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DEFINITENESS MARKING AND THE STRUCTURE OF THE NP IN MALTESE

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RÉSUMÉ

Cet article décrit le marquage de la définitude dans le NP (syntagme nominal) maltais et discute ses implications viis-à-vis de la structure du NP, ou plus précisément du DP. La définitude en maltais peut être marquée (a) sur le nom et les adjectifs épithètes qui le modifient, (b) sur le nom mis pas sur l'adjectif ou (c) non-marquée, ni sur le nom, ni sur l'adjectif. La quatrième option —marquage de la définitude sur l'adjectif et pas sur le nom— n'apparaît pas. Cet article explore les contextes où (a), (b) et (c) apparaissent, ainsi que d'autres données en rapport avec la définitude, notamment l'occurrence d'un article défini sur d'autres éléments du NP, sa non-occurrence à l'état construit et sa cooccurrence avec le démonstratif. Ces données, nous permettent de tirer des conclusions sur la structure du NP en maltais.

ABSTRACT

The article describes the facts about definiteness marking in the noun phrase (NP) in Maltese, and discusses the implications of the data for the structure of the NP or, more precisely, the Determiner Phrase (DP). Definiteness in the noun phrase in Maltese can be marked (a) both on the noun and the attributive adjective modifying it, (b) only on the noun but not on the attributive adjective, or (c) on neither the noun and the adjective. The fourth logical option of having definiteness marked on the adjective but not on the noun does not occur. The article explores the contexts in which (a) (b) and (c) occur, together with other facts concerning definiteness, namely the occurrence of the definite article on other elements in the NP apart from nouns, its non-occurrence in the construct state, and its co-occurrence with the demonstrative. On the basis of the data conclusions are drawn about the structure of the noun phrase in Maltese.

1. THE FORM OF THE DEFINITE ARTICLE

In Maltese the underlying form of the definite article, which is prefixed to the word it precedes, is /l/ (orthographically 'l-' in the following examples).

- | | | | |
|--------------------|------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| (1) a. <i>arka</i> | b. <i>l-arka</i> | c. <i>ittra</i> | d. <i>l-ittra</i> |
| ark | DEF-ark | letter | DEF-letter |
| 'ark' | 'the ark' | 'letter' | 'the letter' |

Depending on the phonological environment it occurs in, /l/ undergoes the phonological processes of /i/-epenthesis and consonant assimilation. There are two forms of /i/-epenthesis: "outer" and "inner" epenthesis. Outer epenthesis takes place when the word that it is affixed to starts with a consonant (see (2b) and (2d)), and the article is not preceded by a word ending in a vowel (cmp. (2e) and (2f)).

- | | | | |
|---------------------|--------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| (2) a. <i>ktieb</i> | b. <i>il-ktieb</i> | c. <i>ħanut</i> | d. <i>il-ħanut</i> |
| book | DEF-book | shop | DEF-shop |
| 'book' | 'the book' | 'shop' | 'the shop' |
| e. <i>Ta-ni</i> | <i>l-ktieb</i> | f. <i>Ta-k</i> | <i>il-ktieb</i> |
| gave-me | DEF-book | gave-you | DEF-book |
| 'He gave me | 'the book' | 'He gave you | 'the book' |

Inner epenthesis occurs when the noun starts with a consonant cluster having initial [s, ʃ] (graphemically *s* and *x*).

- | | | | |
|---------------------|--------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| (3) a. <i>skola</i> | b. <i>l-iskola</i> | c. <i>xkora</i> | d. <i>l-ixkora</i> |
| school | DEF-school | sack | DEF-sack |
| 'school' | 'the school' | 'sack' | 'the sack' |

If the word that the article is attached to begins with the coronal consonants /d/, /t/, /s/, /z/, /ʃ/, /ts/, /tʃ/, /n/, /r/ (graphemically *d*, *t*, *s*, *z*, *x*, *z*, *ç*, *n*, *r*) progressive assimilation takes place (see (4) below). It is interesting to note that /dʒ/ (graphemically *ġ*) is the only coronal consonant that does not trigger assimilation.

- | | | |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| (4) a. <i>dinja</i> | b. <i>id-dinja</i> | c. <i>*il-dinja</i> |
| world | DEF-world | DEF-world |
| 'world' | 'the world' | |
| (5) a. <i>zokk</i> | b. <i>iz-zokk</i> | c. <i>*il-zokk</i> |
| twig | DEF-twig | DEF-twig |
| 'twig' | 'the twig' | |
| (6) a. <i>ġnien</i> | b. <i>*iġ-ġnien</i> | c. <i>il-ġnien</i> |
| garden | DEF-garden | DEF-garden |
| 'garden' | | 'the garden' |

The above phonological properties show that the definite article is "phonologically very close" to the word that follows it and suggests that it is (morpho-phonologically) attached to that word, i.e. it is affixal in nature.

