Respondents

### ***Second Sociolinguistic Survey, 1996***

The main objective of the second survey was to complement the previous survey by collecting data directly from children themselves. In the 1993 survey all respondents were over eighteen years of age and children were indirectly excluded, although respondents had been asked questions regarding the language of interaction of their children (Tables 3 and 4). Since indirect language background questions may be somewhat misleading, the questions in this survey were not indirect. Owing to the fact that these very young respondents spend a lot of their time at school, they were asked questions pertaining to two domains: *at home with their family members* and *at school with their teacher and friends*.

#### *Research Methodology*

The methodology used in the previous survey was again applied. The only difference is that instead, the sampling technique was used to interview 930 children, aged seven. All the children were individually interviewed by a team of well-trained and experienced interviewers during the Christmas period 1996. It is important to note that it was not always easy for the interviewers to conduct the interview at home with the child alone. Some over-protective mothers insisted being on present during the interview. Unfortunately, they suspected a hidden agenda in this survey and feared that their child's intelligence and linguistic performance were being assessed. Interviewers had been prepared for such occurrences and every effort was made to create a bias-free setting for the interview setting.

#### *The Questionnaire*

The 1996 questionnaire comprised two parts: (i) a section on demographic attributes in which information regarding the respondents' age, gender, geographical region in which they lived, school attended and their parents' occupations was obtained; and (ii) questions set to discover the respondents' language use, based on the previously mentioned factors of domain, interlocutor and role-relationship.

#### *Sample Profile*

Table 5 presents details of the sample profile by gender, socio-economic status and school attended. This time quota sampling was adopted to select the large sample of 930 respondents (457 boys and 473 girls) who attend either a public or a private school.

Information regarding the school attended by respondents is important when studying language use in Malta, since the media of instruction in these schools tend to differ. Maltese is the medium of instruction in public schools; in contrast, most private school children are taught in English.

The socio-economic class of respondents was gauged by their parents' occupations. It is also important to note that both parents' occupations were asked

and what is striking (cf. Table 5) is that 643 (69.1%) of the mothers are homemakers and are thus not gainfully employed. Besides, the largest single group of working mothers captured by this study pertain to socio-economic group A (111: 11.9%). It is worth noting that only a couple of decades ago, the tendency was for lower socio-economic status mothers to go out to work. Instead, nowadays, the trend is for women with professional careers to retain their occupations even when married with children.

Table 5 also shows the different nationalities of the respondents' mothers. The overwhelming number (95.8%) of the mothers are Maltese; (2.7%) are British; there are a few mothers who are German (0.1%); Italian (0.1%); French (0.1%) and other nationalities (0.7%). Such information is important in child language acquisition since it is the mother in her role as the primary caregiver who transmits the first language to the child.

Table 6 gives a breakdown of the respondents fathers' occupations. As in the 1993 survey, the majority of the respondents fathers' occupations (288: 31%) belong to the C2 category, being engaged in clerical jobs, are skilled craftsmen or owners/managers of small businesses.

As regards the nationalities of the respondents' fathers, 95.3% are Maltese; 1.6% British; 1.3% Italian; 0.4% German; 0.1% French and 0.4% belong to other nationalities. Such percentages are only slightly lower than their female counterparts (4.2% males *vs* 4.7% females).

The fact that the percentages for male and female non-Maltese parents are virtually identical, results from an important change in the Maltese law in 1987, which granted working rights to non-Maltese males married to Maltese nationals. Before, the percentage of male foreigners living in Malta was much smaller.

In this survey, information was sought regarding the school attended by the child. In our sample there are more children attending private schools than public ones. Following a recent Church-State agreement on the transfer of Church property to

