MALTESE AND PORTUGUESE IN CONTACT

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Emigration and Language Maintenance

Emigrants have taken the Maltese Language not only to the traditional Mediterranean settlements and to English-speaking countries but to many "exotic" places as well. Many Latin American countries have heard the intonation of the Maltese tongue too. In this research work I would like to analyse the fortune of the Maltese language in the case of emigrants in Brazil and its influence on the Portuguese language spoken by them. After brief considerations on the peculiarities of the Maltese in Brazil, an analysis will be undertaken in a restricted area of Linguistics, namely Phonetics and Code-switching, with regard to the encounter between Maltese and Portuguese.

Although reliable statistics are unavailable[1] it seems that there were two differently aimed emigration instances of Maltese to Brazil. The first occurred in the 20s and it was somewhat linked to the British entrepreneurship of railway building and maintenance in São Paulo[2]. The second occurred in the late 50s. This investigation will be restricted to the latter emigration wave. Nuns, friars and diocesan priests were encouraged to open convents and head parishes in the State of Paraná. This predominantly unmarried Maltese community in Brazil totalling approximately 60 persons is restricted to the North of the State of Paraná and the Curitiba area in Paraná, to the São Paulo area in São Paulo, to the extreme east of the State of Mato Grosso do Sul and to the Belo Horizonte area in Minas Gerais. There are four sporadic cases in the States of Bahia and Pernambuco. Without exception all Maltese came to Brazil as adults after completing Secondary School or a University course. Eight are married to Brazilian wives. There is no case of a Maltese female taking Brazilian husband.

Although many Maltese in Brazil have a University degree, only three males have a degree in Portuguese. Language proficiency was acquired through intensive private learning, by hearing and by constant contact with Brazilians. This resulted in the Maltese acquiring the non-systematized, non-cultured register of the Portuguese language which is used by all native speakers in their daily informal communication. The Maltese are versed in the cultured register too (from newspapers and official documents especially) but they do not formally use it extensively or actively,[3] though they avoid the former's gross grammatical mistakes.

All Maltese live in the urban area but they are widely scattered throughout the country.[4] Although the Maltese language serves as a cohesive factor in exclusive Maltese social gatherings, the Portuguese language is used in all time, in all functions and with all other groups. It is significant to note that they change to Portuguese when a Brazilian intrudes into their company.

Unmarried males and females speak Maltese when they meet one another. On the other hand, married males speak Portuguese when they meet another Maltese, when they are at home and in their work environment. They normally speak Portuguese when they meet unmarried Maltese. Spoken Maltese is thus restricted to the close domain of an occasional recreational kind. [5].

All married males have Brazilian-born children who do not speak Maltese. Thus Maltese is not spoken in the home environment. [6] Perhaps this is due to the fact that Brazilian females are historically the language vehicles in Brazil. This fact may be complemented by the males' prejudicial idea of the worthlessness of the Maltese language in their milieu. [7] Neither are they motivated to speak English — a high status language in the Brazilian and in the international community. Thus a paradox ensues: all Maltese married males are polyglots but their wives and children are monolingual as the majority of Brazilians.

Unmarried Maltese have frequent contacts with current Maltese language usage. As evidenced above, no contacts are extant between Brazilian wives and children and the Maltese language. On the other hand, married Maltese do not have frequent or deep contacts with the Maltese language in Malta, except through sporadic letters and even more infrequent visits home. It seems that the latter's vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, nuances in style and syntax have not been renewed. A linguist may probably be able to detect and measure the gap between the Maltese spoken in Brazil (reminiscent of the late 50s and 60s) and that spoken in Malta in the 90s [8].

Probably the Maltese language will not exist any more in Brazil in the space of a generation because of the paucity of its population, because of the death or repatriation of unmarried personnel and because of the non-adoption of Maltese as a second language by the children of married couples.

Phonetic Variations

Since Portuguese is an acquired language for Maltese speaking inhabitants, the influence of the mother tongue is very notable. Below are reproduced some examples of phonetic mutations made by Maltese as a result of the encounter of Maltese and Portuguese. IPA is used. In the examples the left hand phonetic transcription is the correct Portuguese pronunciation; on the right hand side the phonetic transcription represents the pronunciation of the same word by a Maltese.

