

## **Speaking Home, Speaking Host: Family Language Policies in a Migrant Context**

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**Abstract:** Migration experiences, integration into the host society, and the desire to maintain the heritage language and culture significantly shape the family language policies of migrant families. While some prioritise their heritage language at home, motivated by the belief that it is essential for maintaining family ties and cultural identity, other families adopt a more balanced or mixed language policy, using both the heritage language and the host society's dominant language in different contexts. This study explores the language practices of migrant families in Malta, a bilingual country with Maltese and English as its co-official languages, which is becoming increasingly multilingual as newcomer families settle on the island. Thirty-two migrant parents with children attending various state schools participated in this research by responding to an online survey about their home language practices and their attitudes towards learning the languages of schooling, Maltese and English. Findings reveal a multilingual approach in all respondents' home environments. Parents believe that learning the host country's language, particularly English, is crucial for better integration and to secure academic success for their children. The study highlights the complex dynamics of language policy in migrant families, balancing the need for integration with the desire to sustain cultural identity.

**Keywords:** Family language policy; multilingualism; language attitudes; Malta

### **Introduction**

Language policy was initially associated with national language planning, as discussed by scholars such as Berry (1968) and Fishman (1968), who examined language issues in newly independent nations.

More recent scholarship, however, has shifted towards understanding language policies as part of broader social, cultural, and ideological systems (King et al., 2008; McColl, 2007). Spolsky (2012) raises the critical question of where the family fits into language policy, emphasising that language planning is not exclusively a top-down process dictated by state institutions. Rather, families engage in their own forms of language management, influenced by competing forces such as governmental policies, societal expectations, and individual agency. These influences interact in a non-hierarchical system where families make strategic choices regarding language use, often shaped by both micro-level factors (e.g. parental aspirations, literacy practices) and macro-level factors (e.g. economic opportunities, political ideologies) (Curdt-Christiansen, 2009; Spolsky, 2004).

Heritage or home language maintenance and development has positioned the family as the primary social and affective unit for the language-learning child (Lanza & Lomeu Gomes, 2022). In the context of increasing global mobility, this perspective has evolved to account for the complex linguistic ecologies that emerge when families navigate multiple linguistic and cultural environments (Little, 2017). Smith-Christmas (2016) identifies key factors influencing children's proficiency in minority languages, with the most significant being the amount of language input they receive at home. Studies suggest that children who receive greater exposure to their heritage language tend to develop higher levels of bilingual competence (De Houwer, 2007; Quiroz, Snow, & Zhao, 2010), with the role of mothers in language transmission being particularly noteworthy. Lanza and Lomeu Gomes (2022) emphasise that understanding language use within international families is crucial not only for examining children's linguistic development but also for exploring how language contributes to well-being (Zhou & Liu, 2024) and the construction of family identity in an increasingly interconnected world.

In this exploratory study we examine how families who have recently relocated in Malta manage their family language policy (FLP), with the aim of providing valuable insights into the broader sociocultural dynamics of the island's increasingly multicultural society. As migration continues to shape the demographic landscape of Malta, understanding how families navigate language maintenance, shift, and use within the household has profound implications for language education, social integration, and policy development. The present study thus aims to contribute to a growing body of research on FLP by exploring the

language attitudes and practices of migrant families in Malta and the challenges they face in their efforts to maintain their heritage languages while adapting to the linguistic realities of their host country.

### **The Maltese context and developing sociocultural dynamics**

Malta's educational system, rooted in its British colonial legacy, promotes bilingualism in Maltese and English. However, increasing linguistic diversity due to migration is shifting the educational landscape from bilingualism to multilingualism. An aging population coupled with labour shortages have resulted in the proportion of foreign nationals in Malta rising markedly, from 5.5% in 2012 to 25.3% in 2022. By the end of 2023, the foreign population stood at 158,368, representing 28.1% of the total population (National Statistics Office, 2024). Given the country's size and limited natural resources, this makes Malta quite an exceptional case in the context of European population trends (Eurostat, 2024). This demographic shift has implications on various aspects of Maltese society, including education, where the growing population of non-native learners presents new opportunities as well as challenges for teachers and policymakers. At the same time, many teachers report feeling unprepared to manage the complexities of multilingual classrooms, as they struggle to balance the needs of students learning both Maltese and English while also preserving their home languages (Micallef Cann & Spiteri, 2014). Recent local studies highlight the challenge of adapting teacher training to support multilingualism, noting a gap in professional development programmes that address the needs of linguistically diverse students (Camenzuli et al., 2023; Caruana et al., 2019; Panzavecchia & Little, 2020).