**Table 5:** Sample Profile by Mother's Nationality and Socio-Economic Category

	Total	School Attended		Gender		Socio-Economic Category (by Mother's Occupation)						
		Private	Public	Male	Female	A	B	C1	C2	D	E	H/W <sup>a</sup>
<b>N=</b>	930	570	360	457	473	111	5	87	49	31	2	643
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	0.0
<b>NA</b>	.4	.5	.3	.9	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.6
<b>Maltese</b>	95.8	96.5	94.7	96.5	95.1	97.3	80.0	95.4	87.8	90.0	100	96.6
<b>English</b>	2.7	2.1	3.6	2.2	3.2	2.7	-	3.4	6.1	3.2	-	2.3
<b>Italian</b>	0.1	0.2	-	-	0.2	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.2
<b>German</b>	0.1	0.2	-	0.2	-	-	0.8	-	2.0	-	-	-
<b>French</b>	0.1	-	0.3	0.2	-	-	-	-	2.0	-	-	-
<b>Other</b>	0.7	0.6	1.2	-	1.4	-	20.0	1.1	2.0	6.4	-	0.3

\* H/W stands for housewife. In such cases women are not gainfully employed.

Base = All Respondents

the State, all private schools run by the Church in Malta are now non-fee paying schools, although monetary contributions are encouraged by the administrators of such schools.

Other private schools are fee paying. Of particular note is that previously when parents had to pay tuition fees for their children's education in Church schools, there was a more pronounced class distinction between those who attended Church schools and others who did not. It is indeed fortunate that owing to a change in policy, nowadays in these schools there is now a healthier blend of children who hail from the different strata of society.

### *The 1996 Survey Findings*

#### *The Family Domain*

As previously mentioned in Section 5, the family is an important unit for the transmission of language. In fact, the significant role of the mother can hardly be overestimated since she is the pivot around which daily interaction with her children revolves. She is usually also the person who spends more time with the children than anyone else. Psycholinguistic studies have shown that the way a mother interacts with her children is positively or negatively correlated with her children's linguistic abilities. Thus, research has consistently shown that mothers who ask their children open-ended questions and who tend to expand on their offspring's utterances are instrumental for their children's linguistic growth. Conversely, those mothers who stick to the old adage that 'children should be seen and not heard' and/or who answer their children's queries with dry yes/no answers are not really providing the building blocks for language acquisition.

Table 7 gives a breakdown of the languages spoken by our respondents at home. What is immediately striking is the fact that the percentages are highest in Maltese, when respondents interact with their fathers (61.7%) and are lowest with their siblings (53.9%). As regards the findings in English, the respondents reported that they speak to their mothers (24.1%) in this language more than when interacting with their siblings (23.2%) and with their fathers (22.6%).

**Table 6: Sample Profile by Father's Nationality and Socio-Economic Category**

	Total	School Attended		Gender		Socio-Economic Category (by Father's Occupation)					
		Private	Public	Male	Female	A	B	C1	C2	D	E
<b>N=</b>	930	570	360	457	473	167	168	201	288	84	10
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>NA</b>	0.9	0.9	0.8	0.4	1.3	0.6	0.6	0.5	0.3	-	-
<b>Maltese</b>	95.3	94.4	96.7	95	95.6	96.7	94.6	95.0	97.2	96.4	100.0
<b>English</b>	1.6	1.9	1.1	1.3	1.9	2.4	1.8	2.5	1.0	-	-
<b>Italian</b>	1.3	1.8	0.6	1.8	0.8	-	1.8	1.0	1.0	3.6	-
<b>German</b>	0.4	0.4	0.6	0.7	0.2	1.8	-	-	3.0	-	-
<b>French</b>	0.1	-	0.3	0.2	-	-	0.6	-	-	-	-
<b>Other</b>	0.4	0.7	-	.7	0.2	0.6	0.6	1.0	-	-	-

*Base = All Respondents*

A further breakdown of the findings in Table 8 shows that gender is an important non-linguistic variable in language use. In fact, boys consistently use more Maltese with their fathers (62.8%); mothers (58%) and siblings (54.3%) than girls. This trend is, however, reversed when respondents interact in English. More girls than boys speak to their fathers (23.7%); mothers (24.9%) and siblings (24.1%) in English. This is also true for respondents who code-switch (ME). Girls outnumber boys in ME when speaking to their fathers (14.6%) and their mothers (18.4%). When speaking to their siblings more boys (9.4%) than girls (7.8%) use ME.

### *The Education Domain*

Most Maltese children are formally introduced to English and Maltese on entering primary school. In fact, both languages are taught from grade one, but one finds a discrepancy in the actual time that is spent on each of these languages. This is basically where the difference between private school and public school education lies. It is usually the case that in private schools there is a tendency to give importance to oral skills in English especially since the medium of instruction is predominantly English, whereas in public schools the trend is for more Maltese-based instruction. Needless to say, there are no hard and fast rules as each school differs in the degree of exposure that the child is given to Malta's two official languages.