Vowels

1. The Portuguese medial /iː/ is pronounced /ɪ/ with a slight "lengthening" of the following consonant:

   fita (ribbon) /ˈfiːta/ becomes /ˈfita/.

2. Unstressed medial /e/ or /ɛ/ is pronounced /ɪ/:

   desligar (switch off) /desliːˈgaʀ/ becomes /dɪsliːˈgar/.
   desemprego (unemployment) /dezeˈprego/ becomes /dɪzɪmˈpregu/.

2

3. Stressed medial /e/ is pronounced /ɛ/ with semantic mutation:

sede (thirst) /'sedə/ becomes /'sɛdə/ sede (chair)
seu (his, your) /'sew/ becomes /'sɛw/ céu (heaven)

4. Stressed medial /e/ is pronounced /ɛ/ with "lengthening" of following consonant:

cabelo (hair) /ka'belo / becomes / ka'bɛlu/
careza (need) /ka'reza / becomes / ka'rɛza/
fecho (lock) / 'feʃo/ becomes /'fɛʃu /.

5. Unstressed final /ə/ is pronounced /i:/:

parte (part) / 'paRtə/ becomes /'parti: /.

6. Stressed close /e/ is pronounced as the diphthong /ɛɪ /:

mês (month) /'mes/ becomes /'mɛis/
inglês (English) / ɪ'gles / becomes /ɪn'glɛɪs /
montanhês (mountaineer)/ mõta'ŋes / becomes /mõt'aŋeɪs /.

7. Stressed medial / ɔ/ is pronounced / ɔ/:

esposo (husband) / es'pozo / becomes /es'pɔzu /
força (force) /'foRsa / becomes /'forsa /.
Sometimes there is a "lengthening" of the middle consonant when in an intervocalic position:
boca (mouth) /'boka/ becomes /'bɔka/.
moço (young man) /'moso/ becomes /'mɔsu/.
As may be observed Maltese have some difficulties in distinguishing the half-close /o/ and the open / ɔ/. Pronunciation turns out to be haphazard in the case of the metaphonic plural.
In Portuguese some nouns of the masculine gender with a stressed close /o/ in the singular change this vowel into / ɔ/ before adding s for the formation of the plural:
aeroporto (airport)/aɛro'poRto / becomes / aɛro'pɔrtus /
esforço (effort) / es'foRso / becomes / es'fɔrsus/
ovo (egg) / 'ovo / becomes /'ɔvus/
Maltese are generally misunderstood when they pronounce either *olho* (eye) or *óleo* (oil):
olho (eye) /oλo / becomes /'ɔvus/
olho (eye)/oλo/ becomes /'olju/ (oil) whose correct pronunciation is /'ɔleo/.

8. Unstressed final /o / is pronounced /ʊ/ or /u /:

livro (book) /'li:vro/ becomes /'li:vru/.

Nasal Vowels

The Maltese language lacks nasal vowels. On the other hand all Portuguese vowels may be nasalized: [9] / ã / pântano (marsh); /ẽ/ tenda (hut); /ĩ/ assim (so); /õ/ ronco (snore); /ũ/ mundo (world). Diphtongs and triphthongs may

3

be nasalized too: /ãĩ/ pães (bread); /ẽĩ/ bem (well); /õĩ/ condicões (conditions); /ũĩ/ muito (many); /ãw/ falam (they speak); /wãw/ águam (they water); /wẽĩ/ enxágüem (they rince); /wõĩ/ saguoes (halls). Thus in Portuguese nasalization is found in the vowel and/or in the consonant which follows. Nasalization is even more important because of the substratum of the primitive Tupi-Guarani language still extent in some parts of Brazil and is one of the official languages of Paraguay. In the Guarani language all vowels may be nasalized independent of the consonant following them: akã, head; okẽ, door. [10]