As migration continues to shape Malta's sociolinguistic landscape, understanding how migrant families navigate their FLP is crucial for informing educational and language policies. To date, the studies on FLP conducted in Malta with migrant families remain very scarce, with one of the few examples being the one conducted by Grech (2022). In her study, Grech conducted in-depth interviews with parents of primary school children aged between 3 and 8 years from Brazil, Bulgaria, Egypt, Italy, and Lithuania. The study explores the reasons behind parents' desires to maintain their children's heritage language, notwithstanding the fact that they need to learn not just one but two new languages in order to be able to fully integrate and function in their new country. All participating parents held very strong views in favour of maintaining the heritage language, emphasising their daily efforts to ensure

language transmission. Parents highlighted the importance of their heritage language in sustaining family relationships and provided detailed accounts of the various activities and strategies they employed to foster a positive attitude toward it in their children.

### **The study**

With the objective of understanding better the family language policies adopted by an ever-increasing migrant population in Malta, in this study we explore the following research questions: 1) Which languages do migrant families in Malta use within the family? and 2) How does the family language policy chosen by parents reflect their beliefs, attitudes and intentions?

By examining the attitudes, practices, and challenges faced by the participating families, this study contributes to ongoing discussions about multilingualism and social integration. Recognising multilingualism as a resource rather than a problem, we hope this study can help in the creation of inclusive language policies that support both heritage language maintenance and host country language acquisition.

### **Materials and methods**

The aim of this study was to explore family language policies among migrant families in Malta. Data collection was conducted through an anonymous online survey, a method which aligns with the personal nature of family language policies, ensuring that participants could respond openly and without fear of identification. To mitigate the potential of limited depth of quantitative data often associated with online surveys, a number of open-ended questions and prompts were also included in the survey. These were designed to encourage participating parents to provide more detailed responses, offering deeper insights and richer narratives.

The survey was distributed across three different state schools: a primary school, a middle school, and a secondary school. Two of these schools are situated in the northern region of Malta, while the third is centrally located. These schools were deliberately selected due to their visibly high populations of migrant learners, making them suitable sites for gathering relevant data on family language policies. Institutional approval was obtained via an email request to the respective schools, which included documentation of approval from the Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee (FREC) at the University of Malta.

Participant recruitment was facilitated through an information letter, which outlined the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and ethical considerations. The letter also included a consent form, ensuring that participants were fully informed about their rights, including the possibility of withdrawing from the study at any time without consequences. By prioritising ethical measures, the study ensured that participants could contribute their perspectives in a secure and respectful research environment.

Upon consenting, participants received a web link to access and complete the online survey (see Appendix). The survey was designed for ease of readability, considering that the target audience might have varying levels of proficiency in English. The questions focused on family language practices and attitudes towards the heritage language and Malta's two official languages, Maltese and English. A total of 32 parents completed the survey, with the predominant shared characteristic among all the respondents being that they had at least one child attending compulsory schooling in Malta. The data obtained from the survey was analysed using Python programming language with the assistance of OpenAI ChatGPT4 (OpenAI 2024). The use of these tools enabled structured handling of data, while facilitating code generation, statistical interpretation, and theme identification. Since theme extraction and qualitative coding require contextual sensitivity and interpretive depth, which AI can support but not fully replicate, the researchers made sure human validation took place at all times, and always relied on their critical judgment and understanding of the broader context in the interpretation of results.

