

Maltese on the Brink

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Outline

- Maltese Language
- Status of Maltese Language
- Current Projects
- Issues

Maltese Language

Maltese Language

- Mixed Language
 - Arabic: kelb (dog)
 - Romance: karozza (car)
 - English: swiċċ; ners; owkej
- Latin script + some special characters
 - ċ, ġ, ħ, ż, għ, ie
- Vowels are always written (unlike Arabic)
 - kiteb

Mixed Language

SEMITIC

- root-based
- non-concatenative
- Arabic

NON SEMITIC

- stem-based
- concatenative
- Sicilian, Italian, English

Mixed Language

SEMITIC

Arabic Origin

I-ilsien Malti

df-tongue Maltese

the Maltese language

more formal

NON SEMITIC

Italian Origin

il-lingwa Maltija

df-tongue Maltese

the Maltese language

less formal

SEMITIC ASPECT

l - s - n radicals (root consonants)
interdigitation of vowels

<i>lisen</i>	CVCVC	‘talk’	(I form)
<i>lissen</i>	CVCCVC	‘utter/say’	(II form)
<i>tlissen</i>	t-CVCCVC	‘be uttered’	(V form)
<i>(i)lsien</i>	CCVVC	‘tongue’	
<i>(i)lsn-a</i>	CCC-a	‘languages’	
<i>tlissin-a</i>	t-CVCCV-a	‘utterance’	
<i>tlissin</i>	t-CVCCVC	‘uttering’	
<i>lissien</i>	CVCCVVC	‘utterer’	
<i>milsen</i>	m-VCCVC	‘dictionary’	(Aquilina)

NON-SEMITIC

Stem *lingw*

<i>lingw-a</i>	tongue-fsg	'tongue/language'
<i>lingw-i</i>	tongue-pl	'tongues'
<i>lingw-a-ġġ</i>	tongue-fsg-nom	'parlance/diction'
<i>lingw-ist-a</i>	tongue-d-fsg	'linguist'
<i>lingw-ist-i</i>	tongue-d-pl	'linguists'
<i>lingw-ist-ik-a</i>	tongue-d-d-fsg	'linguistics'
<i>lingw-ist-ik-u</i>	tongue-d-d-msg	'linguistic'
<i>lingw-ist-iċ-i</i>	tongue-d-d-pl	'linguistic(pl)'
<i>bi-lingw-i</i>	d-tongue-d	'bilingual'
<i>mono-lingw-i</i>	d-tongue-d	'monolingual'

Plural Formation

Sound Plural

formed by suffixes:

(a) Romance

karozza/karozzi (car)

tappit/tappiti (carpet)

(b) Semitic

ikla/ikliet (food)

Broken Plural

change of stem
drop of vowel

qamar/qmura

tifel/tfal

ġdid/ġodda (new)

tappit/twapet (carpet)

Morpho-Syntactic Features

- Verbless sentences
Il-karozza ġdid/the car is new
cf. Il-karozza il-ġdid/the new car
- Construct state (inalienable possession)
Id it-tifel/the boy's hand
Kelb il-baħar/dog the sea = shark
- Sun-letters
ix-xemx/the sun
it-tifel/the boy

Clitic Pronouns

- bġhatthielux
- bġhat – t – hie – lu – x
- *send past to her it not*
1SM
- I didn't send it to her

Verbs with Semitic Inflections

Italian Borrowing

- spjega explain (It. spiegare)
- jispjega he explains
- nispjegaw we explain
- spjegat she explained
- spjegajt I explained, etc.

English Borrowing

- ixxuttja kick a football (Eng. shoot)
- jixxuttja he kicks
- nixxuttjaw we kick
- ixxuttjat she kicked
- ixxuttjajt I kicked, etc.