Table 9 presents the findings on language use when our respondents are at school. It is immediately evident that when speaking to their teacher, 36.2% and 32.3% of our respondents interact in Maltese and English respectively. What is particularly striking is the fact that code-switching (ME: 30.8%) is also used when respondents speak to the teacher.

When the respondents were asked which language they use when speaking to their friends at school, the majority of them (57.6%) said they speak Maltese; 26.9% reported using English and only 14.6% code-switch (ME).

**Table 7: Language Spoken at Home**

	Maltese	English	ME	No Answer
<b>Respondent to:</b>	%	%	%	%
<b>Father</b>	61.7	22.6	14.4	1.3
<b>Mother</b>	57.2	24.1	18.0	0.8
<b>Sibling</b>	53.9	23.2	8.6	14.3

*Base = All Respondents*

**Table 8: Language Use at Home by Gender**

	Maltese		English		ME		No Answer	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
<b>Respondent to:</b>	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Father</b>	62.8	60.7	21.4	23.7	14.2	14.6	1.5	1.1
<b>Mother</b>	58.0	56.4	23.2	24.9	17.5	18.4	1.3	0.2
<b>Sibling</b>	54.3	53.5	22.3	24.1	9.4	7.8	14.0	14.6

*Base = All Respondents*

A further breakdown of the findings (Table 10) shows that more boys than girls interact with their teacher in Maltese (37.4%), English (32.3%) and ME (31.9%). This trend is reversed when respondents speak to their friends with girls registering higher percentages (56.6%; 27.9%; 14.8%) than boys.

#### *Language Use and Type of School Attended*

As is evident from the previous tables, language use is only to some extent both person-oriented and domain-oriented. Respondents claimed that they speak Maltese more to their fathers than to their mothers when at home. But at school fewer respondents reported speaking either Maltese or English with the teacher and instead code-switched (ME). Although the percentages in ME are not as high when respondents speak with their friends, still one finds that there are relatively significant percentages in the use of ME. Why is this so?

A possible explanation may be given when analysing the findings in Table 11. Those respondents who attend private schools are more likely to interact in English with their teacher (49.5%) and their friends (41.1%). When respondents are at home however, they use Maltese more than at school and use higher percentages of ME with their parents and siblings than do their counterparts who attend a public school.

But what is particularly striking is the fact that only 5% of the children attending public schools reported using English with their teacher and an even lower percentage interact in English with their friends (4.4%); the majority of respondents (60.6%) speak Maltese with their teacher and 88.9% with their friends.

On the home front, public school respondents overwhelmingly claimed using Maltese with their fathers (86.4%); mothers (82.2%) and siblings (77.2%). Thus, in both domains, one can say that these respondents are continually speaking Maltese.

**Table 9:** Language Spoken at School

	Maltese	English	ME	No Answer
<i>Respondent to:</i>	%	%	%	%
<b>Teacher</b>	36.2	32.3	30.8	0.8
<b>Friend</b>	57.6	26.9	14.6	0.9

*Base = All Respondents*

**Table 10:** Language Use at School by Gender

	Maltese		English		ME		No Answer	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
<i>Respondent to:</i>	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Sibling</b>	54.3	53.5	22.3	24.1	9.4	7.8	14.0	14.6
<b>Teacher</b>	37.4	35.1	32.3	30.4	31.9	29.6	0.2	1.3
<b>Friend</b>	53.3	56.0	25.8	27.9	14.4	14.8	0.4	1.3

*Base = All Respondents*

### **Concluding Comments**

#### *The 1993 Survey*

The findings in the 1993 survey amply show that Maltese is used overwhelmingly at home among family members by both young and old respondents from all socio-economic categories. It is all too evident that the family is not merely transmitting the national language to children, but is enforcing its use. Of course, as expected, female respondents tend to use English in their interactions more than males. The use of the more prestigious language by females has been discovered in other Maltese-based studies (Sciriha: 1986; 1994b; 1997). Usually females tend to be more status-oriented than males and English, which is considered to be a social asset, is one of the most obvious status symbols.

