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## **LANGUAGE CONTACT BETWEEN MALTESE AND ENGLISH: CODESWITCHING AND CROSSLINGUISTIC INFLUENCE**

### ***1. Introduction***

The use of Maltese and English in Malta, and crosslinguistic influence between the two languages is overviewed in this paper in three ways. A brief sketch of some social domains of language use (after Fishman 1972) is first presented to illustrate how Maltese and English are used by Maltese society. Then, three extracts of classroom transcripts are used to illustrate how Maltese and English are meaningfully juxtaposed in classroom talk, serving several communicative and pedagogical purposes. Finally some observed instances of crosslinguistic influence between Maltese and English on various linguistic levels inside and outside the classroom are presented. This is followed by some theoretical implications for such language contact phenomena as observed in the Maltese context.

### ***2. Sociolinguistic background***

The Constitution of the Republic of Malta (1974) designates Maltese as the national language, and as co-official with English. In everyday life the two languages share a number of functions as illustrated in Figure 1. Maltese is the only language used for parliamentary affairs, and is the binding language of the law

courts. Maltese is mainly used for spoken purposes while English is used more extensively in writing.

Figure 1: Use of spoken and written Maltese and English

	MALTESE		ENGLISH	
	spoken	written	spoken	written
<b>administration</b>				
parliament	+	+		
courts	+	+		
church	+	+		+
<b>B/casting</b>				
t.v.	+		+	
radio	+		+	
theatre	+		+	
cinema			+	
newspapers		+		+
publications		+		+
<b>work</b>	+	+	+	+
<b>home</b>	+	+	+	+
<b>education</b>	+	+	+	+

### *3. The classroom data*

The data on which my analysis is based consists of over 8 hours of lesson transcriptions amounting to about 50 000 words. The three samples here represent mixed Maltese and English speech, as used by three different teachers as a medium of instruction. There are no regulations about the use of language as a spoken medium in the classroom. Apart from Maltese, all subjects are examined through English. Religion, Maltese History and Social Studies are examined through either Maltese

or English at higher levels - the candidate may choose to answer the examination paper in either language.

<sup>1</sup>*Extract 1*

**Lesson A**

<sup>2</sup>T: today we're going to talk. about. money management. orrajt. the money that. comes into the home. and the money. that. we spend. *issa*. when we talk about money. what is important for us. to do. let's say the money that comes into the family. to the home. *mela* budgeting. it is important that we will be able. to manage. our money properly. *issa* and how can we. manage. how can we budget our money. how can we say that. we are doing good budgeting we are managing our money well. how. *isa*. when can we really say that we are. budgeting well. our money

L: ( )

T: *mela* we should. save up. some money. for the time. when we come in need of it. what else

L: ( )

T: it should be well. distributed. *mela*. let me tell you what we are going to do. first of all we are going to see. what money. orrajt. can come. into the family. *issa* we are going to consider let's take an average. kind of family. *orrajt*. where there is the mother. the father. and two young children. *sewwa*. the mother. the father. and two young children. and only the father works. *issa* what is the money. that will be. coming. into this family. *isa*. what do we have. *ara* try to

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1 Translations of the extracts are provided as appendices.

2 T stands for teacher talking; L stands for any learner talking; Ls stands for a number of learners talking together; ( ) mean the speech is not clear enough to transcribe; dots represent length of pauses, roughly one dot per second of silence; any observer's comments are presented in italics between brackets; bold is used to represent reading activities.

imagine your own situation at home. if only your father works. from where. do you get your money

