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IN TOUCH WITH REALITY OR WISHFUL THINKING?
REFLECTIONS ON LANGUAGE POLICIES AND
PLANNING IN MULTILINGUAL CONTEXTS***

1. Introduction

This contribution is the result of reflections on the theoretical and practical implications of language policies and practices developed during conversations held over the years between the two authors. In language planning there is, inevitably, reference to specific concepts that are applicable to most contexts worldwide. For example, 'standard' language forms are generally equated with written varieties, which have developed a degree of stability and which are used as paragons for correctness and formality, among other things. Reference is also made to the L1, or mother tongue, its history and the cultural heritage that results from being a native speaker of this language. The same can be said of concepts such as 'minority' or 'majority' languages, which are defined not only in terms of the number of people who speak them, but are also 'loaded' in terms of the relative prestige of the languages in question and how widely spoken they are.

Planning and policies are generally more difficult to formulate, implement and sustain in contexts heavily conditioned by diachronic and synchronic language contact. In this respect Kaplan/Baldauf (1997: 52) distinctions (cfr. Baldauf 2006), referring to the macro level (nation-states), meso level (organisations) and

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*** Although this article is the result of collaboration between the two authors, Sandro Caruana is responsible for paragraphs 1 and 3 (including sub-paragraphs), whereas Matteo Santipolo is responsible for paragraphs 2 and 4.

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micro level (individuals), are especially pertinent. Language policies at every level are composed of multiple dimensions, and:

> a useful first step is to distinguish between the three components of the language policy of a speech community: its language practices - the habitual pattern of selecting among the varieties that make up its linguistic repertoire; its language beliefs or ideology - the beliefs about language and language use; and any specific efforts to modify or influence that practice by any kind of language intervention, planning or management (SPOLSKY 2004: 5).

SPOLSKY (2004: 6) adds that language policies exist in «highly complex, interacting and dynamic contexts, the modification of any part of which may have correlated effects (and causes) on any other part». These different layers could lead to challenges putting into practice what is formulated at a political level or, to return to BALDAUF's (2006) distinctions, applying what is decided at a macro and meso level at the micro levels, which is where on-the ground implementation generally occurs. This is also the case because, as WILEY/GARCÍA (2016) note, conventional language planning often focusses on language itself rather than on its speakers. Consequently, it is quite possible for practitioners to ignore official policies or simply abide by those parts of them which are merely applicable to their situations or interests. It is not rare for them to be quite oblivious of these policies too, because practitioners focus mainly on their day-to-day duties and use language/s as determined by their immediate needs.

SELLECK (2013), for example, provides insights into the Welsh context, referring to policies whereby Welsh is actively promoted in several communities through inclusive bilingual policies. However, she also reports that choosing either Welsh or English in schools sometimes creates barriers between learners and that the

> impact of bilingual policies at school are inconsistent with *Iaith Pawb*'s presumption that bilingualism should be premised on choice and on the inclusive principle that the option to learn and use Welsh (and English) is open to all, regardless of linguistic background (SELLECK 2013: 35)[1].

While official documentation sometimes presents a picture of languages neatly categorised into different sectors, together with their respective functions, reality is quite different. This is particularly the case in language contact situations, where languages are used interchangeably with functions that are established through constant interplay, rather than by the exclusive use of one or the other. Another

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[1] *Iaith Pawb* (Everyone's Language) is a national action plan for a bilingual Wales, published by the Welsh Assembly Government in 2003. This policy has since been updated and supported by other documentation including the 2010 strategy *Iaith Fyw* (A living language).

aspect that must be taken into consideration is that, especially over the past decade or so, there has been a significant increase in the volume of official documentation produced at a macro level, especially within EU institutions. The Council of Europe Language Policy portal[2] provides links to such documentation, including dedicated thematic websites, such as those of the CEFR, and also provides information on subsequent developments (e.g. COUNCIL OF EUROPE 2020). While the scope and importance of these documents cannot be doubted, the question is the extent to which practitioners are aware of them and if they find them relevant to the context in which they carry out their day-to-day duties. Furthermore, could the sheer amount of material available be overwhelming, not only for practitioners themselves, but also for those who operate at meso levels, such as language planners in different institutions, including educational ones?

Although our reflections are intended to have a wider relevance, as we show in Section 2, in this contribution we focus more specifically on the linguistic situation in Malta. The island's linguistic history is characterised by contact because of its geographical location and its colonial history (1800-1964), and it therefore represents an interesting case of how policies and planning must cater for the use of two context languages (Maltese and English), for alternation between them, as well as for other languages. We will delve specifically into policy documentation regarding Malta in Section 3, using this as a case study, after discussing some other multilingual European contexts in the next section.

2. Cases of language contact and language planning across Europe

Across Europe cases of language contact have been and still are the source of political reflection and intervention leading, sometimes, to quite different results. Before analysing the case of Malta in more detail, in this section we briefly discuss by way of illustration three other contexts, which all share the common feature of relating to either "marginal" (in a political sense) or "small" countries.

