

How to build a cathedral

The lack of a comprehensive and accessible grammar of Maltese is a major problem not only for linguists working on Maltese, but among the Maltese educators and the interested public as well. The closest thing to it, Borg and Azzopardi-Alexander (1997), remains eminently useful, but the description of Maltese it established has been expanded in multiple ways, and its idiosyncratic form makes it difficult for any non-specialist to access.

In this paper, we propose a roadmap to a new comprehensive grammar of Maltese (codenamed “*il-Katidral*”). This roadmap is based on the following assumptions about the nature of *il-Katidral*:

1. **Accessible:**
 - a. *il-Katidral* must be written in both English and Maltese.
 - b. It should be readily understood by both a specialist and an educated layperson.
 - c. As such, it must not be beholden to any linguistic framework, be it formal or just of the “this is how things are done” type.
 - d. Consequently, a clear and concise metalanguage should be established a priori and updated as necessary.
 - e. *il-Katidral* must be available to all and readily updated; this is ideally achieved by establishing an online version of the grammar.
2. **Comprehensive:**
 - a. *il-Katidral* should cover all aspects of the language at the same level of thoroughness.
 - b. *il-Katidral* will not be a prescriptive grammar, but rather reflect the Maltese language as it is spoken and written...
 - c. ... while also maintaining clear distinction between what is generally accepted and what is special/marked usage.
3. **Accountable:**
 - a. *il-Katidral* must be based on data collected and analyzed in a transparent manner.
 - b. To achieve its goals, *il-Katidral* must be the product of a consensus, not the work of a single person.
 - c. At the same time, the process must be driven by one or two people, otherwise nothing will ever get done. This person (or persons) must also have the authority to make decisions in cases when – inevitably – no consensus can be reached.
 - d. Consequently, a system of governance must be in place to safeguard the transparency and accountability of the process.

This paper briefly addresses the reasoning behind these principles and proposes a way to implement them. Additionally, we will demonstrate some of the more practical aspects of the work involved (metalanguage selection, entry design, workflow) and show several examples of what (parts of) the finished *Katidral* may look like.

References:

Borg, Albert, and Marie Azzopardi-Alexander. *Maltese*. London: Routledge, 1997.