

# JOURNAL OF THE FACULTY OF ARTS

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## COMMENT

This number begins the second volume of *Journal of the Faculty of Arts*. It is a larger issue than the previous ones to make up for the longer time we took to bring it out. The next issue will be devoted entirely to Maltese Studies, a specialised number which will bring before our readers at home and abroad, material of linguistic and literary interest at scholarly level. The next issue of the Journal will bear the title of *Journal of Maltese Studies* edited under the auspices of the Chair of Maltese by the holder of the Chair. Such a number will be an additional periodical publication that can, and should, be bound separately. We hope that those that want to know more about Maltese linguistics, folklore and Melitensia in general will like, and support, the supplementary publication.

This number contains two articles by two Fulbright scholars who spent some time teaching in our University. We are always glad to maintain direct personal contact with our American colleagues who for one academic year worked with us in a University which, though small in material dimensions, yet counts 368 years of academic existence.

Unfortunately, the financial life of the institution is beset with so many hazards and difficulties that, with all the best will in the world, we cannot do all we would like to do for the promotion of knowledge. The publication of this Journal and other similar publications is a voluntary effort, a self-imposed task, that has been kept going at great personal sacrifice. Nothing has disappointed us so much as the absence in the Hetherington and subsequent reports of any official recognition of the value of such efforts and the need for subsidizing such reviews as well as finding money for publication of research works and providing travelling expenses to enable members of the teaching staff to attend Congresses. None the less, we have managed to edit this Journal in order to provide an organ for the Faculty of Arts, and through it maintain and increase contacts with British and continental Universities. Our exchange scheme has proved successful and, with more cooperation and response, students and members of the teaching staff will be able to enjoy a larger measure of the academic



fellowship that animates the world of learning and thus overcome the unfavourable conditions of insular isolation so harmful to learning and growth. ]

In the meantime, we have to continue working against odds such as are unknown to our British colleagues in the U.K., we work and hope, undeterred – hope that the University of Malta will one day be treated (the sooner the better) with greater generosity and imagination by the Government of the day than it has been treated so far. It has been said very well that the most expensive of constructional plans, however urgently needed, can produce no more than an empty shell, no more than a costly impressive façade, if the men that live and work inside this shell are not happy and satisfied that they are well treated as a teaching and research body. The letters that have been appearing in the press and the comments made by some of the correspondents have all stressed the need for a more urgent consideration of the academic and personal requirements of the institution, the personal well-being of the teaching staff. The Institution lacks an effective liaison machinery operating punctually between it and the Government on whose meagre block vote, unincreased since 1958 in spite of two increases to civil servants, it entirely depends for survival and continuance. ]

We produce this Journal to travel abroad and meet new friends across the seas through the written word. But we need more than this; we need comprehension at home and continual personal contact with our colleagues in Britain and on the continent. We need also friends really interested in the well-being of the University. We owe much to the Inter-University Council for Higher Education Overseas. Yet we still need something that has not been given us so far – a publication fund for the promotion of research, money for digging deeper down into our rich native soil in search of undiscovered treasures and expanding wider afield. We need also another fund to make it possible for our scholars to attend Conferences and Congresses abroad. ]

A progressive University must be helped to overcome the many disadvantages of an insular society and government. Without such help it cannot prosper whatever the physical dimensions of a new University building elsewhere. ]

## THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE IN SOCIETY\*

(A talk given at the Convent of the Sacred Heart to the members of the Private Schools' Association on January 3, 1958)

By J. AQUILINA

'WHY have you chosen this subject at all?' some of you may feel inclined to ask. 'This is not a Congress of Linguists, but a gathering of Private Schools teachers.' I see your point and I think I owe you an explanation, but I certainly do not owe you an apology for choosing this subject. For what subject plays a larger and more significant part than language in the schools both as the medium of instruction and itself a subject-matter of intense study in a country that, rightly, attaches great importance to the teaching of languages? The premise from which I draw the conclusion of such importance is justified by the importance of the social purpose that Language serves.

Language is a means of inter-class and inter-group communication. It is man's natural means of mental contact with organized society; and within that society Language serves multifarious social purposes. We educate our young men and women for a purpose that is likewise social, and in using language to communicate ideas and principles of conduct, we fulfil a social purpose of the highest order. Here is, therefore, at the very beginning of this talk, a statement of the greatest significance; namely *that Language is a natural means of communication and self-expression*. Language is to ideas, from which actions and behaviours spring naturally, what a bottle is to the liquid it contains. Its capacity determines the quantity of the content.

One can assess the intellectual and social capacity of the British from their mixed and varied vocabulary and the way the words are strung together in the spoken and written language at its various levels. So also one could assess the intellectual and social capacity of the Italians, the Arabs, the Greeks and the Japanese. Consider carefully and then compare the vocabulary of a Bantu tribe with that of a highly civilised Greek community of Aristotle's time, and you have evidence enough on which to draw if you wish to establish various degrees of social and linguistic relationships.

\* This talk originally published serially in *The Bulletin* (Jan. 30, 1958 - Feb. 5, 1959), is reprinted here with thanks to the Editor.