Note that indefiniteness is normally not explicitly marked in Maltese, i.e. there is no indefinite article (see (7a/b)). However, the word corresponding to the numeral one, i.e. *wieħed* (msg), *waħda* (fsg), which usually follows the noun it qualifies (see (7c/d)), sometimes precedes a noun denoting humans, in which case it is always interpreted as an indefinite article (see (7e/f)).

- (7) a. *Kien hemm mara* b. *Kien hemm qattusa/kaxxa*
 was there woman was there cat/box
 'There was a woman' 'There was a cat/box'
- c. *Kien hemm mara waħd-a*
 was there woman one-fsg
 'There was one woman'
- d. *Kien hemm qattusa/kaxxa waħd-a*
 was there cat/box one-fsg
 'There was one cat/box'
- e. *Kien hemm waħd-a mara*
 was there INDEF-fsg woman
 'There was a woman'
- f. **Kien hemm waħd-a qattusa/kaxxa*
 was there INDEF-fsg cat/box
 'There was a cat/box'

2. THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE DEFINITE ARTICLE

The definite article occurs as shown in examples (8 to 13) below:

A. before nouns

- (8) a. *il-ktieb* b. *il-kotb-a*
 DEF-book(msg) DEF-book-pl
 'the book' 'the books'

B. before numerals

- (9) a. *il-ħames kotb-a* b. *it-tmien buff-i*
 DEF-five book-pl DEF-eight clown-pl
 'the five books' 'the eight clowns'

C. before adjectives

- (10) a. *il-ktieb il-ġdid* b. *il-kotb-a il-ġodd-a*
 DEF-book(msg) DEF-new(msg) DEF-book-pl DEF-new-pl
 'the new book' 'the new books'
- c. *il-ħames kotb-a l-ġodd-a*
 DEF-five DEF-book-pl DEF-new-pl
 'the five new book'

D. before quantifiers

- (11) a. *il-ħafna/fiit* *kotb-a/storbju*
 DEF-many;much/few;litte book-pl/noise
 'the many books/much noise'

E. before the comparative

- (12) a. *l-isbaħ* *ktieb* b. *l-aktar ktieb interessanti*
 DEF-beautiful(superl) book DEF-most book interesting
 'the most beautiful book' 'the most interesting book'

F. after demonstratives

- (13) a. *dak il-ktieb* b. *dawk il-ħame kotb-a*
 that DEF-book those(pl) DEF-five book-pl
 'that book' 'those five books'
- c. *dak il-ktieb il-ġdid*
 that DEF-book(msg) DEF-new(msg)
 'that new book'
- d. *dawk il-ħames kotb-a l-ġodda*
 those DEF-five book-pl DEF-new(pl)
 'those five new books'
- e. *dawk il-ħafna/ftit kotb-a/storbju*
 those DEF-many;much/few;litte book-pl/noise
 'those many books/much noise'

In section 1 above, it was assumed that that the definite article in Maltese is affixal in nature, however assuming that the definite article is a prefix is problematic because it is not possible to characterise its host in a unified manner. In fact its morpho-syntactic properties suggest an analysis of the article as a phrasal clitic that attaches to the first element that follows the demonstrative within the noun phrase (see Anderson, 1995, and Zwicky, 1977, among others, for a general discussion of clitics). Unlike languages such as English or Italian, the demonstrative and the definite article in Maltese are not mutually exclusive, i.e. they are not in complementary distribution. The demonstrative obligatorily governs a definite noun phrase, i.e. a noun phrase that has a cliticised definite article.

To account for these facts of distribution, one could assume that there is a Demonstrative Phrase (DemP) dominating a Determiner Phrase (DP), with the definite article projecting a DP and the demonstrative projecting a DemP (see Fabri, 1993, for such a suggestion). Alternatively, one can assume that there is no such thing as a DemP and that the demonstrative occupies the D position in DP, just as it does in English. In this case, the definite article is not regarded as an element that occupies a syntactic position and that projects a phrase of its own (namely the DP), but as the post-syntactic spell-out of a morpho-syntactic [+def] feature in D. The [+def] feature is present in the set of features that define the noun phrase in question and obtains the relevant semantic/pragmatic interpretation in LF or at the conceptual level. Thus, [+def] is spelled out as the clitic // on the leftmost element in the NP dominated by DP. This seems to account for the phonological and distributional facts concerning the definite article, with the exception of its possible occurrence on the attributive adjective.