In a diachronic perspective one of the most interesting cases is certainly represented by Norway (cfr. TRUDGILL 1995: 137-144). In this Scandinavian country there are two official Norwegian languages: *Nynorsk,* 'New Norwegian' and *Bokmål,* 'the "bookish" language', which coexist in a non-diglottic relationship. *Bokmål* is the language of the national press, of most books, especially translations from foreign languages, and of schools. *Nynorsk*, on the other hand, is used in the local press, especially in the western part of the country, in poetry and in rural literature. All official documents are written in both languages; children learn to read and write in both languages; radio and television programmes can be in either one

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[2] www.coe.int/en/web/language-policy/home.

or the other indiscriminately. Although they are mutually intelligible and linguistically similar, though with major differences in writing, they are still two separate languages. In addition to these two official languages there are also a number of local dialects. This situation is the result of planning and language policy that began in 1814, when Norway gained independence from Denmark after more than three centuries of Danish rule. Throughout that period, Danish was the official language, and Norwegian dialects were considered dialects of Danish too, given their historical proximity to this language. At the time of independence, there was therefore no standard Norwegian: the upper classes used Danish with Norwegian influences (especially in pronunciation) and the lower classes used Norwegian dialects, with occasional Danish influences. In order to create internal cohesion, on the one hand, and draw a line under Danish domination, on the other, the government undertook a two-way policy: the "Norwegianisation" of the Danish of the upper classes (which gave rise to *Riksmål*, the 'state language', which later became today's *Bokmål*), and the "fusion" of rural Norwegian dialects (especially the western ones considered less exposed to Danish influence) which produced *Landsmål*, the 'language of the countryside', renamed *Nynorsk* in 1885. Since then, the two languages, each being the product of interventions on their respective corpora, have continued a gradual process of convergence (the so-called *Samnorsk* 'common Norwegian'), without, however, becoming the same language and enjoying, as previously mentioned, equal rights today.

The Norwegian government's intervention to create a new language from the fusion of rural dialects is clearly an example of corpus planning, albeit *sui generis*. In fact, in practice, corpus linguistic planning tends to concentrate on high varieties of language, or on high languages *tout court*, established on the basis of extra-linguistic criteria such as class, income, the evident prestige of the speakers, ignoring those below a certain threshold (the so-called threshold of interest for intervention).

In this case, on the other hand, the act of undertaking corpus planning for dialects hitherto considered of little or no prestige at all had a goal which is comparable to that of Noah Webster's well-known orthographic reform of American English: the creation of a sense of identity on the basis of language loyalty for the purpose of forging a national unity (cfr. Wiley 1996). *Nynorsk* can thus be seen, in some respects, almost as an example of 'linguistic engineering', ultimately not too dissimilar from the case of Esperanto, although starting from very different assumptions and with very different aims.

A second very interesting case of language contact with language planning implications involves officially multilingual Switzerland, with specific reference to the Romansh language (cfr. Fig. 1).
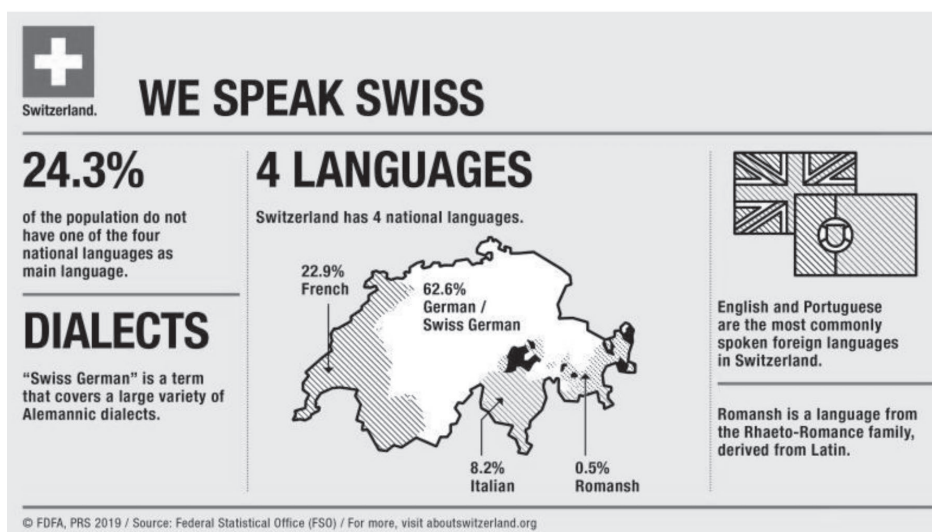
Fig. 1 - Multilingual Switzerland and the Romansch language

Romansh (a Romance language) is recognised by the Swiss Constitution as one of the four official languages of the Federation (the other three being French, German and Italian) and it is currently spoken by some 35,000 people in the canton of Graubünden. Despite the common name of the tongue, many varieties exist which very often are not mutually intelligible. Forms may vary from valley to valley, so much so that, as reported by DORREN (2014):

> even a simple word like 'I' varies from eu to ja. 'How nice' is 'che bel' in one dialect, 'tgei bi' in another. The upshot is that Romansh speakers from one village have great difficulty understanding villagers who live just a few kilometres away. Had all these dialects not been so isolated for centuries, they would have been absorbed into bigger languages. Had they had their own city, to act as a cultural centre, they would have combined into a single language. Instead, they remain today what they always have been: splinters of the broken pitcher once called Latin. So which dialect do Switzerland and Graubünden recognise as 'true' Romansh? Until a generation ago, the answer was: not one of them, but all of them. School books were published in five different variants (DORREN 2014: 25).