## **Results**

The online survey provided valuable insights into the linguistic dynamics within migrant households in Malta. Respondents, representing diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, generously shared their family language policies and practices, contributing to a comprehensive dataset. In this section, we focus on the patterns, nuances, and implications observed among the responses of the 32 participating parents. Throughout the analysis of the compiled tables and charts, the initial research questions were consistently considered to ensure their relevance remained central to the study. The data collected aimed to: 1) explore the language policies within migrant families and 2) examine the families' attitudes towards preserving their heritage

languages while also engaging with Maltese and English, both within and beyond the home.

#### *General background information*

Participants' ages ranged from 20 to 55, with the most common age group being 35–39, comprising 25% of the total responses. Of the 32 respondents, 62.5% were female and 37.5% were male. The sample included a diverse range of nationalities. Ukrainian parents constituted the largest group (n = 5), followed by Chinese (n = 4) and Albanian (n = 3). Two participants each were from Latvia, Russia, Vietnam, and Costa Rica. The remaining participants represented a wide range of countries, with one parent from each of the following: Italy, the UK, France, Germany, Romania, Slovakia, Serbia, North Macedonia, Libya, Israel, India, and Panama.

The majority of respondents were relatively recent arrivals to Malta, having resided in the country for under two years. In contrast, fewer respondents had a longer history of residency in Malta, with only three individuals having lived in the country for 3–5 years, and one respondent having resided in Malta for over 15 years. A significant proportion expressed a strong intention to settle permanently in Malta. Notably, all but one respondent reported that their children were born in their home country. Additionally, 37.5% of respondents declared speaking a different first language from their partner.

#### *Language use within the home*

The next section of the survey focused on participants' language practices within the home environment. Respondents were asked about family language use across eight daily activities: watching television, listening to the radio, listening to songs, reading books, reading news online, writing shopping lists, helping children with their homework, and mealtime conversations. Participants were to tick one amongst six possible options: mostly Maltese; mostly English; mostly heritage language; Maltese and English; Maltese and heritage language; English and heritage language. Results indicate a consistent mix of English and heritage languages across all scenarios, except for mealtimes, where the heritage language was most prevalent. English was most commonly used for media consumption, such as listening to news and mass media, highlighting the dominance of English in these platforms. Notably, Maltese was the least used language across all activities, followed closely by a combination of Maltese and English, which appeared most prominently when respondents helped their children with homework.

Participants were also asked about language use during their daily interactions. When conversing with their partners, respondents reported using primarily English (when they spoke different first languages), their heritage language, or a mix of both. Similar patterns emerged in interactions with their children. However, when children conversed with their parents or guardians, the majority primarily used their heritage language, occasionally supplemented with English. Among siblings, the heritage language remained dominant, often combined with English.

Regarding language use in writing, including text messaging and emails, results indicate flexibility and adaptability. English and heritage languages were the predominant choices, both in communication between partners and in interactions with children. A clear emphasis on using heritage languages in written communication was observed particularly when corresponding with relatives living abroad.

#### *Gauging respondents' beliefs*

Respondents were asked to express their beliefs on key topics related to language, culture, and education within their households by rating a number of given statements using a five-point Likert scale: from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

The findings revealed overwhelmingly positive beliefs towards bilingualism and multilingualism. A significant 59% of respondents strongly agreed that proficiency in both their heritage language and the host country's language positively impacts a child's academic development. Additionally, respondents widely agreed that being bilingual or multilingual benefits a child's future career prospects. A majority (78%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that speaking multiple languages confuses a child, indicating a general belief that multilingual exposure does not hinder language acquisition. Similarly, 53% disagreed and 22% strongly disagreed with the notion that only the heritage language should be used at home.

When asked whether a child must understand and speak the local language to feel a sense of belonging in the host country, 75% agreed. Perspectives on the potential negative impact of heritage language use on mastering Maltese or English were more varied, with 38% agreeing with the statement. While 63% of respondents believed it is important to speak primarily English with a child growing up in Malta, only 34% felt the same about Maltese. Notably, 47% remained neutral on the

importance of Maltese, suggesting a perceived lower priority placed on its acquisition in early childhood.