#### *The 1996 Survey*

The results in the more recent survey on young Maltese children point out that:

- (i) at home, the majority of the children reported using Maltese (61.7% with father; 57.2% with mother and 53.9% with siblings). These percentages are however lower than those in the 1993 survey. In fact, in the first survey, 90.3% of the respondents claimed using Maltese when interacting with adults, though the percentages of Maltese language use declines when respondents speak with children (76.6%), or when children communicate with one another at home (73.7%); and
- (ii) at school, the children in the second survey interact with their teacher in Maltese (36.2%); English (32.3%); ME (30.8%). With their friends they also speak predominantly Maltese (57.6%), followed by English (26.9%) and ME (14.6%).

In the light of the above findings, Maltese is the dominant language at home and at school. Nevertheless, on the school front, even though the percentages of Maltese (36.2%) are the highest of the three varieties used, yet these percentages are significantly lower when compared with the use of Maltese at home. What happens at school is that English (32.3%) is used together with ME (30.8%).

**Table 11:** Language Spoken at Home and at School by School Attended

<b>Respondent to:</b>	<b>Maltese</b>		<b>English</b>		<b>EM</b>		<b>No Answer</b>	
	<b>Private</b>	<b>Public</b>	<b>Private</b>	<b>Public</b>	<b>Private</b>	<b>Public</b>	<b>Private</b>	<b>Public</b>
<b>Father</b>	46.1	86.4	34.6	3.6	18.1	8.6	1.2	1.4
<b>Mother</b>	41.4	82.2	36.3	4.7	21.6	12.2	0.7	0.8
<b>Sibling</b>	39.1	77.2	35.6	3.6	10.0	6.4	15.3	12.8
<b>Teacher</b>	20.9	60.6	49.5	5.0	28.6	34.2	1.1	0.3
<b>Friend</b>	37.9	88.9	41.1	4.4	19.8	6.4	1.2	0.3

*Base = All Respondents*

### *Language Selection*

According to Fishman (1965) language choice is not random but there is a pattern in such a choice which is governed by institutional contexts in which one language is likely to occur more than the other. The obvious question to ask is whether in Malta language choice is governed by institutional contexts which give rise to bilingualism with diglossia and which according to Fishman (1965) results in stable bilingualism. Or has Malta bilingualism without diglossia, in which there is no compartmentalisation of the languages in particular domains? And what are its implications if, as Fishman (1965) notes, bilingualism without diglossia usually ushers in monolingualism?

On the basis of the 1996 survey findings, an attempt will be made to analyse the current linguistic situation in Malta.

### *Bilingualism without Diglossia*

Do the survey results show that the Maltese linguistic situation may be described as one in which there is bilingualism without diglossia? At a first glance, one is tempted to admit that this is probably the case. There does not appear to be such a rigid divide in the use of Maltese and English, since both are used by the majority of the respondents in informal (home) and formal (school) settings. But, Maltese is undeniably the dominant language since the highest percentages registered in both contexts are in this language. Nevertheless, a closer look at these results of the 1996 survey is open to a different interpretation.

### *Bilingualism with Diglossia? Public School Children*

In the 1996 survey, when respondents were asked questions regarding their language use at school, they were also grouped as to whether they attend a public/government school or a private school. As shown previously in Table 6, the majority of the respondents received a private school education. The striking difference that one finds between these two types of schools is that significantly higher percentages of respondents claimed interacting with their teachers in English (49.5%), as opposed to a mere 5% of respondents attending government schools. Furthermore, when speaking with their friends at school, private school children continue using this code (41.1%). On the contrary, only 4.4% of the public school children interact with their friends in English.

As such, Maltese is used by public school children virtually uninterruptedly in both domains. In fact, as is shown in Table 12 below, the lowest percentage (77.2%) of Maltese language use by these respondents when interacting at home is not much higher than they when they interact with their teachers (60.6%). Thus, Maltese is used in both domains and English use is really extremely limited. In this respect, one has also to question whether we should call these children bilingual since most are only using Maltese. But for the sake of the argument, let us say that they are bilingual. Since English is used predominantly at school and not at home for these public school children, this is a case of bilingualism with diglossia.

