

Television rights and viewers' expectations

The Maltese people, like most other societies in western societies, love watching their favourite television programmes and can become quite passionate in their protests when their preferred channels are suddenly taken off air because of some cryptic reason. This happened recently when the two major pay TV providers, Go and Melita, announced they were discontinuing the transmission of two popular channels: Living and Comedy.

It is still not clear why this happened, even if there are indications the retransmission of the two channels by the local TV service providers was not perfectly above board. A spokesman for the owners of the channels was quoted as saying the TV service providers in Malta did not have the necessary permits or authorisation to include Living in their packages and that it was not possible to consent to such transmissions. So, it may not be just

a question of someone not wanting to pay the transmission rights to relay services to Maltese paying subscribers.

Many subscribers argued vehemently in online comments to The Times they do not care why they are being deprived of the channels in question because they have a legal right to receive the full lineup of programmes they contracted for. Some are not happy with the substitute channels offered by the TV providers as these are not considered similar to those taken off air.

If such a dispute between service providers and subscribers were to escalate, it is probable the already significant use of satellite TV or internet-enabled receivers will become more prevalent. The problem with this option is it may still breach transmission rights regulations and can, thus, be illegal. TV service providers in Malta are already finding that their market share of paying sub-

scribers is shrinking as more people opt for satellite and internet TV options.

A compromise needs to be found to reconcile restrictions on transmission rights of local service providers and the expectations of subscribers who feel they should not be asked to make do with alternative channels they do not like. It is difficult to understand why the retransmission of such channels cannot resume after proper talks and agreements between the transmission rights owners and the service providers. Surely, if there is a marketable commodity and a willing buyer for that commodity a deal can be struck that can benefit both parties.

If this attempt fails, then the service providers need to change their take-it-or-leave-it attitude and offer subscribers a real choice to compensate for their inability to get the service they were promised. It will be in the best interest of the service providers to give more added

value to their subscribers rather than skimp on what they are prepared to offer for failing to honour their commitment with clients.

Television transmission via satellite or the internet is becoming increasingly feasible and the rates charged are often very competitive. As already stated, this option is, in some cases, illegal and, as such, constitutes unfair competition to the local service providers. This may be so but enforcing the law in this case may prove to be difficult and very unpopular if the service providers are perceived not to be giving good value-for-money to local subscribers or, worse, if they appear to be able to violate the law with impunity.

It is, therefore, still the right time for TV service providers to come up with a better offer to compensate their subscribers for their inability to provide them with the full service they had promised.

Letters to the Editor

All pensioners should be treated equally

I refer to the letter by Kurt Farrugia, the Labour Party's director of communications (Labour Supported Cause Of Former Servicemen, December 17).

All pensioners are very happy and satisfied with the European Commission's position regarding British Services pensioners.

For the last 30 years, pensioner associations and the pensioners themselves have always insisted that the abatement of a service pension (any service pension) from the two-thirds pension entitlement was a huge injustice to all pensioners

who are entitled to a service pension from any source.

However, it has to be pointed out that the amendments to the Social Security Act in 1997 were not only unjust but also discriminatory to thousands of pensioners who were not entitled to a service pension from the British Services.

The measure created a division between two categories of pensioners, that is, those who have a service pension from the British Services and the others who are entitled to a service pension from other employers.

Since 2007, the present Administration took action to address and rectify this injustice although at a very slow pace.

In the circumstances, as a pensioner of the second category, it is expected that the Labour Party, which "supported the cause of former servicemen", will show the same enthusiasm towards the thousands of other pensioners who are still experiencing this uncalled for injustice. All pensioners should be treated equally in terms of law.

Carmel Mallia
Lija

Prompt action to remove unsightly pole in Valletta

I refer to the letter by Peter Montebello, Valletta Belvedere Has Been Ruined (December 15). It infers a lack of coordination between Mario de Marco, Parliamentary Secretary for Tourism, the Environment and Culture on the one hand and the Malta Environment and Planning Authority on the other. The latter allegedly gave permission to erect a pole "right in the centre" of the "belvedere" near the Upper Barrakka Gardens overlooking St Ursola Street, Valletta.