L: from the father

T: *mela* from the father's wage. from the father's job. what else

This extract comes from a Home-Economics lesson at Form 5 level (last year at secondary school). There were about 12 students in class and the topic of the lesson is "Home Budgeting". The teacher speaks in English throughout the lesson, but switches to Maltese at regular points. She uses the terms "*issa*" (now); "*mela*" (so); "*isa*" (come on); "*sewwa*" (is that right) and "*ara*" (look). Each of these items in Maltese marks the organisation of discourse. It is interesting to note that each time the teacher says "*issa*" she introduces new information about the topic, each "*issa*" marks a new step in the progress of the lesson, and in the exchange of information between the teacher and the learners. On the other hand, each time the teacher uses "*mela*", she repeats the already given information. The other terms "*isa*", "*sewwa*" and "*ara*" serve as attention-getting devices whereby the teacher encourages the learners to think and to participate in the lesson even non-verbally by for example looking at the teacher or at the blackboard. The use of Maltese at these points in the discourse also act as markers of friendliness or solidarity with the learners on the teacher's part as she moves from a formal teaching mode signalled by the use of English to a friendly mode signalled by the use of Maltese.

### *Extract 2*

#### **Lesson B**

L: *(reads from textbook in English) a square room has a square carpet seventy-three placed in it this leaves an area uncovered of nine metres squared and the*

*area of the whole room is twenty five metres squared find the length of one side of the carpet*

T: issa. di tixbaħ. lil din t'hawn hux veru. imma l-*area* tabielna maħduma di d-darba. sewwa. issa. *area* illi għandha a *square room* x'għandha *square room*

Ls: kollox indaqs

Ls: *five sides equal*

T: kollox indaqs *five sides equal* orrajt *square root* immarkajniha. issa *has a square carpet symmetrically placed in it.* il-*carpet* ikbar jew iżgħar mill-kamra

Ls: iżgħar

T: iżgħar Marica suppost qegħdin attenti u ma niktbox. orrajt din ukoll hija *square* qed nimmarka is-*sides* jiena. ħalli ma nitgerfixx għandna. eh *this leaves the area uncovered of nine metres squared* mela għandi l-*biċċa* t'hawnhekk. *uncovered.* taqblu miegħi

Ls: ehe

T: u kemm hija din

Ls: *nine metres squared*

T: orrajt *nine metres squared* maħduma. ara ma tiħdux l-iżball li tgħidu *three by three.* dik m'għandhiex x'taqsam aħrġa tinsewx. biex għibna dik l-*area.* biex għibna dik l-*area* x'għamilna

Ls: ()

T: orrajt il-kbira *minus* iż-żgħira u hekk. l-istess din in-*nine.* dik bl-istess mod irridu ngibuha mela ma nistax ngħid *three by three* għax hija *square.* għax naħseb hemm kien l-iżball tagħkom

This extract taken from a mathematics lesson at Form 4 level, starts at a point in the lesson where a learner is reading aloud from the mathematics textbook which is in English. During

content lessons, there is often a switch from spoken Maltese to written English because the textbooks (and other reference works, teaching aids and written work) are in English. The use of written English also has a 'carry-over' effect, in the sense that after reading in English, participants in the discourse switch from Maltese to English when they refer to certain terms and phrases that have been read in English. This can be seen in extract 2, when the teacher says "has a square carpet symmetrically placed in it" and when she repeats "this leaves the area uncovered of nine metres squared". Other mathematical terms in English are used in the lesson such as "minus", "area" and "square root". For technical terms there often is no Maltese equivalent, or if there is it is never used in the classroom because it does not belong to the classroom register. Since the written work is done in English this also effects the use of English terms such as "carpets" and "sides" in extract 2 above.