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Fig. 2 - A sign in German, Italian and Romansh. Photo: Philip Newton[4]

It was only in 1982 that these varieties were merged into one standard language, called *Rumantsch Grischun*, 'Graubünden Romansh': for reasons of neutrality, the job was assigned by the *Lia Rumantscha*, 'Romansh League' to the German-speaking linguist Heinrich Schmid. As a result of this act of corpus planning, the canton and the central government now publish laws, school books and other materials in the new, unified language. Nonetheless most Graubünden municipalities still use their own local dialect as their first language. Besides, it must be underlined that Romansh (whichever of its varieties we refer to by this term) belongs to a larger group of three 'outsiders', collectively referred to as the Rhaeto-Romance sub-family. The other two are spoken in Italy: Ladin and Friulian. Ladin, with its 30,000 speakers bordering the German and Italian language areas, is as complex a case as Romansh: every tiny village has a few hundred speakers who fully understand only each other. Friulian, by contrast, is a relatively standardised language. It has more than half a million speakers in the far northeast of Italy, including city dwellers, and a literature of its own (DORREN 2014).

In both cases presented so far, the main purpose of the authorities has been to create a homogenised language, or even linguistic repertoires. The next case, instead, sees the authorities pushing in the opposite direction, with the declared aim of preserving and possibly revitalising and promoting a threatened centuries-old local language tradition. The reference here is to Ellan Vannin, or the Isle of Man[4],

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[3] www.thelocal.ch/20180130/opinion-what-ive-learnt-from-living-in-switzerland.

[4] The Isle of Man is a self-governing crown dependency of the United Kingdom. The legisla-

which is geographically (and, in some respects, we may say, also linguistically) situ-
ated right in the centre of a square the sides of which are represented by Ireland
to the West, Scotland to the North, England to the East and Wales to the South.
It is therefore no surprise that over the centuries the Isle of Man has received
linguistic influences from many different parts of the British Isles. As TRUDGILL
(2021) explains:

> The earliest language we know about on the island was Brittonic Celtic, the
> language ancestral to Welsh and Cornish – which was also spoken all over the
> Isle of Man's large eastern island neighbour, Britain. This remained the native
> tongue of the island until the arrival of a group of settlers from the Isle of
> Man's other major island neighbour to the west, Ireland. During the 400s AD,
> Gaelic speakers from Ireland started migrating eastwards across the Irish Sea,
> founding Irish-speaking settlements in coastal areas of Scotland, Wales and
> England. The settlements in Wales and Cornwall were relatively short-lived,
> but on the Isle of Man and in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, Gaelic
> eventually became the dominant and, after a while, only language. Then, in
> about 800 AD, another language arrived on the Isle of Man – this time from
> the north. This was the Old Norse of the Vikings, who had made their way
> from Shetland and Orkney down through the Hebrides and along the west
> coast of Scotland to the Irish Sea. The Isle of Man became a bilingual Norse-
> Gaelic-speaking area, as did the Outer Hebrides, the Kintyre Peninsula, Gal-
> loway, and the coasts of Ireland. The Isle of Man came under the control of
> the Scandinavian Lords of the Isles and then the Norwegian crown, but in
> 1266 the Norwegians sold control of the island to Scotland. Old Norse even-
> tually disappeared from Man, leaving Manx Gaelic as the sole language of
> the island, but traces of Old Norse remained in the form of toponyms – many
> place-names on Man are of Scandinavian origin. […] Subsequently, military
> conflicts between Scotland and England led to the island coming under Eng-
> lish control, from the 14th century (TRUDGILL 2021)[5].

Manx is a variety of Gaelic which shares features with both Irish and Scottish
Gaelic. English rule, especially during the last two centuries, has led to a weak-
ening of cultural ties to traditional Gaelic culture: in fact, as late as 1700, Manx
Gaelic was still the dominant language of the Isle of Man, with many of the in-
habitants not being able to understand English The proportion of the population
who could speak Manx declined rapidly during the 1800s, with the census of 1901
showing only 4,419 speakers of Manx, a mere 8% of the population. By 1921, that
figure had dropped to about 1.5%. The last Manx native speaker died in Decem-

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ture, called "Tynwald", was put into place by Vikings in the 10th century and is the oldest continu-
ous parliamentary body in the world.
    [5] Online publication, page number unavailable.

ber 1974. Since then, the government has undertaken a language policy against the overwhelming hegemony of English aimed at sustaining and increasing the knowledge and the use of Manx which has, at least partially, succeeded in reversing a negative trend in the number of speakers which had lasted for more than 100 years (cfr. Tab. 1).