Recall that the definite article also appears on the attributive adjective, which occurs "inside" the noun phrase, to the right of the noun (see the examples in (10) above). Thus the above generalisation on the spell-out of // does not hold for the adjective because the adjective does not normally occur in front of the noun (except in one very rare and marked case discussed below in section 9). The examples in (10) above might suggest that the article is copied onto the adjective in case it appears on the leftmost element in the noun phrase. This might be interpreted as some form of agreement in terms of definiteness between the adjective and the rest of the noun phrase.

Languages such as Swedish and Classical Arabic, which mark definiteness by means of an affix rather than (or, as in the case of Swedish, as well as) by an unbound formative, also display covariation between the head noun and the attributive adjective with respect to the occurrence or non-occurrence of the definite article. (14) and (15) show some examples for Swedish, taken from Cooper (1986), and for Classical Arabic, taken from Lehmann (1982).

- (14) a. *en gammal häst* b. *den gamla häst-en*
 a old:INDEF horse:INDEF the old:DEF horse-DEF
 'an old horse' 'the old horse'
- (15) a. *qamar-u-n* *kabiir-u-n*
 moon-NOM-INDEF big-NOM-INDEF
 'a big moon'
- b. *al-qamar-u* *l-kabiir-u*
 DEF-moon-NOM DEF-big-NOM
 'the big moon'

The question is whether this form of covariation in terms of definiteness can be treated as a form of grammatical agreement, comparable to the agreement in terms of gender and number, or whether it is some completely different phenomenon. This paper is an attempt to answer the above question with respect to the Maltese data.

3. PREVIOUS TREATMENTS OF DEFINITENESS COVARIATION IN MALTESE

3.1. Schabert (1976)

In his book about Maltese, Schabert (1976) considers the covariation in question to be a form of agreement (my italics):

Adjektive *kongruieren* mit ihrem Leitwort bei attributivem Gebrauch nach Genus, Numerus und *Determination* ... (Schabert, 1976, 201)

(When used attributively adjectives agree with their head-word in terms of gender, number and determination ...)

Schabert illustrates this point with the following examples:

- (16) a. *baħar abjad*
 sea(msg) white(msg)
 'calm (white) sea'
- b. *lanċ-a bajd-a*
 motorboat-fsg white-fsg
 'a white motorboat'
- c. *il-lanċ-a l-bajd-a*
 DEF-motorboat-fsg DEF-white-fsg
 'the white motorboat'
- d. *lanċ bojod*
 motorboat(pl) white(pl)
 'white motorboats'

Schabert, however, immediately relativises his claim with the following comment and the examples shown in (17), which are actually counter-examples to the claim that agreement is involved here: "Adjektive von Ländern sind auch in attributiver Verwendung meist indeterminiert" (Schabert, 1976, 105: When used attributively adjectives referring to countries are mostly indeterminate.)

- (17) a. *it-temp Taljan* b. *l-ikel Malti*
 DEF-weather(msg) Italian(msg) DEF-food(msg) Maltese(msg)
 'the Italian weather' 'Maltese food'
- c. *il-lingw-a Maltij-a*
 DEF-language-fsg Maltese-fsg
 'the Maltese language'

Such 'counter-examples' need, of course, to be accounted for. In fact, it turns out that there are many such examples, so that the claim that agreement is involved is implausible.

3.2. Sutcliffe (1936)

Sutcliffe (1936) does not use terms such as 'agreement' or 'concord' to describe the co-occurrence of the definite article on nouns and adjectives. Instead, he lists a number of conditions, which are clearly semantic/pragmatic in nature, and which determine the occurrence or non-occurrence of the definite article on the adjective.

(i) An attributive adjective in agreement with a noun which is accompanied by the definite article itself takes the article only if the article is used with the noun to specify a particular object and moreover the adjective helps to identify the object named. (p. 20)

(ii) On the other hand, the article does not accompany the adjective if this is merely descriptive and does not help to distinguish the object named from others of its kind. (p. 20-21)

Sutcliffe also mentions some specific cases and gives the relevant examples:

(iii) A noun may be made definite, not only by the article, but also by a pronominal suffix. An adjective in agreement with a noun so determined

also takes the article if its purpose is to indicate exactly the object mentioned. (p. 20)

- (18) *b'xabla* *fid-u* *l-waħda*
 withsword in hand-his DEF-one
 'with his sword in one hand' ('a sabre in his one hand' Sutcliffe, 1936, 20)

(iv) In some common expressions in which the adjective is felt to be descriptive, the article is not used, although in strict analysis it does help to identify the object or objects named. (p. 21)