*Extract 3*

**Lesson G**

(noise)

T: *now no more talking please se toqogħdu tiskantaw oħorgu il-kotba w il-files*

(noise)

T: *take out your books and your files on page forty we're starting a new topic today*

(noise)

T: *right can I have silence now (learners quieten down) irridkom toqogħdu attenti ħafna. għal-lesson ok għaliex hija... sa nibdew unit ġdid. xi ftit mill-affarijiet li. sa naghmlu... f'dan il-unit... sa jkollkom żgur fl-eżami allura tridu toqogħdu attenti iktar... secondly... you must also have noticed that we have a visitor today. we have Miss Camilleri here with us. sa toqgħod kwjeta hemmhekk. nittama li*

kulħadd joqgħod kwiet daqs kemm toqgħod kwieta Miss Camilleri. tisma' u jekk. Miss Camilleri mhux sa tipparteċipa fil-lezzjoni. intom sa tipparteċipaw. pero mhux bil-mod. tas-soltu. fejn tgedwdu. eh... *so. page forty. topic.* Eric. fuqhiex inhu

This extract is taken from the beginning of a general science lesson at Form 1 level. The teacher codeswitches continuously thus achieving certain goals. In the beginning she attracts the learners' attention first by making disciplinary comments in English and then by switching to Maltese to re-enforce her authority. She uses terms like "files", "lesson" and "unit" in English which belong to the classroom register. Most classroom register terms are used in English by most of the teachers I observed, but this particular teacher also uses the term "lezzjoni" in Maltese for "lesson". The teacher then switches back to English. These two codeswitches co-incide with a change in the topic of discourse, thus marked by a switch in language. Each time, however, she switches back to Maltese to attract the learners' attention again and to ensure their participation.

The above examples are only some of the motivations of codeswitching as observed in Maltese classrooms. It should be clear enough from these three extracts that codeswitching is not a random activity, but is purposeful and systematic even if the speakers themselves are most often unaware of what they are doing at the time of doing it. Teachers, as bilingual speakers, utilize the knowledge they have of two languages to pass a message across in as efficient and meaningful a way as possible.

#### **4. Crosslinguistic influence**

Apart from switching from one language to another, other things happen when bilinguals draw on the knowledge that they have of two languages. According to traditional definitions and

exemplification of language contact phenomena such as borrowing and codeswitching, one language is seen as dominating over the other language, thus the subordinate language "borrows" from the dominant language; the dominant language "influences" the subordinate language etc. (going back to Bloomfield, 1933). Such metaphors have been applied to languages due to the social status of the speakers of those languages and thus the dominant language is so perceived because of the dominant political, social, numerical status of its speakers, while the subordinate language is the language of minorities, stigmatized ethnic and social groups etc.

However, when two languages come in contact at societal level it is normally the case that both languages influence each other (see for example Py 1986 on language attrition of Spanish migrant workers in Switzerland and Rouchdy 1978 on an immigrant Arabic community in the U.S.A.). Furthermore, in the case of Malta it would be incorrect to speak of dominating and subordinate languages or speech communities, because the speech community concerned is ethnically and culturally homogeneous, though functioning in two languages.

Kachru (1992) reviews the literature about the long-term contact of English with other languages in multilingual and multicultural contexts, and talks about the process of *nativisation* whereby a localized variety of English is created. One other process that has resulted from the contact of English with other languages is the *Englishisation* of these languages.

The processes of nativisation and Englishisation have affected the English and Maltese languages respectively. Examples of each of these two processes are given below.



#### 4.1 Nativisation of English in Malta

English, as used by speakers of Maltese, is referred to as 'Maltese English' (see for example Borg, 1980; Borg, 1988). Linguistic descriptions of Maltese English are given in for example Delceppo, 1986; Calleja, 1987; and Navarro and Grech, 1984).

Maltese English is influenced by Maltese on all linguistic levels, namely phonology, grammar, semantics and discourse, but not on the lexical level, i.e. there are no Maltese lexical items within a stretch of Maltese English speech. There is however, an influence from Maltese on lexical choice. Some examples are given below.

Phonological influence can be observed on both the segmental and the suprasegmental levels. On the segmental level, for instance we observe the neutralization of English alveolar /t/, /d/ and fricatives /θ/, /ð/ by Maltese dental /t/, /d/, as in "the" /de/. Voicing distinctions made in Standard British English may also differ slightly in Maltese English. Maltese devoicés obstruents word finally. It is therefore highly likely that Maltese English may be characterized by non-standard patterns of voicing and instances of word final devoicing especially may frequently be noted: devoicing word-finally as in "plug" /plak:./.