1. Stressed final nasal vowels are pronounced by Maltese without nasalization or with a final /n/ disguising a false nasal vowel:

   maçã (< mala matiana, apple) /ma'sã/ becomes /ma'sa/ or /ma'san/
   roma (< mala romana, pomegranate)/Ro'mã/ becomes /Ro'ma/ or /Ro'man/
   alemã (< alamana, German) /ale'mã/ becomes /ale'ma/ or / ale'man/
   salão (hall) / sa'lãw / becomes / sa'lawn/

2. Stressed nasal vowels preceeding /m/, /n/ and /ŋ/ are pronounced with a non-nasalized vowel but with the correct consonant sound:

   estranho (strange)/es'trãŋo/ becomes /es'traŋu /
   entre (between) /'ẽtrə/ becomes /'entri:/
   ama (he loves) /'ama/ becomes /'ãma/.

Consonants

Normally Maltese do not find any difficulty in pronouncing the Portuguese consonants. Due to Italian influence the digraphs *lh*/ʎ/ and *nh* /ŋ/ not found in Maltese are pronounced correctly. Even the regional allophones /tʃ/ and /ʃ/ of the phonemes /t/ and /s/ respectively are properly pronounced by Maltese emigrants. Thus,

   tio (uncle) is pronounced /'tʃio/
   estrela (star) is pronounced /eʃ'trela/

However, there are various peculiarities in the pronunciation of some Portuguese consonants by Maltese.

1. The consonant ç /s/ is sometimes pronounced as /ts/ (perhaps through the influence of Italian) and sometimes as a slightly "long" /s/ accompanied by a close preceeding vowel:

   diferença (difference) /dife'rẽsa/ becomes /difɛ'rentsa/
   liderança (leadership) / lide'rãsa/ becomes /lidɛ'rantsa/
   peço (I ask) /'pɛso/ becomes /'peso/.

2. In the Portuguese language the letter *r* is a velar approximant, /R/, at the beginning of a word or in the middle of a word after a consonant or in the digraph *rr*. It is an alveolar approximant consonant when found between two vowels.

4

rato (rat) /'**Rato**/
genro (son-in-law) /'ɲẽ**Ro**/
carro (car) /'**kaRo**/
era (epoch) /'ɛ**ra**/

Maltese are inclined to pronounce this consonant as the strong alveolar /r/ in all occasions and not as the strong velar /R/. This type of pronunciation gives an inlandish accent to the Maltese way of speaking Portuguese. Final r as in *lavar* (to wash), *fazer* (to do) and *medir* (to measure) is a very weak, almost inaudible, velar approximant: /la'va**R**/; /fa'ze**R**/;/me'di**R**/. Normally Maltese pronounce final r with an extremely strong tone as an alveolar, betraying a foreign accent.

3. Portuguese has a clear and a dark /l/. The latter occurs before a consonant and at the end of a word. In this case the lateral alveolar /l/ is pronounced as /ʋ/ or /o:/. However, Maltese are inclined to pronounce it indistinctly as a clear /l/:

futil (vain) /'**futi**ʋ/ becomes /'**futil**/
mal (badly) /'**ma**ʋ/ becomes /'**mal**/
altar (altar) /a ʋ'**taR**/ becomes /al'**tar**/
aldeia (small town) /aʋ'**deɪa** / becomes /al'**deia** /.

It is interesting to note that the Maltese variant helps writing these words correctly and avoids confusion in meaning. In fact, Brazilians, in contrast to Maltese, find it difficult to distinguish between:

mau (bad) /'**mau**/ and /'**ma**ʋ/ mal (badly)
auto (self) /'**auto**/ and /'**a**ʋ**to**/ alto (high)
serviu (he served) /se**R**'**viu** / and / se**R**'**vi**ʋ/ servil (servile)

Code-Switching

The popular register of the Portuguese language was assimilated by Maltese emigrants who, through bilingualism, produced a type of code-switching that needs analysis and interpretation. Interacting strictly between themselves Maltese use the conversational code-switching [11] within single and various sentences with strict syntactical categories used in classifying linguistic terms. This lato sensu code-switching [12] is not characterized by any ideologization but constitutes a space in language alternations.

