

Emerging standardization of English in Malta

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This paper will examine the emergence of a covertly codified standard in Maltese English. There are only few publications on Maltese English in general and none that deal with issues of standardization. This variety has been and to some extent still is a high-contact variety largely influenced by British English, standard Italian and Sicilian dialects as well as Maltese (cf. Mazzon 1992, 1993). Due to this and ongoing socio-cultural changes, standardization processes are very much in a state of flux.

While at first sight Maltese English seems to be clearly oriented towards the exonormative standard of British English, our study will present a more complex picture where formality factors play a key role. What is acceptable and common in Maltese speech communities depends heavily on factors such as context, use of written or spoken language, but also on age, education and bilingualism. Many local linguistic features do not seem to survive in more formal situations, though some do, for instance structures like *You want I stand over here?* (Krug in preparation).

With the focus being on grammar and lexicon, it will be shown that the definition of a standard feature is often a matter of statistical preference rather than a binary issue (Krug 2008, Hilbert forthcoming). More specifically, this paper will address the question of where the standard(s) of this variety is (are) situated relative to British and American English.

Our study will be based primarily on two categories of the International Corpus of English (ICE: press reports and editorials from local newspapers) as well as on data from fieldwork carried out in Malta in 2008 and 2009. Broader issues to be discussed include:

- the complexities of standardization and codification issues for smaller varieties of English
- the socio-historical changes which lead to the emergence of new varieties of English
- the way in which a variety with a predominantly exonormative standard patterns in linguistic variation and change
- methodologies that can be used for studying less well-known varieties

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