On a suprasegmental level, especially with regard to intonation it is extremely difficult to find a Maltese speaker of English who is not influenced to a greater or lesser extent by the intonation of Maltese. For example, at word-level, there is a tendency to shift stress towards the end of the word. Stress in Maltese is either penultimate or final, and only rarely - and usually only in loan words - antepenultimately. Thus, where the stress rules of English would give *Arabic* with stress on the first

(i.e. antepenultimate) syllable, Maltese English would have stress on the second (i.e. penultimate) syllable, thus *Arabic*. Similarly, where operation of the Compound Stress Rule in English would give *fire-engine* with main stress on *fire*, Maltese English would invariably have main stress on the first syllable of *engine*. This occurs quite systematically in compounds whose second component is two or more syllables long. For example, *fire-fighter* and *fire-alarm* would both be pronounced with primary stress on the first syllable of their second component and secondary stress on *fire* where Standard English would have the opposite. (See Vella 1988).

The following are some examples of Maltese grammatical influence on Maltese English:

- (i) the possessive construction (almost a literal gloss from the construction in Maltese), e.g.

"The book is at you" for 'You have the book'  
*Il-ktieb qiegħed għandek*

"This is the car of John" for 'It's John's car'  
*Din il-karozza ta' John*

- (ii) the comparative construction as in

"They are more cold" for 'They are colder'  
*Dawn huma iktar kesħin*

- (iii) topicalization pattern as in

"Like that, I told you to do it"  
*Hekk għidtlek tagħmilha*

"At four they close"  
*Fl-erbgha jagħlqu*

The latter examples are considered as examples of Maltese English, not so much because they are idiosyncratic to this variety, but rather because they occur more frequently than expected, i.e. in contexts where they are not likely to occur, or are marked, if they occur in Standard British English.

Navarro & Grech (1984) also give some examples of lexical choice deviance as in "Don't stand in the middle" (for "Don't stay in the way") (in Maltese "Toqgħodx *fin-nofs*") and the omission of 'do', 'does', or 'did' as in "You want ice-cream?" (in Maltese "*Trid* ġelat?"). Such examples, they comment, are prominent features of Maltese English.

The following are two other classroom examples of lexical collocation where transfer from Maltese is obvious:

"He works with the government" for "he is a civil servant"  
*Jaħdem mal-gvern*

"The cooker works with electricity" for "it is an electric  
 cooker"  
*Il-kuker jaħdem bl-elettriku*

#### 4.2 *Englishisation of Maltese*

Probably most Maltese speech is influenced to a greater or lesser degree by English. For instance it is difficult to listen to radio and television in Maltese and not find examples of English linguistic items used by Maltese speakers. However, it is interesting to point out that such lexical items are often adapted to the Maltese phonetic and phonological systems. Thus, lexical and phonological assimilation can be seen occurring simultaneously as in the following examples of wholly and partially assimilated elements observed in classrooms. A

distinction is here drawn between wholly and partially assimilated items on the criterion of orthography. If an originally English term is now generally written in Maltese orthography it is considered as wholly assimilated, if the English spelling is still generally used, it is considered as partially assimilated.

Examples of wholly assimilated items:

1 "orrajt"	/or:ajt/	(allright)
"ċekk"	/tʃek:/	(cheque)

Examples of partially assimilated items:

"structure"	/straktʃer/	(structure)
"function"	/fankʃin/	(structure)
"triangle"	/trajencil/	(triangle)

While the most obvious influence of English on Maltese is lexical, one has to distinguish between a loan which is purely lexical, e.g.

