

## **Editorial**

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The three papers in this special issue on languages in education share a number of similarities. In all there is a strong presence of academics working within a faculty of Education, specifically within a department dedicated to the humanities and the teaching and learning of languages in Malta. It is no surprise therefore, that issues relating to pedagogy run through the three papers and the authors' close relationship to the subject is evident. Another similarity is the stimulus that prompted the research. All are grounded in the local educational context and the authors respond to a felt need in their respective areas as their research addresses issues that call for study, analysis, and evaluation.

In recent years, the linguistic landscape in Malta has changed considerably and several schools now have a range of nationalities on their roll call. Malta has practised bilingual education, albeit not consistently successfully across the board, but that practice and the usefulness of models of bilingualism are now in question as the contextual features that typify bilingual education no longer hold. Teachers can bear testimony to the challenges of teaching linguistically diverse groups of learners; which challenges are not only pedagogical but also social and cultural.

In their paper, Caruana and Pace explore some of these challenges specifically in relation to Italian schoolchildren in Secondary schools. At the time of writing, their focus is a judicious one as the number of Italian nationals in Malta between 2010 and 2019 rose exponentially – fourteen-fold. This rate of increase far outpaced that of nationals from the United Kingdom whose numbers rose by less than three times for the same period. Correspondingly, the numbers of

Italian schoolchildren make for the largest group of migrant learners in schools. This is only some of the background that the authors couch their study in before reporting their findings gathered from a variety of sources. Some of the findings indicate clearly that problems of inclusion abound and that though the teachers' pedagogy could mitigate the issue, communication in Maltese or English or both remains key to an enhanced educational experience – a conclusion that confirms earlier research by Micallef Cann (2013) and suggests that an evaluation of the pedagogical effectiveness of the pull-out model is called for.

Pedagogical effectiveness of the questioning techniques adopted by teachers of French is the focus of Bezzina and Gauci's paper. The authors build on existing local research in this area and complement it with their own study into the key role teachers' questions play in the quality of learners' oral responses. The implications of the former are clearly associated with the latter and are verifiable using tools from corpus linguistics to analyse the quantity and type of response learners give to teachers' questions. Moreover, the analysis is enriched by evaluating the questions against the cognitive levels set out in Bloom's taxonomy. Here too, the findings are not encouraging as lower-order questions predominate. The cost of that is brief responses from learners who are neither stretched nor motivated and the point is stressed that language teaching that focuses on form and not sufficiently on meaningful experience makes for diminished language learning. The creation of a corpus of classroom interaction during French lessons marks a valuable contribution to further research.

The influx of foreign nationals in Malta has led to an increased interest in Maltese as a second or third language for those living here long enough to invest in learning the language. Zammit carries out a longitudinal study of the progress made by foreign nationals (adults) in acquiring the Maltese verbal tense and aspect. Intertwined with the students' emerging familiarity with this linguistic feature is the pedagogical approach their teacher adopted, which was rated negatively by the students. In addition to the increased understanding of an aspect of language acquisition that this study offers, is the novel application of Chaos/Complexity Theory. From the range of methods that the researcher uses to collect data, she found that understanding and explaining the complexity of acquiring a second language is facilitated by applying Chaos/Complexity Theory.

International research into second and foreign languages is characterised by a richness and diversity of research methods. This small collection of three articles bears witness to this as the studies presented in this special issue are conducted using surveys, interviews, bibliographic data, verbal protocols, standardised tests, corpus-based analysers, oral transcriptions, textbook analysis, and curriculum evaluation.

### **References**

Micallef Cann, S. (2013). *Immigrant students in Malta and the language barrier*. Unpublished Master's thesis, University of Malta, Malta.