Year	Manx speakers		Population
	Total	*%*	
1874	16,200	30%	54,000 (1871)
1901	4,419	8.07%	54,752
1911	2,382	4.58%	52,016
1921	915	1.52%	60,284
1931	529	1.07%	49,308
1951	355	0.64%	50,253
1961	165	0.34%	48,133
1971	284	0.52%	54,481
1974	Last native speaker dies		
1991	643	0.90%	71,267
2001	1,500	1.95%	78,266
2011	1,650	1.97%	84,497
2015	1,800	2%	88,000

Tab. 1 - Manx speakers from 1874 to 2015[6]

Each one of the three cases mentioned here presents both analogies to and differences from the situation in Malta. We will discuss these in our concluding sections, after presenting the Maltese case study in more detail.

3. A case study: Malta

The Maltese context is characterised by features that are typical of a small-island state in which historical events and geographical location have led to continual cultural and linguistic contact. In the following sections we first provide a brief overview of the demographic and linguistic situation of Malta, and we then refer

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[6] Census of Manx speakers: www.isle-of-man.com/manxnotebook/history/manks/census.htm.

to two policy documents to discuss the extent to which they reflect the rapidly-changing reality in present-day Malta.

3.1. *Demographic and linguistic background*

The Republic of Malta is physically the smallest member state in the EU while being, by far, the most densely populated. According to 2018 figures, available on the Eurostat portal[7], Malta is in the first place in the EU with regards to recent population growth, with an increase of 36.8 per 1,000 residents, this being largely attributed to immigration because in a decade the birth rate decreased from 1.43 to 1.23[8]. The EU average reportedly increased by approximately 2 inhabitants per 1,000 residents. By comparison, the second-placed country, Luxembourg, registered an increase of 19.6, followed by Ireland at 15.2.

Foreigners[9] constitute 14% of Malta's population, putting it at 5th place in the EU (preceded by Luxembourg, Cyprus, Austria and Estonia), and this trend is increasing and is especially marked in the case of Italian nationals who now live and reside on the island (Caruana 2020). Third-country Nationals (TCNs) employed in Malta increased from 4,152 in 2009 to 30,895 in 2019[10]: TCNs include persons originating from non-EU member States and who entered Malta legally, as well as irregular migrants who benefit from national and international protection, including asylum seekers. These demographic changes have led to new linguistic scenarios, which have superimposed themselves onto the official bilingual status of the country, with both Maltese and English used regularly for everyday communication[11]. Maltese, on the one hand, has a strong integrative function, and represents one of the strongest markers of locals' identity. English, on the other, has an important instrumental function, and offers social mobility as well as better work opportunities, locally and internationally.

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[7]   ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=tps00019&plugin=1.

[8]   timesofmalta.com/articles/view/maltas-population-growth-largest-in-eu-by-far.720748.

[9]   Although terminological issues will not be discussed in this paper, we observe that it is necessary to problematise several labels which are used in relation to immigration. The very term "foreigner" carries, for example, a number of possible interpretations, more so when it is placed in opposition to "natives" or "nationals". Cfr. Caruana/Klein (2009) for a discussion regarding this.

[10]   jobsplus.gov.mt/resources/publication-statistics-mt-mt-en-gb/labour-market-information/foreigners-data#title1.3.

[11]   English is a medium which is used frequently for reading and formal writing, while Maltese is the preferred code for immediate communication purposes, including speaking and informal exchanges using technological devices. Around 97% of Maltese nationals state that Maltese is their L1 (Council of Europe 2015: 11-14), with around two-thirds of them reporting that they can hold a fluent conversation in English too. English is used more frequently than Maltese in some sectors, including education.

Local language policies have sometimes struggled to address a situation wherein the L1 (Maltese) is used by locals, often to mark in-groupness, while being largely unintelligible to the many non-Maltese nationals who reside on the island; the other context language (English) is so widespread and important internationally that it requires little effort from policy makers to ensure that it is safeguarded, also because among its many functions it acts as lingua franca both for communication between Maltese nationals and non-nationals and among persons of different nationalities.

Code-switching and mixing are present, as expected in contexts where contact is the order of the day. Switching and mixing normally occur in specific situations (VELLA 2012) and most locals are generally very familiar with their communicative functions. Up to a few years ago this interplay between Maltese and English did not figure at all in language planning and policy, also because of the negative stigma that used to be attributed to it. Today, as we document later, this is changing.