<i>English</i>	<i>Maltese</i>	<i>Maltese plural</i>
"kettle"	"kitla"	"ktieli"

where the grammatical category of number is then realized by a native Maltese form, in this case the broken plural; and other loans which come into the language with some of their accompanying morphology, e.g.

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1    " " show the current Maltese spelling  
 // show phonemic transcription  
 ( ) show English spelling

<i>English</i>	<i>Maltese</i>
"cookers"	"kukers"
/kukəz/	/kukers/
"symbols"	/simbils/
"pets"	/pets/

The presence of this English plural morpheme in these loanwords is such that it is today considered as an integral part of Maltese pluralizing morphology.

The following are examples of English terms that have been adapted to Maltese inflectional morphology.

'tistorja'	/tisto:rja/	(she stores)
'tistreċċja'	/tistretʃja/	(she stretches)
"tiddrajklinja"	/tid:rajkli'nja/	(to dry clean)
"nibbliċjaha"	/nib:lietʃja:/	(I bleach it)

Calques are another example of crosslinguistic influence when morphemic substitution occurs without any importation from the donor language. The following examples involve the literal translation of English idioms or metaphors.

<i>Calque</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>Maltese</i>
"tonfoħ imniehrek"	to blow one's nose	tomħot
"jigbed is-saqajn"	to pull one's legs	twaqqa' għaċ-ċajt
"jiddependi fuq"	to depend on	jiddependi minn
"grazzi għal"	thanks to	bis-saħħa ta
"qiegħed fuq btala"	to be on holiday	mar btala
"tfittex għal"	to look for	
"titlob għal"	to ask for	

These last two examples in Maltese require a direct object.

The following are two examples of syntactic influence from English on written Maltese where the definite article is omitted corresponding to English usage where Maltese structure demands it, e.g.

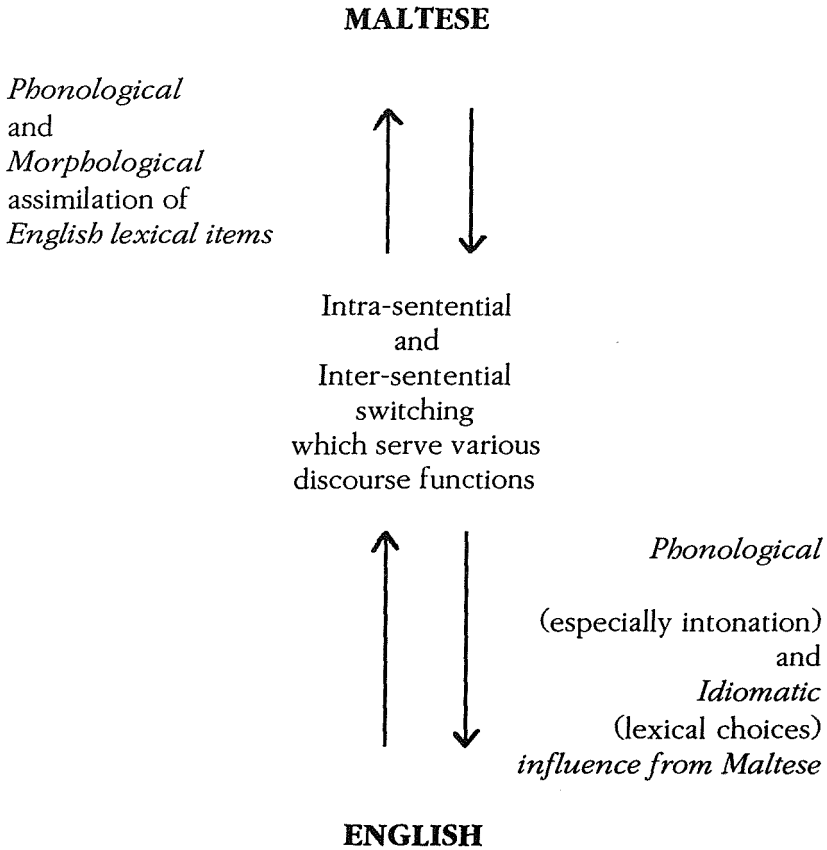
Grazzi	talli użajt is-servizz	ta' (/-) Mid-Med Bank
Thankyou	for using the services	of Mid-Med Bank

(Ir-)Ref. tiegħek  
Your Ref.