- (19) *il-belt* *imqaddsa*
 DEF-city holy
 'the Holy City'

(v) Moreover, the article does not accompany the adjective when the noun with its article does not signify a particular object, but has a generic sense. (p. 21)

- (20) *il-ħobż* *iebes* *jitfarrak*
 DEF-bread hard crumbles
 'Dry bread crumbles'

(vi) Adjectives derived from proper names are sufficiently determined in themselves, and do not require the article. (p. 21)

- (21) *l-ilsien* *għarbi*
 DEF-tongue Arabic
 'the Arabic language'

4. ATTRIBUTIVE ADJECTIVE AND NOUN

It is obvious from the above examples that, unlike Swedish and Arabic, in Maltese the co-variation in terms of definiteness between the noun and the adjective is not strict. The question is what exactly determines the occurrence of the definite article on the adjective. In the rest of this paper, I will present the relevant data systematically and show that the observed covariation has nothing to do with grammatical agreement but is determined by other totally independent factors involving semantics and pragmatics.

In the following, the expression *definite noun* or *definite adjective* refers to a noun or adjective that has the definite article attached to it. Thus, *il-ktieb* 'DEF-book' is called a *definite noun*, and *il-ġdid* 'DEF-new' is referred to as a *definite adjective*.

First note that out of the four logical possibilities of co-occurrence listed under 1 to 4 in Table 1 below, only the three ticked ones (1, 2 and 4) actually occur, while the starred one (3) is unacceptable. That is, an indefinite noun and a definite adjective cannot co-occur. Examples (22) through to (25) exemplify each case (1 to 4) in Table 1 in that order.

Table 1

	NOUN	ADJECTIVE	
1	definite	definite	√
2	definite	indefinite	√
3	indefinite	definite	*
4	indefinite	indefinite	√

- (22) a. *l-istorja t-twila*
 DEF-story DEF-long
 'the long story'
- b. *il-programm il-ġdid*
 DEF-programme DEF-new
 'the new programme'
- c. *ir-raġel l-oħxon*
 DEF-man DEF-fat
 'the fat man'
- (23) a. *l-istorja twila*
 DEF-story long
 'the long story'
- b. *il-programm ġdid*
 DEF-programme new
 'the new programme'
- c. *ir-raġel oħxon*
 DEF-man fat
 'the fat man'
- (24) a. **storja t-twila*
 story DEF-long
- b. **programm il-ġdid*
 programme DEF-new
- c. **raġel l-oħxon*
 man DEF-fat
- (25) a. *storja twila*
 story long
 'a long story'
- b. *programm ġdid*
 programme new
 'a new programme'
- c. *raġel oħxon*
 man fat
 'a fat man'

The facts illustrated in Table 1 can be captured by the following generalisation: if a noun in an attributive construction is indefinite, then the attributive adjective must be indefinite, too. This automatically excludes the third case and the examples in (24). This generalisation, of course, still needs to be motivated so that it naturally falls out from a more principled account of the facts.

Note that the generalisation as it stands captures the fact that a definite noun can be modified either by a definite or by an indefinite adjective. In other words, one cannot speak of agreement in terms of definiteness here, since agreement would imply that the adjective should always co-vary with the noun in terms of definiteness. An examination of the typical contexts in which different combinations of noun and adjective

occur provide a clear indication of the conditions which allow the occurrence of an indefinite adjective with a definite noun (case 2 in Table 1) and exclude that of a definite adjective with an indefinite noun (case 3).

5. APPARENT COUNTER-EXAMPLES

Before a detailed analysis is presented, it should be noted that constructions like the one shown in (26) appear at first sight to be exceptions to the above generalisation, since the noun is not definite but the adjective is.

- (26) a. *Triq il-Kbira*
 street DEF-large
 'Main Street'

These constructions, however, are the result of a word-formation process that is not restricted to nouns and adjectives, but also includes combinations of two nouns like those in (27). This word-formation process is based on the pattern of formation of the construct state in Maltese (see Fabri, 1996, and Borg, 1989, for a detailed analysis).

- (27) a. *Dar il-Paċi* b. *Wied il-Għajn*
 house DEF-peace valley DEF-spring
 'House of Peace' 'Spring Valley'

In constructions like that in (26), the adjective cannot be modified by expressions such as *ħafna* 'very/much/many', unlike constructions like those in (28):

- (28) a. *it-triq il-kbira ħafna*
 DEF-street DEF-big very
 b. **Triq il-Kbira ħafna*
 street DEF-large very
 'the very large street'

This suggests that the combination in cases like (26) involves lexical formation through the combination of N and A and not the syntactic combination of a noun and a modifying AP. Therefore, the above generalisation is valid in the syntax.