An analysis of a short dialogue will give us an example of an alternation of words and sentences in the two languages:

"Fejn sejjer *tivvjaġġa* fil-*verão?*"
"*Talvés* immur sal-Bahia. *Você gostaria de ir também?*"
("Where are you going in the summer?"
"Perhaps I'll go to Bahia. Would you like to go there too?")

One cannot help observing that linguistic blocks of one language are substituted by equivalent ones in the other. The prepositional phrase extant

in two instances consists of the preposition in Maltese and the noun in Portuguese. This is corroborated by the prepositional phrase in "Ħlist mit-tarefa li kelli naghmel": not only *tarefa* has the function of its Maltese equivalent but its initial dental consonant changes the article "il-" into "it-" as in Maltese. The future of *viajar* (to go/travel) is conjugated as a Maltese verb. The adverb *talvés* (perhaps), denoting doubt, is followed by the subjunctive as in Maltese syntax.

Without being exclusive, code-switching is used by Maltese in the following situations:

1. In tags, perhaps because of their high automatic factors:
   "Repare, X ghadu mhasseb".
   (Observe. X is still worried.)
   "Inti kilt, *não*?"
   (You have eaten, haven't you?)
   "*Escute*. Il-mutur qed jaħdem".
   (Listen. The engine is functioning).
   "*Então*, ma ċempiltlux".
   (So, I didn't call him up.)
   "...ghalhekk ghidtlek li s-sitwazzjoni kienet tal-biża',
   entendeu agora?"
   (...that's why I told you that the situation was critical. Have you understood now?)

2. In registers of a different specialization other than the speaker's. This may be considered as borrowing rather than code-switching.
   "Il-bieraħ kelli niehu l-*carro* fl-*oficina* biex *nikkonserta* l-*embreagem*".
   (Yesterday I had to take the car to the mechanic's to repair the clutch.)
   "Xtrajt *l-azulejo* kollu".
   (I bought all the wall tiles).
   "Il-*contador* qalli li kien hemm ftit *entradas e muitos débitos* fix-xahar ta' Awwissu".
   (The accountant told me that there were few credits but many debits during the month of August).

3. In commentaries following statements uttered in a second language:
   "Iva oqgħod kwiet. *Você vai me machucar!*"
   (Please, keep quiet. You are going to hurt me.)
   "Kul aktar. *Parece que não gostou!*"
   (Eat more. It seems you didn't like the food).

4. In statements where emphasis is achieved through an utterance in a second language:
   "Nehhi dak il-*quadro da parede* daqskemm hu *feio*.
   (Take that picture off the wall. It's so ugly.)
   "M'inix nisimghek. *Vou desligar a televisão*".
   (I'm not hearing you. I'll switch off the TV).

6

5. In the repetition of words in the two languages to give emphasis:

   "Qatt ma rajt haġa bħal din, *jamais.*"
   (I've never seen such a thing. Never.)
   "*Por favor, anda mais depressa.* Ħaffef il-pass għax mhux se' naslu qatt".
   (Please, walk quicklier. Walk faster, otherwise we'll never arrive there).
   "Itfiħ dak it-television. *Desliga ele, pô!*"
   (Switch off that T.V. Bah, switch it off).

6. To exclude intruders from the theme of a conversation, as the following stretch of conversation between two Maltese may witness:

   "...*aí a confusão estava criada. Ele ficou enfurecido.*
   [Someone comes in and the speaker switches to Maltese]
   Jien għidtlu li qed jigdeb, imma hu saħan aktar..."
   (...Trouble was brewing. He became furious. I told him he was lying. But he became more furious still).

Some conclusions

A brief analysis of phonetic variations and code-switching practiced by Maltese in Brazil may help us reach some conclusions and may open the way to deeper questions about this very rare contact between the two languages. Even though Maltese have difficulties in distinguishing the open vowels /ɛ/ and /o/, the close vowels /e/ and /o/; the nasal vowels and some consonants, they are normally understood by native Brazilians. Maltese accent diminishes accordingly, but it doesn't disappear altogether. People attuned to the Arabic way of pronouncing Portuguese detect an affinity with the Maltese intonation and their way of speaking Portuguese. More analyses can be made in this area to discover the Semitic substrata of stress and intonation of Maltese and its distinctness from Romance languages with which it had contact for nearly 1000 years.

