

## Morphological Complexity in Maltese: A Divergence from canonicity

This paper is a first attempt at systematically looking at what aspects of morphological complexity exist in Maltese, and describe what is taking place. Complexity as used here is understood in terms of form-function mismatches, thus a divergence from what is canonical (Corbett, 2005, 2007). Morphological complexity in Maltese can be looked at from two dimensions: Paradigm-internal complexity, and complexity which appertains to the binyanim system.

Paradigm-internal complexity in Maltese will essentially focus on stem-changes, where Maltese seems to have five distinct stem-classes. The formation of stem-classes comes about as a result of processes such as ablaut, stress-pattern alternations, syllable-structure changes, and stem-extensions. The analysis of stem-classes becomes even more intricate once more bound forms follow the suffixes, in which case verbs may shift their stem-class membership, reduce the number of stem-alternations, and/or increase the inventory of stem-classes. In relation to this stem-class analysis, the discussion pursues to see whether it is the case that the perfective form is more basic and underlies the imperfective form, or vice-versa, as both arguments are found in the literature. Evidence from stem-classes may help us towards a better understanding of what is actually taking place in this regard.

In the case of the binyanim, I discuss a potential hypothesis, following Bakir (1996), that as in other Arabic dialects, the binyanim are active morphology, where what is thought to be passive prefixes are treated as argument-structure-changing affixes. In this context, the availability of possible deponency will be discussed. Moreover, by looking at what internal grammatical functions some verbs may subcategorise for, examples are provided which challenge the tradition that certain prefixes on some verbs are instances of passive morphology in Maltese, as held in (Borg 1988, Hoberman & Aronoff, 2003). Evidence that in the case of some verbs the binyan is an active form comes from the fact that the exponent of passive morphosyntactic features is a periphrastic construction, and not the synthetic word-form within the given binyan. In discussing passive morphology and ways to construct a passive form in Maltese, one sees that we get instances of overabundance within the paradigmatic cells (Thornton, 2010), e.g. *ċ-ċaħd-et* intrans-deny.PERF-3.sg.f ‘was denied’ ~ *gie-t mi-ċħud-a* ‘come.PERF-3sgf PASS-deny-sg.f ‘was denied’. Furthermore, the very existence of periphrastic expressions alone, which act as exponents of passive voice for some verbs, may potentially act as arguments that the binyanim may be an instance of active morphology. Moreover, overabundance and periphrastic expressions is what intersects between the Semitic and non-Semitic parts of the language and implies potential directions of change. Finally, heteroclisis (Stump, 2006) in the binyanim system is discussed in relation to the perfective paradigms of the 1st and 2nd binyanim of a very restricted set of verbs. The availability of heteroclisis within the binyanim in turn makes us want to review the long standing tradition of considering these patterns as part of derivational morphology.

References:

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