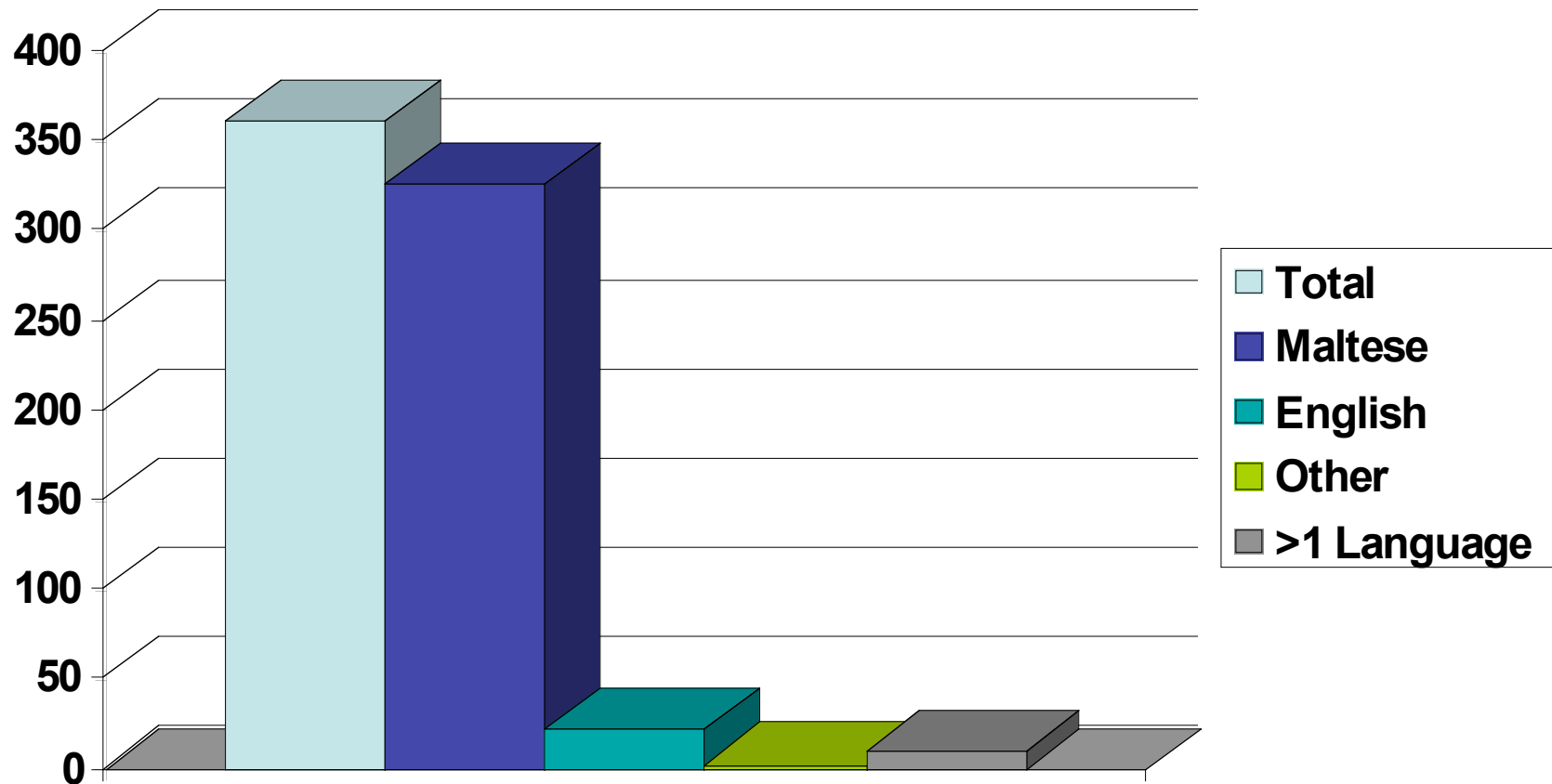
Language Situation in Malta

Status of the Maltese Language

According to the Constitution

- Maltese is the **national language**
- English and Maltese are **official languages**, i.e.
 - laws in EN and MT
 - all official government correspondence should be bilingual
- In reality there is a strong tendency for English to be used in government departments
- Maltese tends to be the spoken language
- English tends to be the written language

Language Spoken at Home (2005 Census)



The Written Language



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Since 2004

- Official EU Language
- Higher socio-political status
- Increased language awareness
- Need for
 - translation, translators, interpreters
 - developments in terminology
 - further standardisation of orthography
- Formation of National Council for the Maltese Language in 2005

Functions of Kunsill include

- Promotion the Maltese Language
- Updating orthography
- Adoption of a suitable linguistic policy
- Evaluation and coordination of the work done by associations and individuals in the Maltese language sector
- Establishment of a National Centre of the Maltese Language which, besides serving as the office of the Council, shall offer the necessary printed and audiovisual resources
- <http://www.kusilltamalti.gov.mt>

Current Projects

Research, Resources and Tools

- Maltese Language Resource Server (UM)
- Maltobi and SPaN projects (UM)
- PsyCol Maltese Lexical Corpus (UM/U. Ariz.)
- Online lexicon/dictionary (UM/U. Ariz.)
- Text to Speech Engine (FITA/UM/CW)
- Spellchecker (UM/MS)
- CLARIN (UoM/FP7)

Projects

	Lexicon	Corpus	Tools	Text	Speech
MLRS	X	X	X	X	
MalTOBi		X			X
PsyCOL		X	X	X	
TTS			X		X
Spellcheck	X		X	X	
CLARIN	X	X	X	X	X

Future Work: Basic Infrastructures

- Resources
 - Corpora: MNC + others
 - Lexical: mono and multi lingual; MultiWordNet
- Tools
 - Tagger (improve accuracy)
 - Spellchecker
 - Morphological Analyser
 - Parser
 - Translation Support

Conclusions

- Mixed language hence more complex.
- Still lacking basic language resources.
- Lack of stable funding. Chicken and egg situation regarding users and funders of language-enabled tools and resources.
- Order in which to tackle shortcomings. Roadmap needed.
- Ensuring survival of Maltese in the midst of new technological developments.
- Balancing act between conservation and modernisation.

Valletta in Winter



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