

# Maltese Puzzle and Solution

## Question: Malteaser

Study the following Maltese nouns, which are given together with the definite article (meaning 'the'). The English translations are given for your information, but are not relevant to the problem.

il bar	(bar)	l hemm	(grief)	li bdiewa	(peasants)
il ktieb (*)	(book)	is sħana	(heat)	li mħadda	(pillow)
il ġobon (*)	(cheese)	id dar	(house)	il qassis	(priest)
iċ ċirasa	(cherry)	iż żir	(jug)	il ward	(roses)
li ksieħ	(cold)	ir raġel	(man)	is silġ	(snow)
l jum	(day)	iċ ċpar	(mist)	ix xemx	(sun)
li ħmar	(donkey)	l għonq	(neck)	il vjola	(violet)
l art	(earth)	l uffiċċju	(office)	il mara	(woman)
il lvant	(east)	il langas	(pear)		

Pronunciation guide: ċ = 'ch' as in 'church' (IPA [tʃ])

ġ is like English 'j' in 'judge' (IPA [dʒ])

h is like in English except at the beginning of a word, when it is silent

ħ is a sound made at the back of the throat, like the 'ch' in German, but much further back, a voiceless pharyngeal fricative (IPA [ħ]). But the sequence 'gh', which is treated as a separate letter, is silent.

j is like 'y' in 'yes' (IPA [j])

q is a glottal stop, the sound in the middle of 'uh-oh' (IPA [ʔ])

x = 'sh' as in 'shoe' (IPA [ʃ])

z = 'ts' as in 'bits'

ż = z as in 'zoo'

All other letters have their expected values

D1. In your answer book, give the appropriate form of the definite article for the following nouns:

lura (back), qamar (moon), ors (bear), nar (fire), xahar (mouth), demm (blood), hena (happiness), mniħer (nose), nifs (breath), ras (head), forn (oven), geddum (chin), tama (hope), patata (potato), bliet (cities), ħadid (iron), bejt (roof), kafè (coffee), ġżira (island), xkora (sack), dlam (darkness), ilsna (language), żarbun (shoe), għajn (eye), beraq (lightning), azzar (steel), wiċċ (face), suq (market), zokor (sugar), missier (father), ilma (water)

D2. The two words marked (\*) don't seem to fit the rules. What would you expect the form of the definite article to be in these two cases?

D3. (Bonus marks) Briefly summarise the rules for the Maltese definite article seen in these examples (excluding the two examples marked \*).

Maltese is a Semitic language, arguably a dialect of Arabic, and is the national language of Malta, where it is spoken by about 560,000 people. Along with English it is an official language in Malta, and is also one of the European Union's official languages.

## Malteaser Solution

D1. Give the appropriate form of the definite article:

il lura	il qamar	l ors	in nar	ix xahar	id demm	l hena
li mniher	in nifs	ir ras	il forn	il geddum	it tama	il patata
li bliet	il ħadid	il bejt	il kafè	li gżira	ix xkora	id dlam
l ilsna	iż żarbun	l għajn	il beraq	l azzar	il wiċċ	is suq
iz zokor	il missier	l ilma				

D2. What would you expect the form of the definite article to be in the two (\*) cases?

li ktieb      iġ ġobon

D3. (Bonus marks) Briefly summarize the rules for the Maltese definite article seen in these examples (excluding the two examples marked \*).

1. i+C if C is one of {ċ,d,l,n,r,s,t,x,z,ż} ie dental/alveolar sound
2. l before vowel (incl. j) or silent letter
3. li before consonant cluster unless first consonant is one of those in rule 1.
4. otherwise il