### *Bilingualism with Diglossia? Private School Children*

What about the private school children? Is their linguistic situation to be similarly described? Let us analyse the results of language use by these respondents (Table 12).

First of all what is indeed remarkable about these respondents is that less than half (20.9%) of the 46.1% who interact in Maltese with their fathers, continue using Maltese when speaking with their teachers. On the other hand, those respondents who speak English at home with their mothers (36.3%) increase the use of this language when speaking to their teachers (49.5%). What is happening here is really interesting. Those respondents who speak Maltese at home are more likely to interact in English at school with their teachers. So theirs is a bilingual situation and a diglossic one too. Unfortunately, this is not the case for other respondents who speak English at home, since the likelihood is that they will only reinforce the use of English at school with their teachers. The linguistic situation for these children is at best bilingual with diglossia and at worst it is really a monolingual one.

### *Degree of Proficiency and Code-Switching*

The above linguistic situations in both public and private schools are not only extremely revealing but also very perturbing for parents and educators who wish their children to become bilingual in a country which is officially bilingual. Besides, the percentages of code-switching ought not to be taken lightly. The fact that at school, children are allowed to code-switch with their teachers (28.6% and 34.2% in private and public schools respectively) reflects a worrying state of affairs for educators and parents. Sociolinguistic research reveals that when a person engages in extensive code-switching, it means that his proficiency in either language is not at all high. In the case of a significant number of Maltese children attending public schools, the lack of fluency in English is all too obvious; these children have no option but to choose the path of least resistance and code-switch.

It is important to highlight the fact that from a language learning and assimilation point of view code-switching is generally not viewed positively (Grosjean 1985) because the person who switches from one code to another demonstrates that actually he knows neither of the two languages well enough. In fact, code-switchers are considered to be semi-lingual or non-lingual. If parents speak to their child in Maltese and send him to a private school where English is the medium of interaction, then the likelihood is that the child will become bilingual since there is a both a separation and use of the two languages in two domains. On the other hand, if parents speak Maltese with their child who is sent to a public school, the probability is that at school Maltese is reinforced since interaction in English is minimal. Thus, the child remains to a large extent monolingual.

This is so because, as has already been noted, public school education is characterised by a Maltese-based instruction. Thus, understandably so, instead of

using only English to interact with their teacher, public school children predominantly use Maltese or code-switch. In fact, the percentages of code-switching given in Table 12 clearly show that such practice is higher for public school children (34.2%) than for private school ones (28.6%) when interacting with teachers.

These results clearly illustrate that in the school domain, language use is conditioned to a large extent by the school one attends. Moreover, code-switching in the two languages occurs in both types of school, but even then, public school respondents report using such a variety more than their private school counterparts (34.2% versus 28.6%) when interacting with teachers.

#### *Macro-level versus Micro-level Sociolinguistics*

The above results can possibly be interpreted by discussing two approaches to bilingualism. On the one hand, macro-level sociolinguistics, with Fishman (1983) as its main proponent, emphasises the importance of societal institutions. In this way, individual behaviour is a result of outside forces which operate at this level. On the other hand, micro-level sociolinguistics views the interactions of individuals as the basis for social change. According to Hakuta (1986: 189) 'the issue of utmost theoretical importance [is] — how to parcel out the causal chain of events in bilingual societies.' Both approaches can be seen to operate in the Maltese setting.

#### *Macro-level Sociolinguistics and Maltese Language Use*

As has previously been discussed, Maltese language use towers over English especially, but not exclusively in the home domain since public school respondents use Maltese extensively at school. This is partly the result of societal institutions which enforced changes in structure at the institutional level. In fact, recent Maltese governments stepped up their efforts to promote the national language. Street names are now in Maltese and Maltese is now not regarded with disrespect in public functions: the old adage that *il-Malti tajjeb biss ghall-kcina* (Maltese is only good for use in the kitchen) is not only not upheld any more but is frowned upon. For many years the use of Maltese has become mandatory at the primary level. At the secondary school level, the National Curriculum enforces the medium of instruction to be Maltese for Maltese History, Religion, Social Studies