Alongside the use of Maltese and English, and the various conversational functions that are achieved by alternating their use, there are now many different languages that migration has brought along. The Covid crises has had repercussions on this and, reportedly, up to 15,000 non-Maltese nationals left the island between March and August 2020. It is yet unclear whether they moved elsewhere permanently or otherwise. The same, however, cannot be said for so called 'sea-arrivals'. The UNHCR reports a figure of 1,020 sea arrivals to Malta during the first months of 2020, as represented in Figure 1, which provides data regarding other Mediterranean countries:
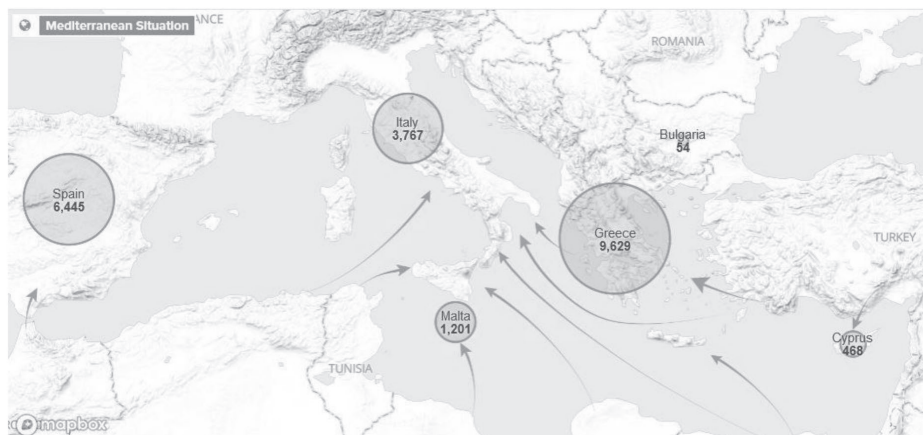

Fig. 3 - Sea arrivals in the Mediterranean (1 January-6 May 2020)[13]

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[12] www.unhcr.org/mt/figures-at-a-glance.

While the above figures may seem relatively small, if they are multiplied in proportion to populations of larger EU states they assume a different dimension: for example, when calculated with respect to Germany's current population the above figure of 1,020 sea arrivals in Malta would amount, by proportion, to almost 170,000.

These demographic changes and the inclusion of TCNs do not only involve achieving competences in Maltese and/or English, but also developing metalinguistic competence relating to the way these languages alternate in everyday use. This is no mean feat, and while children of non-nationals brought up in Malta may become accustomed to it, for others it is a struggle. The Maltese context, because of its inherent complexity and these recent demographic changes, therefore represents an interesting situation with regards to the formulation and implementation of policies regarding language planning and language use. We now therefore turn our attention specifically to policy-making, also reflecting on the repercussions for the education system.

3.2. *Language planning and policies*

Language planning in Malta has, even historically, been a bone of contention. The early 1900s, for example were characterised by the 'language question' (HULL 1993) whereby different pro-Italian and pro-English factions tussled to obtain stronger representation for the language with which they, and the social class they belonged to, identified. This period coincided with the political, social and economic developments which led to the Second World War, and its aftermath. These events side-lined Italian, a language which was used by the local elite until the 1930s, and strengthened English. Maltese gained ground, especially after its standardisation process initiated in 1921 and, slowly but surely, became the language with which most Maltese nationals identified themselves, thereby attaining a strong integrative function, as opposed to English which maintained its instrumental value. The Constitution of the Republic of Malta, (Chapter 1, par. 5) defines Maltese as the national language of Malta, while both Maltese and English are official languages. The legal system also includes a Maltese Language Act (Chapter 470) the aim of which is: «To establish the National Council for the Maltese Language in order to promote the National Language of Malta and to provide the necessary means to achieve this aim».

The situation that prevailed during the decades following Independence (1964) was largely characterised by societal "self-adjustment", in the sense that language use followed a pattern, relatively typical of a post-colonial setting, wherein a local language cohabits with another of international prestige, with Maltese English emerging as a variety in its own right (CARUANA/MORI 2021). The major demographic changes, referred to earlier, have brought about a new scenario whereby

alongside the two context languages and, to a lesser extent, Italian, a plethora of new languages are now present in Malta. This necessitates several adjustments at a policy level, where reference now has to be made to the linguistic rights of TCNs – a point that rarely, if ever, featured in policy making in Malta up to very recent years.

Malta's accession to the European Union, in 2004, led to a greater influence of EU macro levels of policy making, drafted at a supra-national level often in collaboration with counterparts from other EU states. An example of this is the Language Education Policy Profile (Council of Europe 2015), an initiative which aims to encourage member states to undertake a self-evaluation of local policies «in a spirit of dialogue with Council of Europe experts, and with a view to focusing on possible future policy developments within the country» (Council of Europe 2015: 5). This process of reflection involves both authorities and members of civil society, with the Council of Europe experts acting as catalysts. The document provides a largely descriptive account of the linguistic situation in Malta, with very limited critical insights. For example, although there is mention of a historical language policy recommendation to teach different subjects in either Maltese or English, it is not said that this was totally ignored in practice, as both languages are used simultaneously in most pre-primary, primary and secondary schools. Reference is then made to more recent documentation, including the National Curriculum Framework (Ministry of Education and Employment 2012) and the Learning Outcomes Framework[13] (finalised subsequently, in 2016) where the approach to language education shifts towards a more dynamic model, which is not based on the separation of the two languages of instruction.