Unfortunately, Mr Montebello got his "lack of coordination" facts wrong: the pole was erected under the authority of Transport Malta for purposes of the CVA system.

Mepa did not grant any permission to erect such a pole nor was it notified that such a pole was to be erected because, in

terms of LN 115 of 2007, Mepa needs to be notified only if such type of works are attached to a scheduled building.

Given that this was not the case, no notification or permit was necessary on the part of Mepa.

Moreover, it is, thankfully, not customary to notify the parliamentary secretary on poles to be erected in Valletta or any part of Malta, for that matter.

Despite the fact that it is not Mepa's or the parliamentary secretary's responsibility to remove the pole, the matter was taken up with CVA Malta Ltd, which have since removed the said pole.

Alessia Zammit
communications officer
Parliamentary Secretariat for
Tourism, the Environment and
Culture
Valletta

With regard to my letter about the ruined "belvedere" in Valletta, which appeared in The Times last Wednesday, I appreciate the very

prompt action taken to remove the eyesore on Friday, two days later.
Peter Montebello
Żejtun

Mediaeval poet's place of confinement

First of all I wish to point out that the excellent turnout for the recent talks by Godfrey Wettinger at Castille and Stanley Fiorini and Charles Dalli at the Curia shows that what happened in late mediaeval Malta generates a lot of interest. The three speakers expounded their views from healthily different angles.

With reference to Prof. Fiorini's letter (December 14) regarding my article Muslim Malta And Christian Gozo? (December 6), my point is that the poet does not say he was exiled in Gozo and that the manuscript's notes say the place of confinement was "Malta" twice and "Melitegaudo" once. As to compounds, there are many categories with different semantic associations

(a letterbox is a box, a cutthroat is not a throat, a *capostazione* is a *capo*, an *autostrada* is a *strada*) and there is also the coordinative type (fighter-bomber, Anglo-Saxon, tragicomic, bittersweet). In the poem in question, the compound Melitegaudo/Melitegaudo is used only with reference to Publius and Roger II, two events that affected both islands: the compound is therefore coordinative. This is confirmed by a Greek professor who teaches general linguistics and specialises in word structure.

Drawing in Giliberto Abate complicates matters: his 1241 report was not a census (as Mr Dalli proves), it was drawn up 100 years after the Greek poet's exile and historians still have to reconcile his figures with the

fact that a number of Muslims had already been expelled from Malta in 1223-24 while rebels from Celano were sent here in 1224.

In such a poorly-lit period, hypotheses will remain hypotheses with varying degrees of plausibility. Arguing that Gozo was not Muslimised, because Al-Himyari does not mention it, is as sound as saying that Gozo was not Christianised by St Paul because Luke only mentions Malta. The continuity of Christianity in Malta and Gozo does not depend on the Greek poem. Although I strongly believe in popularisation, I will discuss linguistic evidence on this intriguing matter in detail in a scholarly publication.

Joseph M. Brincat
St Julians

The national carrier: a reliable airline

Do those who make the rules at the EU now understand why we cannot do without our national airline?

It is the only airline that really cares about Malta and the Maltese. The others take the easy way out and cancel flights leaving their

passengers stranded and joining in the chaos at foreign airports!
Charles Micallef
Qawra

Incorrect language used by some television stations

Readers like me must have noticed the warning prior to programmes on TVM and, more recently, even on another channel, saying: "Dan il-programm fih tqeghid tal-prodott".

It would be appropriate if someone explained what it means. In my opinion, this is a literal translation of "product

placement" and it is obviously totally incorrect. The construction is definitely not Maltese.

I deserve to be illuminated and corrected if wrong. If I am right, I expect the TV stations to refrain from perpetuating this misuse of the Maltese language.

Joseph Micallef
Msida