Multilingual Children's Speech Development

MALTESE

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Maltese Author

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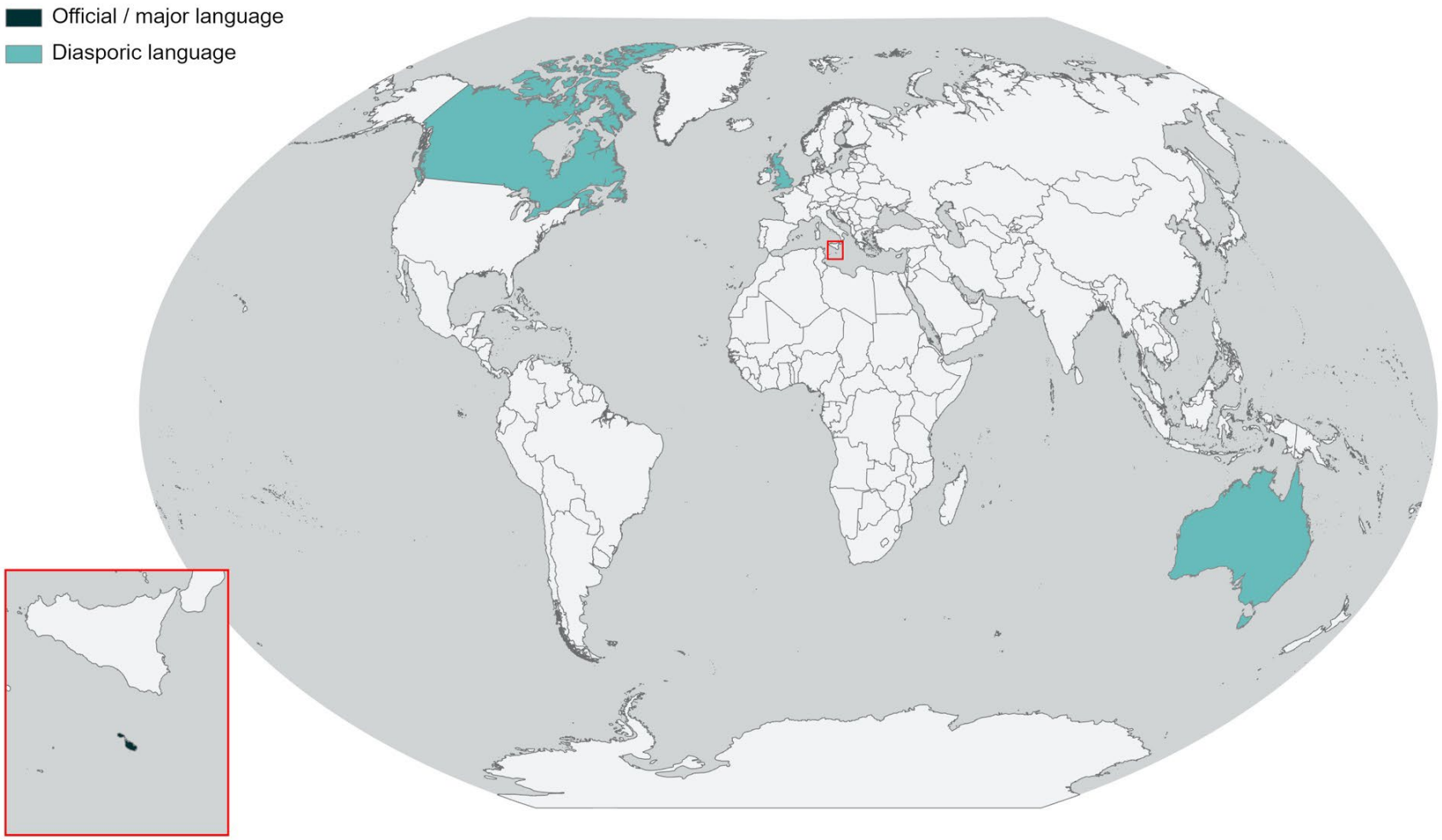
Source: Grech, H. (2025). Maltese. In S. McLeod (Ed.). *The Oxford handbook of speech development in languages of the world*. Oxford University Press.