With reference to migrant learners, a distinction is made between "elite" and "non-elite" migrants: the former are «British nationals, families (usually European) of business people and diplomats, for example» (Council of Europe 2015: 50) whereas the latter, for which the local educational system has less provisions in place are explicitly defined as «non-valued language groups» (Council of Europe 2015: 50). Nevertheless, this distinction, and especially the implications it carries, is not elaborated on or critically appraised.

More importantly, perhaps, the Council of Europe (2015) document refers to the languages of migrant learners and to the pedagogical uses of code-switching and mixing, thereby presenting a realistic overview of the situation in Maltese schools. Furthermore, this document, despite its top-down approach, has had the merit of paving the way to further policy-making, of which two examples are *A Language policy for the early years in Malta and Gozo* (Ministry for Education & Employment 2016), henceforth LPEY, and *Integration = Belonging Migrant Integration Strategy & Action Plan, Vision 2020* (Ministeru għall-Affarijiet Ewropej u l-Ugwaljanza 2017), henceforth referred to as I=B.

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[13] www.schoolslearningoutcomes.edu.mt/en.

Although the LPEY refers to bilingual development and education, the discourse included in this document also mentions gaining competence in "other" languages besides Maltese and English. This is implicit in the background provided, especially in the case of reference made to children's development and to the home environment. At several stages, whether explicitly or implicitly, reference is made to multilingualism, and reflections and proposals do not only cover bilingual policies. The importance of early years provision is then highlighted, with reference to educators, managers and teacher educators. The roles are clearly outlined, by referring to the promotion and safeguarding of different language competences. The LPEY document clearly provides a positive outlook towards the use of different languages and marks a break from previous policies in which they were excessively compartmentalised. Nevertheless, what is effectively missing from it are clear measures in relation to fostering the home languages of migrant children: so, while on the one hand, a positive direction is provided regarding linguistic diversity, less is said in terms of how – also in practical terms – this is to be linked to the teaching and learning of the two official languages. This, we assume, will be dealt with at a micro level[14].

The I=B document is the first strategy in Malta which focuses on migrant integration. There is no terminological justification as to why "integration" is chosen, rather than "inclusion", a term which is not used in this document. Integration is defined as ensuring «that migrants in Malta have a voice, are recognised for their true value and are able to build their sense of belonging within society» (Ministeru għall-Affarijiet Ewropej u l-Ugwaljanza 2017: 2). Most significantly, this policy refers to specific plans, to be accomplished through a national Integration Unit, where opportunities will be offered to TCNs to learn Maltese and English. This is part of a pre-integration certificate, which will eventually entitle TCNs to submit their "integration request". Learning both languages[15] is seen as a fundamental step in order to access Malta's services, including the health system, where communication problems can give rise to serious misunderstandings. Finally, and most significantly in the developing local scenario, this document paves the way for the establishment of a framework to train professional cultural mediators, to be deployed as required in public services. The I=B strategy is therefore set at the macro-level, but includes provisions that could filter down to the meso and micro levels too. As in the case of the LPEY document, there is no specific mention of the role that TCNs language/s of origin will play, and their maintenance is not ad-

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[14] While drafting this paper, a new consultation document (*A Language policy for the junior years – a consulation paper*, Ministry for Education & Employment 2021) was launched. Although this builds on the LPEY and proposes a similar vision in relation to language development, it develops further some of the points mentioned in the LPEY.

[15] Cfr. recent initiatives to strengthen teaching Maltese as a foreign language (cf. Ministry for Education & Employment 2019).

dressed. Although this, presumably, will occur through the role of cultural mediators themselves, the lack of acknowledgement of the issue, in the discourse of both documents, still needs to be rectified.

In summary, the documentation we refer to shows that in the Maltese context language policy-making and implementation is now taking account of the major social and demographic developments, although several points raised need to be fleshed out by developing practical measures. Such measures should take account of not only the influx of TCNs, but also the significant influx of non-nationals from EU-member states, which further contributes to Malta's great linguistic diversity including, of course, varieties and dialects.

As an aside, insofar as the Maltese context is concerned, it should be noted that Falzon *et al.* (2012) have already addressed a number of points raised both in the Council of Europe (2015) policy profile and, especially, in the I=B document. This confirms the point we made in our introduction on the large volume of policies and related documents, especially at macro level. Sometimes this is not only extensive but tends to be repetitive, in the sense that what is said at a later stage has already been expressed, just as pertinently, in earlier research.

