

INTRODUCTION

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Though the overwhelming majority of the countries accommodate more than one language, official bilingualism is not very common. Indeed, Malta is one of a small group of officially-bilingual countries in the twenty-eight member states of the European Union. Malta's official bilingualism in Maltese and English guarantees the use of the two languages in the Maltese archipelago and also ensures that its people have the necessary linguistic tools to interact with international partners. Moreover, unlike much larger societies where knowledge of one other language, in addition to the official one, is sometimes perceived as unnecessary, there is a general consensus among the Maltese that they also need to be fluent in other non-official languages.

This deeply-rooted belief that language learning is imperative for a small island state is clearly manifested at tertiary level. Since its inception in the late eighteenth century as a *studium generale*, the University of Malta has fostered the study of languages, especially in the Faculty of Arts, which offers courses at undergraduate and postgraduate levels in a kaleidoscope of languages – Maltese and English, Hebrew, Greek and Latin, as well as Italian, French, German, Spanish, Arabic and Chinese. Language departments clearly form the backbone of this faculty and it was hardly surprising that in March 2015 the Faculty of Arts hosted the first *International Conference on Bilingualism* in Valletta – a city which in 2018 will be one of the two European Capitals of Culture.

Language learning reflects the geo-political reality of Malta, a small island state, not only a member of the European Union but one which is also geographically close to North Africa. A country with two official languages has its strengths and weaknesses. Similar challenges are also faced by other unofficially bilingual countries.

The seventeen chapters contained in this volume are a selection of papers presented at the *International Conference on Bilingualism*. The editor of this volume, who was also the convenor of this three-day conference, deemed it important to give a taste of the multifaceted

research on bilingualism presented by a few of the two hundred delegates who hailed from no less than forty-five countries. Though Europe attracted the largest number of delegates, there were also participants from more distant countries such as Australia, Brazil, Brunei, Cameroon, Canada, Chile, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Mexico, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and the United States of America, to mention a few.

The international nature of this volume reflects diverse viewpoints from a varied selection of authors who analyse the linguistic situations in Brazil, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Greece, Israel, Italy, Macau, Malta, Poland, Romania, Sri Lanka, and the United Kingdom. This volume comprises six sections. Part I contains only one chapter on *Code-Switching* by Penelope Gardner-Chloros, one of the conference's keynote speakers. Each of the subsequent five sections includes at least three papers by non-plenary participants on topics related to the *Linguistic Landscape* (Part II), *Language Policy* (Part III), *Bilingualism, Culture and Identity* (Part IV), *Bilingual Education* (Part V) and *Trilingualism* (Part VI).

In her chapter, Penelope Gardner-Chloros reviews the ways in which research on the intriguing and challenging phenomenon of code-switching has so far been conducted. She convincingly argues that the newer multilayered approach is necessary for a better understanding of the reasons why code-switching occurs.

The Linguistic Landscapes of the Mount Carmel area in Israel, Macau on the China coast and the Brittany region of France are the focus of three chapters in Part II of the present volume. Martin Isleem investigates the presence of Arabic in a Druze public school in Israel. While his findings raise important questions on the importance of Hebrew in this area, Isleem suggests that the predominance of the Hebrew language is strong because of factors such as location, language contact and economic reasons.

Ana Cristina Neves discusses the linguistic landscape of Macau by investigating the visibility of the three most important local languages, Cantonese, Portuguese and English, in the three largest pedestrian areas of the Macau Peninsula. Her research findings reveal the presence of changing linguistic patterns in the three languages as spoken there.

The third chapter in this section homes in on the bilingual region of Brittany in France. Noemi Ramila Diaz analyses the linguistic landscape at the Department of Applied Foreign Languages where students are required to study two foreign languages, with English as

one of the compulsory languages. Her findings reveal that since the linguistic space comprises three levels – the institutional, the academic and the personal – there are tensions especially in spaces which are considered to be neither private nor public.

Part III comprises three chapters discussing *Language Policy* in Brazil, the German-Polish border and Sri Lanka. In the first of the three chapters, Kyria Rebeca Finardi first reviews language policies and internationalisation programmes in Brazil and then shows that the varying roles of English result in a low uptake of scholarships of the *Science without Borders* internationalisation programme. She maintains the necessity for an alignment of language policies across the various educational levels.