#### *4.3 Continuum of Crosslinguistic Influence*

The use of Maltese and English in mixed speech and the influence that each of the languages exerts on the other, is best illustrated by a continuum of crosslinguistic influence. This ranges from small scale borrowing of lexical items from English at one end, through different examples of code-switching, to Maltese influence on spoken English at the other end. The grading of types of crosslinguistic influence is not so neatly staged in real language use. The aim of the scale is just to give a general idea of crosslinguistic influence as it occurs between Maltese and English as observed in the course of this research.

Figure 2: Continuum of crosslinguistic influence and mixed language usage of Maltese and English



### **5. Conclusion**

The findings from the Maltese data as discussed here could be summarized as follows:

1. On a socio-linguistic level, one language (or rather its speakers) are not subordinate to another;
2. On a linguistic level both Maltese and English (in Malta) are changing as a result of language contact at societal level within a bilingual speech community, i.e. as a result of crosslinguistic influence;
3. Codeswitching is systematically and purposefully utilized by Maltese bilingual speakers.

For these reasons, we agree with Eastman (1992) that the distinction between borrowing and codeswitching can no longer be considered a straightforward one. The term crosslinguistic influence is more appropriate to describe our data since such phenomena traditionally referred to as borrowing, code-switching and codemixing are systematically found co-existing within any small extract of mixed Maltese and English speech produced by Maltese bilingual speakers.

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### Appendix

Translation of extract 2, lesson B

#### Lesson B

L: (*reads from textbook in English*) a square room has a square carpet seventy-three placed in it this leaves an area uncovered of nine metres squared and the area of the whole room is twenty five metres squared find the length of one side of the carpet

T: now. this is similar. to this one here isn't it. but the *area* is given worked out already this time. is that correct. now. *area* which has a *square room* what has a *square room* got

Ls: everything equal

Ls: *five sides equal*

T: everything equal *five sides equal* alright *square root* we have marked it. now *has a square carpet symmetrically placed in it.* the *carpet* is it larger or smaller than the room

Ls: smaller

T: smaller Marica you should be paying attention and not writing. alright this is also a *square* I am marking the *sides*. so that I won't get mixed up we have. eh *this leaves the area uncovered of nine metres squared* so I have this bit over here. *uncovered*. do you agree with me

Ls: ehe

T: and how much is it this one

Ls: *nine metres squared*

T: alright *nine metres squared* it is worked out. be careful not to make the mistake of saying *three by three*. that has nothing to do we remember. in order to obtain that *area*. to obtain that *area* what did we do

Ls: O

T: alright the big one *minus* the small one and like that. this is the same this *nine*. that one we must work out in the same way so I cannot say *three by three* because it is a *square*. because I think that's where you made the mistake

Translation of extract 3, lesson G

**Lesson G**

(noise)

T: *now no more talking please* are you going to just stare take out your books and your files

(noise)

T: *take out your books and your files on page forty we're starting a new topic today*

(noise)

T: *right can I have silence now (learners quieten down)* I want you to pay a lot of attention. to the *lesson* ok because it is... we are starting a new *unit*. some of the things that. we are going to do... in this *unit*... you are definitely going to have in the exam so you must pay more attention... *secondly you must also have noticed that we have a visitor today. we have Miss Camilleri here with us.* she is going to keep quiet over there. I hope you will all be as quiet as Miss Camilleri. listening. and if. Miss Camilleri is not going to participate in the lesson. you are going to participate. but not in the usual way. by talking among yourselves. eh... *so. page forty. topic.*  
Eric. what is it about