4. Discussion and conclusion

What can, therefore, be learnt from the experience of the island of Malta (and from the other cases, previously illustrated briefly), in terms of language policy and planning in multilingual contexts? First and foremost, both in Malta's case and in the others presented in Section 2, social and historical processes led to linguistic changes which were subsequently reflected, to a greater or lesser extent, in planning and policy-making. In Malta, the increased prestige of the Maltese language was determined by its widespread use in the community and its association with local identity (cfr. Caruana/Mori 2021). This led to its affirmation in schools – both as a subject in its own right and as a medium of instruction. This occurred over a relatively short span of time: as confirmed through a private communication with a former Head of School, now retired, up to the post-war years students who attended some schools used to be punished if they were heard using Maltese rather than English, even during out-of-class activities and in recreation. This experience shows that even in a post-colonial setting where the social role played by English is so powerful to the extent that it can be over-bearing, a significant space can be carved for the local language. This positive historical experience now needs to be extended to a new paradigm shift, to acknowledge and safeguard the linguistic rights of migrants, including TCNs. Admittedly this is no easy feat and requires effective material resources and a highly-prepared and well-disposed teaching profession, which views schools as learning communities which share collective responsibility with the society in which they are immersed (cfr. Sultana 2002).

Another point which we mentioned in this paper is that, especially in the recent years, documentation regarding policy making has increased, not only at the macro level but also at the meso level. The risk here is that if these policies are then not owned at micro levels, because they provide information which is not attuned to or in touch with day-to-day practice or because they are not promoted adequately, they will be superseded by day-to-day practice and start losing relevance. We represent this in Figure 4 below, again using our Malta case-study as an example:
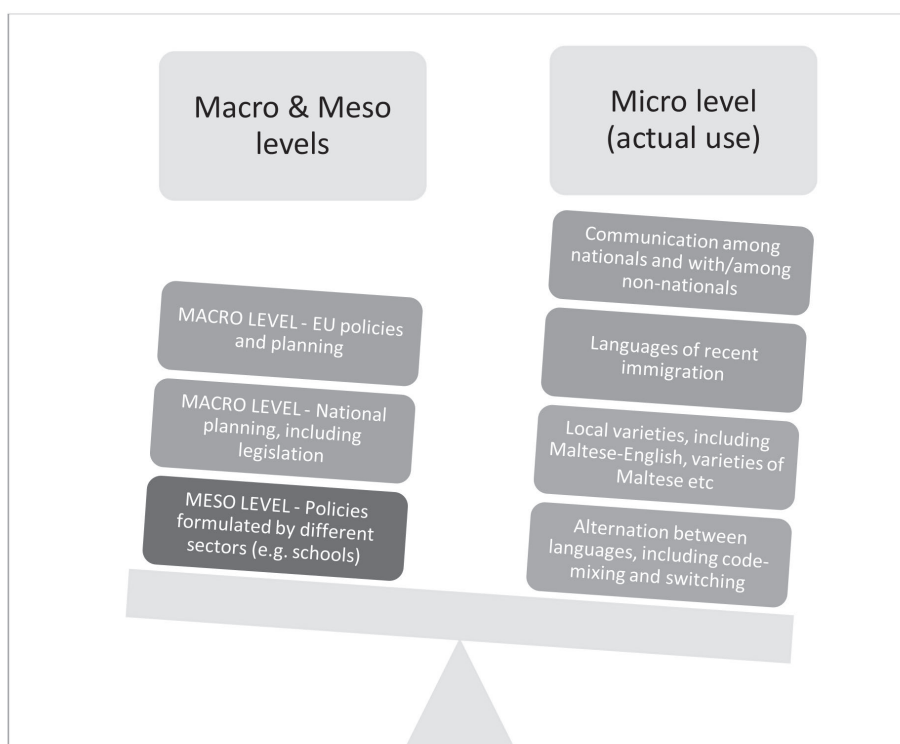

Fig. 4 - Balancing different levels of policies and planning

While, in particular at macro and meso level, the involvement of practitioners is not especially strong, they are expected to abide by and follow (and possibly also critique) policies and practices at the micro level. At this level one can assume that there are, at least, two further sub-levels involving both the repertoire of locals (e.g. Maltese, English, alternation between the two codes, Maltese-English as a variety in its own right) and that of non-nationals, with a plethora of allochthonous languages used for interaction both with locals and among themselves. Undoubt-

edly, the fact that the two policies we discuss in this paper acknowledge these realities is a step in the right direction – they are close to reality and include suggestions that, at least potentially, can be taken on by practitioners, although an evaluation of what occurs at the micro level is required. They are, therefore, not merely wishful thinking, as we illustrated also in the case of policies and planning related to other contexts taken into consideration.

In this respect the Maltese setting, despite obvious differences that are the result of the country's size and demographics, is not too not dissimilar from others, including the Italian one, where despite the presence of an over-arching standard form, local varieties are also heavily present in schools, alongside many heritage languages of migrant learners. One such case is represented by the Veneto region (cfr. Santipolo 2018) where, to return to our initial point regarding the different facets of languages and difficulties related to labelling, the linguistic repertoire can be summed as follows:

1. Standard Italian: as in the vast majority of cases, the standard (or neutral) variant of Italian is rarely present in the repertoire of the Veneto population. When this happens, it is almost exclusively in its written form;

2. Semi-standard Italian (or *Neostandard*): this is undoubtedly the most widespread variety in official contexts. It is very close to the standard as far as morphology and syntax are concerned, but it differs from it mainly in phonology (and, in particular, in suprasegmental features and prosody) and lexical terms;