41% of respondents agree that learning a child's heritage language should be a private matter done at home, while 28% disagree. A significant number of respondents (31%) remain neutral, suggesting no strong policies on restricting heritage language learning to the home. 59% of respondents believe after-school classes are beneficial for improving a child's heritage language, while 13% disagree. 28% are neutral on the matter. A majority (66%) of respondents emphasise the importance of maintaining relationships with family relatives for a child's heritage language development.

#### *Language input through afterschool activities*

Respondents provided information on the frequency of their children's media-related language activities at home, including watching television, playing online games, or watching online videos. English was the preferred language for most activities, followed by the heritage language (notably for watching YouTube videos). Maltese was rarely used in media consumption. Regarding reading habits, some respondents reported engaging in English reading activities 2-3 times a week or more, while others did so once a week or never. Reading in Maltese was less frequent, with many respondents selecting 'never'. Heritage language reading was slightly more common, occurring 2-3 times a week or daily in some households. As to book ownership, at home children tend to have significantly fewer books in Maltese compared to English and heritage languages. Tuition outside of school was also explored. English tuition was the most common, typically occurring once or 2-3 times per week. Maltese tuition was significantly less frequent, with most respondents selecting 'never'. Similarly, heritage language tuition was infrequent, with most respondents indicating no formal instruction outside the home.

#### *Language competence*

Parents assessed their children's competence in Maltese, English, and their heritage language across the four language skills. In Maltese, children were predominantly described as having 'limited' skills in all areas. In contrast, English competence was generally rated as 'limited' for reading and writing, 'average' for speaking, and 'good' for comprehension. Heritage language competence was rated highest, with most parents describing their children as having 'excellent' speaking and comprehension skills and 'good' reading and writing skills.

Among respondents with more than one child, 44% reported notable differences in heritage language proficiency between their eldest and youngest child. In many cases, the eldest child demonstrated stronger heritage language skills, likely due to longer exposure before migrating to Malta.

#### *Changes in language practice*

Respondents reflected on how their own language practices had changed since raising their children in Malta. A significant 44% reported increased mixed-language use, indicating a shift towards bilingual or multilingual household practices. Furthermore, 66% observed an increased use of English in daily interactions.

Key reasons for these changes included integration needs, educational considerations, workplace dynamics, and community engagement. Many respondents emphasised the necessity of improving English proficiency to support their children's schooling and future opportunities. Additionally, 22% highlighted the importance of learning Maltese or English to integrate better into their communities and improve their quality of life in Malta.

#### *Respondents' perspectives on heritage language use and government support*

Finally, respondents were presented with 5 statements on heritage language practices and government support for language learning. They were to give their views by rating the statements on a 5-likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

A majority (60%) agreed that using their heritage language with their children in Malta is important, reflecting a strong commitment to language preservation. Views on using heritage languages in public were more mixed, with 51% expressing agreement, 38% remaining neutral, and 9% strongly disagreeing.

91% of respondents strongly agreed that they were pleased their children were learning Maltese and English. Regarding government support, opinions were divided. While only 22% agreed that more support is needed to maintain heritage languages, 78% agreed that more assistance should be provided to help minority groups learn Maltese and English. This suggests a much greater perceived priority for support in host-language acquisition over heritage language maintenance.

### *Final thoughts from respondents*

To give a tangible voice to the respondents, we concluded the survey by inviting additional thoughts. A selection of responses, which reflect the collective sentiments of several parents, has been included in this section to serve as closing remarks and points for reflection.

Several respondents felt that it is beneficial for children to learn and use multiple languages at home. Many expressed their belief that children are capable of learning multiple languages simultaneously and that they should be bold and practice these languages. One respondent stated:

- (1) *I think speaking languages should be embraced and used as much as possible, at home in public, everywhere... one must not be embarrass[s]ed of speaking a foreign language as much as shouldn't be embarrass[s]ed of trying to learn the host country language... [The] only way to improve a new language is to speak and get others to help you improve it. So keeping it at home won't help.*

The vast majority of respondents stress the importance of maintaining the heritage language, highlighting the need for children to stay connected to their cultural and linguistic roots. They mention the value of learning the languages spoken in the host country without neglecting the heritage language, with one respondent stressing that:

- (2) *[children] have to remember where they come from, [their] origin country language and history.*