The problem of code-switching is equally important because it may raise the question of national identity camouflaged under a seemingly appropriation garb. It seems that basic Semitic structures are always maintained in a bilingual sentence. The presence of Portuguese words may be attributed to an *ad hoc* convenience by the speaker, to a lack of linguistic promptness with regard to the Maltese equivalent and even to the lack of an equivalent word in Maltese. With regard to the latter factor, it may be shown that more than 50% of these words are borrowed from English or Italian in native Maltese. It is therefore not surprising that these words are substituted *in toto* by the Portuguese equivalent.

On the other hand, there seems to exist an inverse proportion between linguistic contact with native Maltese and code-switching. The more a person

maintains linguistic contacts with the native Maltese language, the less he is prone to use extensive code-switching. In this case the two codes become more distinct and separate. In both cases national ident·ty [13] of the speaker bars out the extinction of Maltese – a phenomenon witnessed for hundred of years in Malta.

1. Research has been done only in Brazil. Due to the fact that Maltese had a British passport, they were enlisted as British citizens. Some of them even changed their surnames giving them an "English" spelling.

2. With great caution and even greater admonishment with regard interpretation, mention may be made of many "Maltese" surnames found in the city of São Paulo: Aquilina, Attard, Balzan, Bonello, Bonici, Borg, Calleja, Caruana, Cassar, Falzon, Fenech, Friggieri, Galea, Grech, Grima, Mallia, Meli, Muscat, Pirotta, Pisani, Said, Saliba, Sammut, Schembri, Spiteri, Tabone, Vassallo, Vella, Zahra, Zammit. Some comments may be helpful: the surnames above were transcribed ipsis litteris: some contact with these families was tried but discontinued; São Paolo is a melting-point of Italian, Sicilian and Lebanese emigrants. Berlinck, pp. 48–63.

3. Brazilian Portuguese has no dialects. The cultured register is characterized not by a different lexicon but by phonetics and strict rules of syntax. The non-cultured register is characterised, for example, by the initial alveolar /r/ in contrast to the velar /R/, the use of the subjective pronoun instead of the objective one ("Eu o encontrei", I met him, is changed into "Eu encontrei ele") and by the use of the first person plural pronoun with a third person singular verb ("Nós fomos", We went, is changed into "Nós foi").

4. Appel and Muysken say that there is a great trend for Maltese emigrants in Australia to adopt English in places where a small Maltese community flourishes. The contrary happened where heavy Maltese immigration occurred. Pp. 32–45. Lieberson (in Giles: 1977) analyses the non-maintenance of language in widely scattered populations and the fast assimilation of the dominant language by immigrants of a minority language dispossessed of their traditional territory.

5. Fasold pp. 180–242 and Saville-Troike pp. 52–70, 169–199.

6. With regard to language, interethnic marriage and the role of women, see Appel and Muysken, ibid; Saville-Troike, ibid; Smith, pp. 119–122. Studies on Japanese and German descendants in Brazil have given the same results. See Ruth Correa Leite Cardoso, "O agricultor e o profissional liberal entre os japoneses no Brasil" in Schaden, pp. 363–373; Carlos H. Oberacker, "Transformações da língua alemã no Brasil", ibid. pp. 383–432.

7. On language status and maintenance see Giles H. pp. 308–343.

8. Since Brazil is a melting pot of immigrants, many studies are published yearly about minority languages spoken in Brazil and comparisons are made between them and those spoken in Europe. The Editora da Universidade de Caxias do Sul (C.P. 1352 Caxias do Sul (RS) has published dozen of works on this point, especially about the Italian and German dialects.

9. Faraco and Moura, pp. 18–32.

10. Guasch, pp. 23–25.

11. Hudson, pp. 56–58. see also John Gumperz, Discourse Strategies. CUP, 1982.

12. In Vermes and Boutet, p. 144. On item 6 see Grosjean, Chap. 3.

13. See ideas of Le Page and Labov quoted by Bortoni-Ricardo on identity and linguistic behaviour. Pp. 69–97.

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