3. Regional Italian: as in the case of the other Italian regions, this variety presents marked geographical traits under different aspects (lexicon, phonology, morpho-syntax);

4. Popular Italian: this "label" refers to the «modo di esprimersi di un incolto che, sotto la spinta di comunicare e senza addestramento, maneggia quella che ottimisticamente si chiama la lingua 'nazionale', l'italiano» (De Mauro 1970: 49). The Veneto variant of Popular Italian, decidedly less widespread than in the past, is nevertheless still quite lively not only in the speech of the semi-cultured or of those who suffer from some form of what has been defined as functional illiteracy, but also in writing, or rather in its 'digital' form (e.g. emails, chats, blogs, social media, etc.);

5. Semi-italophony: closely related to the previous phenomenon is that of Semi-italophony, i.e. a partial competence in Italian, typical today in Veneto of native dialect-speaking Venetians and first-generation immigrants. As far as immigrants are concerned, the levels of Semi-italophony, strictly related to their progression on the interlanguage continuum towards the target language (TL), can be extremely varia-

ble, in consideration of the fact that the TL is not necessarily Italian (regional), but may also be a dialect, as we illustrate in point 8 below;

6. Historical minority languages: there are two linguistic minorities in the region, namely Ladin (in the Provinces of Belluno and Treviso) and *Sappadino* (or *Plodarisch*), a survival of Middle High German. On the other hand, Cimbrian, another Germanic variety (archaic Southern Bavarian) once widespread in the mountainous areas of the provinces of Verona and Vicenza, is now almost extinct. Strictly speaking, the Emilia dialect (in its Ferrarese variant), which is widespread in the southern part of the Province of Rovigo, at the end of the Po river, which marks the border between the two regions, should also be included in the list of historical linguistic minorities spoken in Veneto (regardless of whether they are protected by law);

7. Recent minority languages: with this denomination we refer to alloglot communities present in the territory for less than three generations. Veneto ranks fourth among Italian regions for number of immigrants (after Lombardy, Lazio and Emilia Romagna), with 9.5% of the immigrant population in Italy[16]. The largest foreign community comes from Romania (25.2%), followed by Morocco (9.3%) and the People's Republic of China (7.1%). The most widespread recent linguistic minorities in Veneto are: Romanian, Arabic, Chinese, Albanian, Ukrainian, Bengali, Indian languages (mainly Punjabi, Tamil and Hindi) and Serbian;

8. Dialect:

> Il Veneto […] è una regione in cui i dialetti sono ancora molto vitali, non solo nell'uso familiare, ma anche nella vita quotidiana a tutti i livelli. Anche negli uffici statali e comunali, come nell'industria, nel commercio e nelle banche, spesso si ricorre all'italiano solo se si ha a che fare con dei 'foresti', provenienti da altre regioni. Pure i professionisti e i medici per lo più usano il dialetto, parlando coi clienti e i pazienti, non solo per farsi capire meglio, ma anche – e non raramente – perché in questo modo tutti si trovano maggiormente a proprio agio. Il rapporto è sentito come più cordiale, più sincero, più vero (CANEPARI 1986: 21).

Although this quotation dates back to more than 30 years ago, it still aptly describes the use and spread of the Veneto dialect in the region today. One of the consequences of this situation is the development of semi-dialectophony, i.e. the condition of partial competence in the dialect on the part of an alloglot. This

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[16] ISTAT: dati.istat.it/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=DCIS_POPSTRRES1.

may be viewed as the other side of the coin represented by semi-italophony (as discussed above), but whereas accommodation towards the national language is a phenomenon that has been widely studied, accommodation in the opposite direction deserves more consideration.

As a general conclusion, we argue that although we are aware that Europe is still far from perfect in terms of the protection and promotion of minority and less widely-spoken languages throughout the continent, much progress has been made since the nineteenth century, when the systematic and often brutal processes of consolidation of national and cultural elites and the imposition and standardization of a single national language were the norm in many countries, while other languages were relegated to mere dialects without many rights and with their speakers treated as ignorant, unable to "speak properly". There is still much work to be done, but the Maltese case, together with the examples we provide from other contexts, can perhaps help to reflect on how language policies may contribute not only to the maintenance of local languages and to their promotion, but also on how language planning needs to be adjusted regularly in order to deal with significant demographic changes.

Finally, when policies and planning reflect the realities of society, including schools, and acknowledge the contribution of practitioners in their implementation, they are bound to be more successful. It is therefore positive when, especially in the case of supra-national macro level policy-making and planning, there is an immediate practical and applicable follow-up, especially at micro levels. Also, as has been described at length in the literature (cfr. VIENNET/PONT 2017), if policy-making is 'top-down', rather than cyclical, it is destined to fail – such a cyclical approach, involving drafting, publishing, executing and evaluation which in turn contributes to new drafts, requires the involvement of practitioners, as well as a dynamic connection between all three (macro, meso and micro) levels.

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