

# 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

- bgħatthielux
- bgħat – 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.

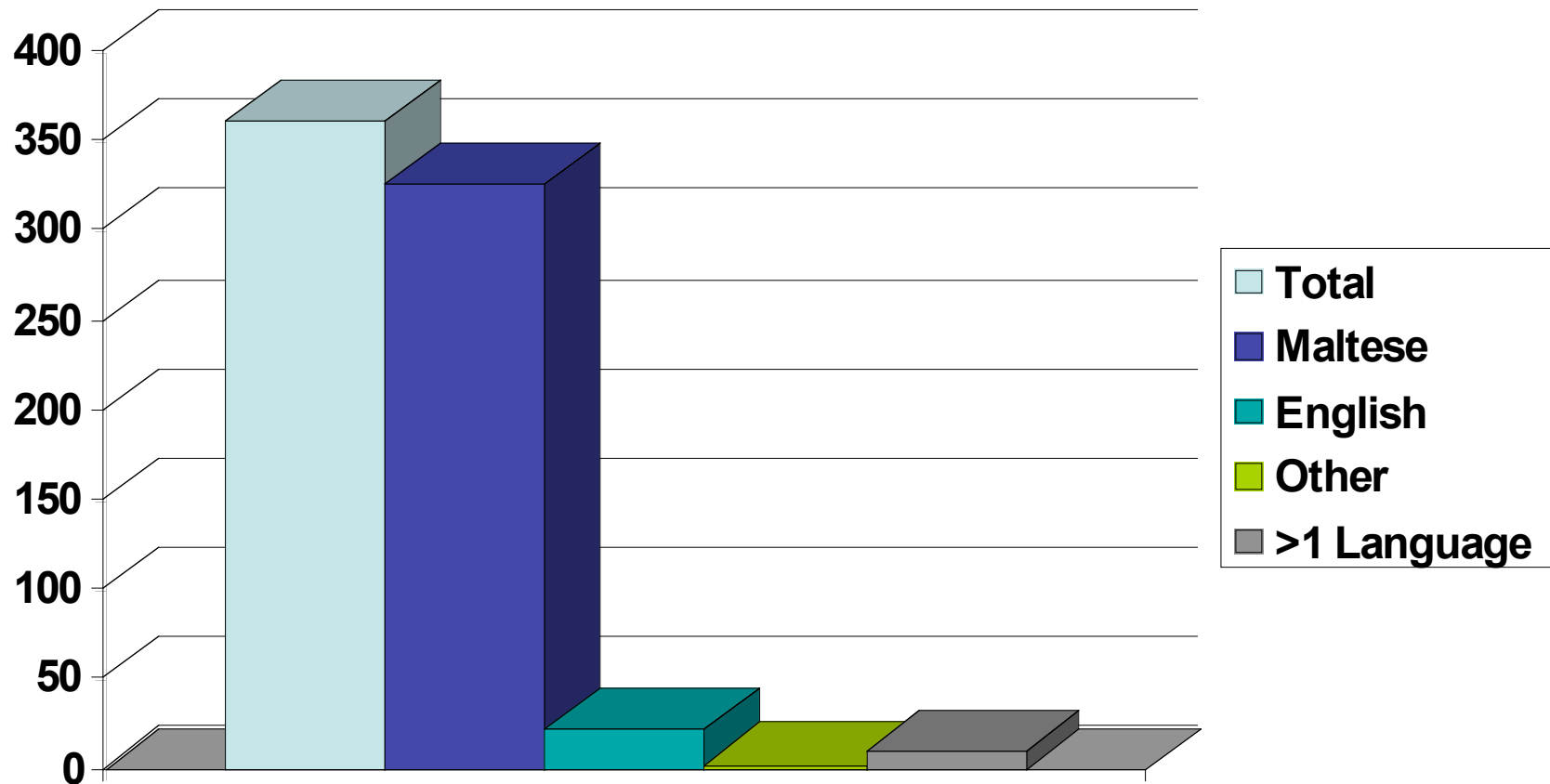
# Language Situation in Malta

# 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



June 2010

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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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