The second chapter in this section is by Barbara Alicja Jańczak who considers bilingualism and multilingualism as quite common on the Polish side of the German-Polish border. After presenting the partial results of her ongoing research project being conducted in this geographic area, she questions the role of the administration of Polish border towns in supporting both bilingual education and intercultural communication of the inhabitants, and whether their children and adolescents stand to profit from the border location in terms of bilingual language education.

Marie Perera and Suriya Arachchige Kularathne focus on one significant aspect of an ongoing study on bilingual education in Sri Lanka. Through the use of qualitative and quantitative data, they propose that there are no clear micro-level policies ensuring harmony amongst all the stakeholders in bilingual education. They suggest that existing policy documents be amended to accommodate present pedagogical, socio-political, economic and cultural needs.

The four chapters included in Part IV of this volume focus on *Bilingualism, Culture and Identity*. Marina Morbiducci has studied the role of idioms which international students attending Sapienza University in Rome use during interactional exchanges via social networks. Her findings confirm that where grammar competence and correctness fail, effective communication and language creativity may still take place.

In his chapter *Bilingualism and Identity in Selected German-Speaking Regions*, Ralf Heimrath first argues that it is inaccurate to assume that German is the mother-tongue of all inhabitants in German-speaking countries. In fact, by means of examples taken from the linguistic panorama and other sources, he shows the existence of

bilingual communities in specific regions close to Germany and illustrates the role of societal bilingualism in these geographical areas.

The third and fourth contributions in Part IV discuss aspects of bilingualism and culturalism in Romania. Gabriela Scripnic discusses how the European Union's cultural policies have encouraged students to pursue their studies outside Romania. By means of several student testimonies, Scripnic shows the extent to which Romanian students studying in the United Kingdom manage to assume a bicultural identity. Furthermore, she highlights the importance of such an academic environment as one that fosters tolerance towards diversity amongst students.

The last chapter in this fourth part discusses the use and practice of humour among bilingual Romanian students. In her study Alina Ganea presents the findings of the data she gathered after interviewing foreign students enrolled in Dunărea de Jos University of Galați (DJUG) in Romania during the academic year 2014–2015. Ganea's findings highlight the difficulties that bilinguals naturally encounter when faced with humour and how the Romanian language determines the bilingual's linguistic command in the use and practice of humour.

Bilingual Education is the theme of the penultimate section of this volume (Part V) with two chapters focussing on the Maltese educational scene, while the third highlighting the linguistic situation in Bulgaria. In her chapter Romina Frendo questions the extent to which one can accurately identify the language used to teach each of the subjects taught at primary level in Malta. In a survey of almost one thousand pupils hailing from state, church and private schools, Frendo finds a lack of conformity in the use of the two official languages during lessons.

While Frendo focuses on primary-school children, Damian Spiteri and Christiana Sciberras concentrate on older students who are pursuing their studies at the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST). This study explores perceived self-efficacy in terms of their linguistic performance, both within academic as well as work-based settings.

The focus of Mariyana Todorova's chapter is the way Content and Language Integrated Learning approach (CLIL) is implemented in classes of tourism and entrepreneurship taught in English to high school students at one high school in Bulgaria. Todorova presents the results of interviews with students who either intend to or are already conducting their studies in English both abroad and in Bulgaria.

Amongst other findings, she shows how the school represents an example of effective bilingual education.

The final section in this volume (Part VI) homes in on *Trilingualism* with three chapters relative to three countries – Malta, Greece and Sri Lanka. In her chapter Lydia Sciriha questions whether Italian, which was an official language in Malta until 1934, is in reality the third language of the country. By providing Census data, MATSEC examination reports and research on the linguistic landscape, she confirms Italian's third position though she predicts that, owing to the ever-growing non-Maltese residents who display different linguistic preferences from their Maltese counterparts, Italian's position might in future be challenged.

Fotini Anastassiou focuses on multilingual immigrant children in Greece who speak both Albanian and Greek and who also learn English as a third language at school. The findings of her study, in which forty-nine primary school children between the ages of nine and twelve were asked to narrate a picture story in English, evidence the prevalence of Greek code-switches over Albanian.

The trilingual situation in Sri Lanka concludes this volume. Sabaratnam Athirathan and Markandu Karunanithy first discuss the trilingual scenario in Sri Lanka and later identify the issues and challenges faced by Sinhala-speaking students when learning Tamil as a Second National Language. Amongst others, their findings reveal that unfortunately teachers are not that qualified and there is no clear-cut policy as to how suitably-qualified teachers are recruited. These are all issues that pose great challenges in the teaching of the Tamil as a Second National Language.