A few respondents bring forward the idea that using the heritage language at home can be important for a child's emotional well-being, asserting that it allows children to express feelings and emotions more comfortably. One respondent stated that:

- (3) *If [a] child was not born in the host country it's easier to express feelings and emotions in heritage language, and [as] you know, it's very important for mental health to have a chance to express your emotions.*

Many parents express the belief that being multilingual contributes to a child's development and provides access to different perspectives and thought processes. This underscores the importance of exposing children to various languages:

- (4) *As a multi-language person, myself, I'm a strongly believer that true bilingualism not only contributes to a genetic child development, but also provides access to a bit different thought processes, as every language captures a slightly different and unique perspective of the surrounding world. It even applies to academic development, for example graduate math text books are way more concise and easier to comprehend in Hebrew - which is very structured and laconic - than in extremely verbose and a bit chaotic Russian. In Malta we are very happy that we can expose our children to more languages on a daily basis in a live speaking environment.*

Lastly, many respondents express their desire for more opportunities for their children to learn English and Maltese. They hope for their children to understand what their teachers say and what goes on in their classrooms, emphasising the significance of language proficiency in the host languages for effective communication, integration and academic success.

- (5) *My wish for the children in Malta who have not yet learned English and Maltese should be more attention in the schools where they learn, the school should be more focused on how children learn languages...*
- (6) *I would like to have a chance for my kid to study Maltese language apart from school by means of government support, [because] we do not have a possibility to pay extra for studying Maltese but at the same time my daughter has a strong willing to learn the language, [because] she likes it and pretend to stay on Malta "forever" how she says.*

Some respondents highlight the need for more accessible courses for the Maltese language for both children and parents. They suggest implementing online courses that are held in the afternoon with the aim to support language development, particularly since online courses can be critically helpful for migrants facing transport challenges.

- (7) *... it would be very beneficial for the kids and their guardians if the government can implement more courses specially for Maltese language because as parents we can not help them too much since we are also not familiar with the language. Those courses could be online in the afternoon hours on a daily basis... This could be done for parents as well but only online due to other obligations as well as limited transportation.*

The above thoughts collectively reflect the experiences, aspirations, and concerns of the respondents as they navigate language acquisition and education in Malta. They underscore the importance of language support, and effective language education for children from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

## **Discussion**

The findings of this study offer valuable insights into the family language policies of migrant families in Malta, highlighting participants' linguistic practices, beliefs, and attitudes towards maintaining their heritage languages while integrating into the host society. Given that the study is based on a relatively small sample of 32 participants, the findings should be interpreted with caution, as the limited sample size constrains the generalisability of the results. This section critically examines the findings and situates them within the broader scholarly discourse on FLP, multilingualism, and language acquisition.

Results reveal that migrant families in Malta predominantly use a combination of English and their heritage language in everyday communication, with Maltese playing a marginal role. This aligns with previous studies (e.g. King et al., 2008; Salomone, 2022) that underscore the dominance of English as a global language. English is particularly evident in media consumption and digital interactions, suggesting that exposure to English extends beyond interpersonal communication and is reinforced by external societal factors and technology. Heritage languages have a strong presence in familial settings, particularly during mealtimes and in interactions between parents and children, underscoring the vital role of the home in language maintenance (Fishman, 1991). The limited use of Maltese within the home suggests that while families may acknowledge its importance, they struggle to incorporate it into daily linguistic routines. This may be due to several factors, including parental proficiency, limited access to Maltese-language resources, and the prevalence of English as a lingua franca in Malta.

Participants overwhelmingly expressed positive attitudes towards bilingualism and multilingualism, with the majority agreeing that proficiency in both the heritage language and the host country's languages benefits children's academic development and future career prospects locally and abroad. These findings echo those of previous

research indicating that multilingual competence is widely perceived as an asset in the globalised labour market (OECD, 2021).