Maltese

- **Commonly spoken in**
  - Malta
  - to a lesser extent by Maltese migrants in the UK, US, Canada and Australia
- **Dialects and variants**
  - few dialects/variants & mainly used by older generations and phasing out
- **Writing**
  - Left to right. Latin alphabet (Roman script)
  - The only Semitic language written this way

Maltese Map



The author acknowledges assistance provided by the Spatial Data Analysis Network (SPAN) at Charles Sturt University, and in particular Craig Poynter, for his work creating this map. Figures/maps/imagery created using ESRI ArcGIS Pro 3.1 software and data contained within ESRI's Living Atlas.

Maltese
Speech Components

- **Consonants (22):** /p, b, t, d, k, g, ʔ, m, n, f, v, s, z, ʃ, h, j, w, l, r, ʧ, ʤ, ts/
  - 7 plosives, 2 nasals, 6 fricatives, 4 approximants and 3 affricates
  - Plosives, fricatives, and affricates frequently occur as voiced/voiceless
- **Consonant clusters:** Word initial up to 3; word final up to 2 (generally). Clusters allowed word medially with C2 being offset of the following syllable
- **Vowels (11+7):** 11 monophthongs (5 short; 6 long) & 7 diphthongs
- **Tones (0):** None
- **Phonotactic restrictions:** C_3 V C_2. Words are often multisyllabic and do not include more than 5 syllables
- **Prosody:** Primary correlate of stress is vowel length; stress is generally on penultimate syllable. The stressed syllable is often louder and with higher pitch. Stress distinguishes between words. Intonation pattern is constructed over a whole or part of an utterance. 2 pitch levels – high and low

Maltese
Age of Acquisition

- **Consonants**
  - By 3;6 years Maltese children use all the phones of Maltese except for /ts/ and master the contrastive phonemes of Maltese; few phonemes still show up with substitution including /n, d, s, z, ʃ, l, r, ts, ʧ, ʤ/
- **Consonant clusters**
  - From 3;0 years onwards Maltese children produce consonantal clusters of some type
  - By 3;6 years of age the singleton segments in their phonetic inventory are produced in combination with other consonantal phones, as clusters
- **Vowels**
  - 3;0-6;0: monophthongs and diphthongs are produced by most children.
- **Tones**
  - Not applicable

Maltese
Speech Development

- **Percentage correct**
  - This increases with the age of children; by 3;6 high level of accuracy is produced
- **Intelligibility**
  - No data
- **Common phonological patterns**
  - Weak syllable deletion, fronting, stopping, lateralization of /r/, deaffrication, gemination of consonantal sequence, compensatory vowel lengthening and cluster reduction (only one observed at 4;0 years)

Maltese
Children with Speech Sound Disorders

- **Also called**
  - diffikulta' bid-diskors → speech sound disorder
  - aprassja tad-diskors fit-tfal → childhood apraxia of speech
  - diżartrija → dysarthria
- **Research has focused on**
  - identification of typically developing patterns; speech assessment
  - children with hearing impairment (CI users)
  - speech sound disorders and phonological awareness skills; automatic speech recognition
- **Studies (examples)**
  - Automatic speech recognition in the assessment of child speech (Buttigieg, Grech, Attard, Fabri, & Farrugia, 2021)
  - Phonological development of consonants in 4 year old Maltese children (Azzopardi, 1997).
  - Speech sound disorders and phonological awareness skills in Maltese children aged 4 to 6 years. (Camilleri, 2019)
  - Articulation and phonology of Maltese cochlear implanted children. (Felice, 2019)
  - Development of a speech and language screening tool for 3-year-old Maltese children (Formosa, 2019)
  - Bilingual speech assessment for Maltese children (Grech, 2017)

Maltese
Speech Assessments

- Grech, H., Dodd, B., & Franklin, S. (2011). *Maltese-English Speech Assessment (MESA)*. Malta: University of Malta. (ISBN: 978-99957-0-027-0)
- Formosa, R. (2019). *The development of a speech and language screening tool for 3-year-old Maltese children*. Unpublished Master dissertation. University of Malta.

Maltese
Speech Interventions

- No specific speech interventions that are available for Maltese-speaking children
- Clinicians adapt available scientifically-based interventions to the child's needs and the respective phonological system/s

Reference

Book chapter

- Grech, H. (2025). Maltese speech development. In S. McLeod (Ed.). *The Oxford handbook of speech development in languages of the world*. Oxford University Press.

Presentation

- Grech, H. (2024). *Maltese: Multilingual children's speech development*. Charles Sturt University, Australia. https://www.csu.edu.au/research/multilingual-speech/languages
  - Sharynne McLeod and Helen L. Blake, Charles Sturt University, Australia