Table 12: Language Spoken at Home and at School by School Attended

	Maltese		English		EM		No Answer	
	Private	Public	Private	Public	Private	Public	Private	Public
<i>Respondent to:</i>	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Father</b>	46.1	86.4	34.6	3.6	18.1	8.6	1.2	1.4
<b>Mother</b>	41.4	82.2	36.3	4.7	21.6	12.2	0.7	0.8
<b>Sibling</b>	39.1	77.2	35.6	3.6	10.0	6.4	15.3	12.8
<b>Teacher</b>	20.9	60.6	49.5	5.0	28.6	34.2	1.1	0.3
<b>Friend</b>	37.9	88.9	41.1	4.4	19.8	6.4	1.2	0.3

Base = All Respondents

and Maltese. In private schools (whether they are Church run or otherwise), Maltese is now being taught as a subject from grade one. By such measures Maltese governments aim at strengthening our national identity by reinforcing the position of Maltese especially in the educational system.

It is an undisputed fact that public school respondents in the 1996 survey are the by-product of the gradual build-up of these and other institutional measures. It is not surprising that only 5% of the respondents claimed to speak English with their teachers. Besides, the high percentages of switches between Maltese and English are testimony to a situation where exposure to English is very limited. What often happens at school is that some teachers themselves make constant switches between English and Maltese and the pupils 'are left to cut and paste with little intervention from the teacher' (Clyne *et al.* 1992). The proficiency of teachers in English has not been the object of a study in its own right, but one needs to point out that English language courses in the Bachelor in Education course at the university constitute only a minute proportion of the curriculum, and as such, proficiency in that language is not so very effectively promoted in teacher training in Malta. Besides, there are other teachers whose opinions regarding the abilities of their pupils are so low that they prefer to interact with their pupils exclusively in Maltese even during the English lesson. Most textbooks are indeed in English, but teachers further accommodate pupils by resorting to word for word translations of the English text into Maltese. In such cases, children really do not need to understand English as they are readily provided with a translation. It is thus hardly surprising that children end up being at best monolingual or at worst engage in continuous and extensive code-switching. This effectively means that they are not really mastering either language. And they are not mastering either language because they are trapped in an institutional setting that does not promote proper language training, however benevolent the intentions of teachers may be. Pupils are reaping the results of not-so-adequate training in a language which needs to be proficiently used in the exercise of their profession; the school system as such, reinforces wider processes of language use in the home and is reinforcing the unorthodox code-switching practice at home and the incorrect use of language at home and other settings where children socialise, rather than providing an alternative model and setting in which language proficiency can be obtained. What is perhaps even more striking is the fact that even though the teaching profession is proud of its professional status, yet this core aspect of the profession has not been researched, and the awareness of its importance very infrequently transpires in public or professional circles.

#### *Micro-Level Sociolinguistics and English Language Use*

The micro-level sociolinguistic method of investigation views the behaviour of individuals as a means to enforce social change. The relevance of this kind of approach to the analysis of language can be seen from the 1996 survey which clearly showed that English language use is predominantly a feature of private school respondents.

Two salient features emerge from these results: (i) it is widely recognised that parents in Malta no longer desire their children to attend a private school purely for social class reasons understood in the traditional sense, but primarily because English is the medium of instruction for most of the subjects taught from grade one. Even in a particular private school, San Anton, where the stated provisions of the statute require the school to be 'bilingual', parents almost revolted when they realised that if this policy were to be implemented, the main language of instruction *in all subjects* was going to stop being English. Maltese parents are all too cognisant of the fact that proficiency in a language is not merely gauged through reading and writing, but speaking a language fluently is rated very highly. After all, people talk much more than they write. Thus fluency in English is extremely important in a world where English is an international language; (ii) in the 1996 study some children attending public schools stated that they interact in ME especially with their mothers. The previously mentioned small scale studies (Sciriha 1994a) show that what generally happens at home is that some mothers, daunted by the prospect of their children not having enough exposure to English at school, decide to speak to them in 'English'. Obviously, there is nothing inherently wrong in doing so, as long as the parent concerned is proficient in the language in which communication with their children is undertaken, but it is equally true that one cannot give what one does not have. Unfortunately, the proficiency in English among a large number of Maltese mothers is rather low, but they are still determined to interact with their children in what they consider to be 'English'. The result of such a linguistically challenged environment is the use of excessive code-switching, which the child reinforces when he attends his public school.