Interestingly, a considerable proportion of respondents rejected the notion that speaking more than one language confuses a child, reinforcing the idea that migrant families understand the cognitive and social advantages of speaking multiple languages (Bialystok, 2009a; 2009b). The disagreement with the statement that only the heritage language should be spoken at home further suggests an openness to linguistic diversity within the household. Notwithstanding this, 38% of respondents believed that speaking the heritage language may negatively impact the acquisition of Maltese and English suggesting that concerns about linguistic interference still persist among some families. This belief may stem from common misconceptions about language acquisition, as research has consistently demonstrated that the learning of additional languages (Grosjean, 2010) does not hinder linguistic development.

The data on children's afterschool activities further corroborates the dominance of English in migrant households. English is the preferred language for watching television, playing online games, and consuming digital content, with the heritage language occasionally used, particularly on platforms such as YouTube. The near absence of Maltese in these activities is noteworthy and raises concerns about the limited exposure children have to the national language outside of school. Given the strong link between input and proficiency in language acquisition, the lack of Maltese-language exposure in informal settings may contribute to weaker competence in the language, as reflected in parental assessments of their children's language skills. Moreover, while many families engage in reading activities in English and their heritage language, reading in Maltese remains infrequent. This aligns with the data on book ownership, which indicates that children tend to have significantly fewer books in Maltese compared to English and heritage languages. Such disparities may be attributed to the limited availability of children's literature in Maltese, parental language preferences, or a perceived lower necessity for Maltese literacy. These findings underscore the importance of initiatives aimed at increasing accessibility to Maltese-language reading materials for migrant families.

The differences in heritage language proficiency between younger and older siblings point to a common phenomenon observed in migrant families: language shift across generations (De Houwer, 2018). The

eldest children, having spent more time in the home country before migrating, tend to exhibit stronger proficiency in the heritage language compared to their younger siblings, who are more immersed in the linguistic environment of the host country. This suggests that prolonged exposure to the heritage language without deliberate reinforcement, younger siblings may experience a gradual shift towards the dominant societal languages, leading to heritage language attrition over time (Brehmer, B. & Treffers-Daller, 2020; Montrul, 2016).

A significant number of respondents reported an increased use of mixed-language communication since migrating to Malta, with English emerging as the dominant language in daily interactions. This shift is driven by various factors, including the need for integration, workplace demands, and children's schooling. In Malta's bilingual landscape, where English functions as a second official language and is extensively used in educational and professional domains, the increased reliance on English suggests that migrants perceive English as a practical and widely accepted medium of communication in Maltese society.

The responses regarding government support reveal an interesting dichotomy. While a strong majority of respondents believe that more governmental assistance is needed for migrants to learn Maltese and English, fewer respondents prioritised support for heritage language maintenance. The neutral stance of many respondents towards heritage language support may indicate a perception that language maintenance is primarily a private or community-driven responsibility. However, the strong agreement on the need for increased support for learning Maltese and English suggests that many families recognise the challenges associated with integrating into the host society due to language barriers.

## **Conclusion**

Parental language ideologies play a central role in shaping FLP (De Houwer, 2017; Gauci 2025). Many migrant parents perceive bilingualism or multilingualism as a social and economic advantage, believing that proficiency in multiple languages can enhance their children's career prospects, self-esteem, and ability to integrate into society (Gogonas & Kirsch, 2018; Moin et al., 2013). At the same time, political factors also influence FLP, particularly in terms of access to education, government policies on language learning, and the perceived status of different languages (Curdt-Christiansen, 2009; Curdt-Christiansen & Huang,

2022). For some families, maintaining their heritage language is not only a matter of cultural identity but also a strategic decision to secure future opportunities for their children.

In this study thirty-two migrant parents with children attending school in Malta disclosed their family language practices and their attitudes towards maintaining their heritage language alongside learning the languages of schooling, Maltese and English. Despite this being a small-scale study, its findings can provide important insights for local policymakers, educators, and community organisations.

First, results indicate that parents place significant value on their children's heritage language, and their children demonstrate strong proficiency in it. This may be attributed to the fact that most parents have only recently migrated to Malta, and all but one of the children were born outside the country. Parents consistently assessed their children's heritage language speaking and comprehension skills as 'excellent'. It is crucial that such linguistic knowledge be sustained over the years. Recognising heritage languages as valuable assets, it is essential to promote awareness of the benefits of maintaining these languages alongside acquiring the host country's language. Community-based heritage language programs, multilingual education initiatives, and culturally inclusive policies can contribute to a linguistically diverse and inclusive society, where heritage languages are acknowledged and nurtured as the valuable resources they truly are.

