

## The languages of Malta and language contact

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### Abstract

The Maltese linguistic landscape provides an interesting case study of language contact involving regular use of Maltese, alongside English, and more recently, Maltese Sign Language (*Lingwa tas-Sinjali Maltija, LSM*), in most people's daily lives, and this in a reality of a society which is becoming increasingly multicultural (Vella 2013; Vella & Grech in print).

The first part of this talk will describe the linguistic contact situation in Malta providing examples from everyday use of the bilingual use of English alongside Maltese. I will demonstrate how contact between the two languages has resulted in the emergence of Maltese English, MaltE, which can be said to have the status of a variety in its own right. I will give examples of characteristics of MaltE at all levels of structure, vocabulary, grammar, meaning, and, possibly most noticeably, pronunciation, also illustrating the great deal of sociophonetic variation which is the result of the interplay of factors of various sorts, and which can itself also be said to be an important characteristic of the variety. I will look briefly at some of these factors, also exploring the idea of a continuum of use as a way to better understand the variability within the variety. The discussion will be grounded in a brief exploration of models such as those of Kachru (1995) and Schneider (2007), also taking on board Thusat et al.'s (2009) view that MaltE has moved into the so-called 'nativisation phase', in an attempt at understanding where MaltE fits into the complex landscape of World Englishes.

The second part of this talk looks at our attempts at collecting MaltE speech data into corpora which can be used to better access data for this variety. Such corpora are important given that pronunciation is certainly one of the more, if not most, salient, identifiability marker of the variety. I discuss the challenges associated with the task of collecting and pre-processing spoken data in the particular context of the languages of Malta, including by describing a successful attempt we have made at using tools available for other varieties to help speed up the process of transcribing MaltE speech data (Vella et al. 2024).

### References

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