It is specifically in this context that private schools, in which the level of English use is perceived to be better and higher than it is in public schools, are being 'instrumentalised' by Maltese parents who seek an English based education for their children. At the micro level the choice of school is not primarily a choice of a better content curriculum, but for a better instrumental curriculum. It is the perceived more extensive use of English which continues to be one of the more effective selling points of the private school system in Malta.

It is indeed striking that the linguistic strategy which some Maltese parents in Malta are now adopting is highly reminiscent of Maltese migrant communities in Canada and Australia. In particular areas in Canada (Toronto: Junction area in Dundas West Street) and Australia (Melbourne: St Albans and Sunshine), where the density of the Maltese population is very high, Maltese language retention is surprisingly very low in the second and subsequent generations (Sciriha 1990; Cauchi 1990). The shift towards English, the dominant language, starts precisely at home when parents, whose English proficiency is low, decide to interact in 'English' with their children so that their offspring would not experience a linguistic shock when they go to school.

These two contexts (the Maltese context and the migrant context in either Canada or Australia) are however not identical. An important difference exists since in both Canada and Australia, English is reinforced at school by native English speakers and the negative effects of the Maltese children's home background, which generally provided them with a large dose of degraded input in English are neutralised. Instead, in Malta, exposure to English in public school is limited and the quality is not even, with the result that the levels of code-switching increase. It is only too understandable in consequence, that Maltese children do not feel comfortable interacting in either Maltese or in English and thus resort to the easy habit of constant code-switching.

### ***Language and Culture***

Language as an essential aspect of culture can hardly be overestimated. It is the means whereby people communicate with each other, control each other and let themselves be controlled by others. 'Language carries with it a particular history, culture, philosophy and ultimately an ideology' (World Council of Churches 1972: 4). Language, more than any other artefact of culture reflects the emotions, the fears and the aspirations of the group who uses it as a means of interaction and socialisation.

The present study has attempted to go beyond the pure descriptive facets of current language use in Malta. In the choice of language, persons do not simply select an instrument for mutual understanding and communication. Language is used to define world views and construct meanings by the speakers about themselves and their understanding of the geo-political reality around them. In their choices in the sphere of language use, contemporary Maltese are effectively defining social reality and constructing a universe of meaning about themselves and their visions for their country, their visions for their country.

The results in the 1996 sociolinguistic survey clearly show that Maltese parents are now exhibiting a frequently non-articulated fear that their children might be robbed of the opportunity to learn English well and attempt to redress the situation by speaking to them in a language in which they do not have, not even remotely, near native-like competence. Furthermore, these parents are daunted by the reinforcement of Maltese in public schools, especially at the primary level, the stage which is so critical to 'language learning, the greatest intellectual feat anyone of us is ever required to perform' (Bloomfield 1933: 29) and are now indirectly trying to change a situation where Maltese dominates, and over which they have little or no control.

Through the strategy being adopted by different social categories of parents however, both private and public school children are ending up as losers: the former forego Maltese, their national language, the most identifying factor in their identity kit, or what Barnard (1969:65) dubbed a 'collective treasure'; the latter miss out on mastering an international language, an important key to global

citizenship and an important passport to jobs and opportunities that increasingly depend on the use of English in the technological era. In this context, very important public policy considerations become very relevant. The need for a small nation-state community like the Maltese is that it must undoubtedly seek to preserve its national language, since it is that which will nurture its identity and self esteem in a society that is increasingly becoming more anonymous and in which micro and macro structures seek to cloud the feeling of belonging, community and self-worth.

However, the socio-economic realities of the geo-political system that is fast developing also remains a clear pointer that what Maltese parents feel and act upon by instinct is also very true: survival in the modern world, and therefore the very enjoyment of the fruits of community, belonging and all that people look for in their searches for ultimate meaning in life, can only be obtained if one's credentials are valid and readily cashable. It is this function that a proficient use of English can provide the Maltese. In order to strike a better balance between the two poles of needs (economic and meaning) language policy in Maltese requires a radical rethinking, based on further research and illuminated discussion.

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