Second, findings reveal that a multilingual approach is prevalent in all respondents' home environments, with most parents perceiving multilingualism as an asset—an encouraging outcome. Parents view proficiency in the host country's language, particularly English, as crucial for their children's integration and future opportunities. However, the reported shift toward English within these households warrants attention. Parents note that their children have extensive access to books in English, are frequently exposed to English media, and that their own language practices have shifted towards increased use of English since relocating to Malta. In addition, while parents express a strong desire for their children to learn English, there is comparatively less emphasis on the need for learning Maltese or maintaining the heritage language. This trend is understandable, given English's status as a global lingua franca and its perceived importance for future success. However, it also raises concerns about the potential emergence of a monolingual mindset. To counteract this, greater institutional and

governmental support is needed to promote both heritage and host languages acquisition. While prioritising English proficiency is logical for global communication and academic achievement, fostering true multilingualism requires a more comprehensive approach—one that equally values the maintenance of the home language alongside learning the languages of the host society.

Third, the findings indicate that the Maltese language holds a less prominent role in these households. A possible contributing factor is the limited availability of resources for learning Maltese. Given that the Maltese language serves as a key marker of identity and belonging in the country (Gauci, 2024), addressing its underrepresentation among migrant families is crucial. Efforts should be made to enhance the accessibility and appeal of Maltese-language resources, particularly in digital media. Furthermore, schools and local institutions should adopt a more active role in promoting Maltese acquisition by implementing structured programs that facilitate interaction with native speakers and provide engaging, high-quality learning materials.

Finally, despite a growing body of international research on FLP, studies focusing on Malta's migrant communities remain limited. By addressing this gap, this study sought to shed light on the specific ways in which migrant families in Malta manage their linguistic resources, negotiate language ideologies, and navigate sociopolitical constraints, thus offering insights that can inform language policy.

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The Authors report that there are no competing interests to declare.

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## Appendix: Survey questions for parents

Thank you for choosing to participate to this survey. We'd like to learn more about the language/s used in your family environment. The terms 'first language' or 'heritage language' refer to the language you grew up speaking in your country before coming to Malta. The 'languages spoken in the host country' refer to Maltese and English, the official languages spoken in Malta.

1. Your age group (tick as appropriate)
2. Your gender (tick as appropriate)
3. For how long have you been living in Malta?
4. For how long do you plan to live in Malta?
5. How many children under your care attend compulsory schooling in Malta?
6. How many of them were born in Malta?
7. What is the age of your oldest child attending compulsory school in Malta?
8. How would you describe your household (people living in the same home)?
9. What is your nationality?
10. What is your first language?
11. Does your partner speak a different first language from you?
12. What languages are used within your family?
13. What languages are used at home in the following situations? (eight situations presented)
14. What languages are used when SPEAKING at home? (seven situations presented)
15. What languages are used when WRITING at home (including text messages and emails)
16. What do you think of the following statements? (eleven statements presented to gauge respondents' beliefs)
17. On average, how much time does your child spend on the following activities at home? (nine activities presented)
18. How frequently in a typical week, do the following language activities take place in your home? (seven activities presented)
19. Indicate how many books (including ebooks) does your child own.
  - i) books in Maltese
  - ii) books in English
  - iii) books in your heritage language
20. How would you describe your children's competence in Maltese, English and your heritage language for each one of the following language skills? speaking/ understanding/ reading/ writing
21. How would you compare your eldest and youngest child's ability to use the heritage language?
22. What about you? Have your language practices changed since you started raising your child in Malta?
23. Why do you think this happened?
24. Please indicate the most influential people in helping your children maintain the heritage language?

25. What do you think of the following statements? (five statements presented to gauge respondents' perspectives)
26. It is better for the child if only the languages of the host country are used at home. Do you agree/disagree? Why?
27. Do you have any additional thoughts or comments?