6. NOUN TYPES

What is important for the analysis to be presented here is the type of reference that a noun has, more specifically whether there is exactly one or potentially more than one possible individual referent in context of discourse that may be denoted by the head noun.

Löbner (1985) classifies nouns as follows:

Nouns have two basic interpretations. Taken in isolation they can be considered either sortal nouns or relational nouns. Sortal nouns classify objects, whereas relational nouns describe objects as standing in a certain relation to others ... The type of relational nouns can be further subdivided into several

subtypes... The most important subclass is that of functional nouns. For functional nouns, the relation that defines their reference is a function. Functions relate objects unambiguously (or one-to-one) to others ... These distinctions apply to uses of nouns. (Löbner, 1985, 292 ff)

For example, the noun *mother* typically encodes a function (a one-to-one relation), i.e. its meaning (semantics) includes the information that every individual (normally) has exactly one (biological) mother. Thus, *mother* in *John's mother* refers unambiguously to a specific individual in context. However, we can have a situation in which reference is made to two mothers (not, of course, mothers of the same individual) in the discourse context, as in *Two mothers came to pick up their daughters*. In this case, we can, for example, refer to the tall mother and the short mother, in order to be able to keep them apart. So, although semantically *mother* encodes a function, pragmatically there might be more than one individual in context that it can refer to, in particular if it occurs alone without the possessed noun.

In contrast to *mother*, the semantics of *brother* tells us that it potentially expresses a one-to-many relation, i.e. a person can have more than one brother. This, of course, does not exclude the possibility of a person having only one brother. *brother* in *John's brother* can be ambiguous if John has more than one brother, but is unambiguous if we know that John has one brother only. Thus, pragmatically the noun *brother* may be unambiguous in reference.

Finally, sortal nouns like *man* and *woman* are potentially ambiguous referentially since the number of possible referents in a given discourse context is open. In what follows, I will first describe the combination of sortal nouns with definite adjectives and then I will consider functional and relational nouns such as *mother* and *sister*.

7. SORTAL NOUN AND DEFINITE ADJECTIVE

The example in (29) shows the typical context for a sortal definite noun modified by a definite adjective. (29a) is the first sentence in a story which introduces two characters. Sentences (29b) and (29c) show two possible continuations of the story. Note that the question marks in (29c) indicate that this sentence is pragmatically of doubtful felicitousness rather than being grammatically unacceptable.

(29) a. *Darba kien hemm żewġt irġiel: wieħed oħxon*
 once was there two men one fat

u wieħed irqieq
 and one thin

'Once there were two men: one was fat and one was thin'

b. *Ir-raġel l-oħxon tant beda' jitkellem jgħajjat li ...*
 DEF-man DEF-fat so began talk shout that
 'The fat man began to talk so loudly that ...'

- c. ?? *Ir-raġel oħxon tant beda' jikkellem jgħajjat li ...*
 DEF-man fat so began talk shout that
 'The fat man began to talk so loudly that ...'

The use of (29b) with the definite adjective *l-oħxon* 'DEF-fat' is the preferred continuation of the story. This indicates that when the speaker wants to choose a particular individual in contrast to a number of similar individuals in context, a definite adjective is preferred to an indefinite one. In this case the use of the definite adjective in Maltese corresponds to the stressed contrastive adjective in English (underlined in the transliteration in (29b)).

It appears that generally in Maltese sortal nouns tend to be followed by definite adjectives, as the following example shows:

- (30) a. *Fi triqtu lejn il-palazz Peppi ra mara*
 in street towards DEF-palace Peppi saw woman
sabiha ħafna.
 beautiful much

'On his way to the palace Peppi saw a very beautiful woman'

- b. *Il-mara s-sabiha tbissmit-lu.*
 DEF-woman DEF-beautiful smiled-at him
 'The beautiful woman smiled at him'

- c. ?? *Il-mara sabiha tbissmit-lu.*
 DEF-woman beautiful smiled-at him
 'The beautiful woman smiled at him'

Interestingly, if the demonstrative is used together with the definite noun, then an indefinite adjective is preferred, as shown in (31). This could be explained by the fact that the referent of a noun with the demonstrative is unambiguous in context, and therefore no choice of possible individuals in context is implied. On the other hand, a definite noun phrase without the demonstrative could still potentially have a number of possible referents in context, i.e. it is referentially, at least potentially, ambiguous.

- (31) a. ?? *Di-l-mara s-sabiha tbissmit-lu*
 this-DEF-woman DEF-beautiful smiled at-him
 'This beautiful woman smiled at him'

- b. *Di-l-mara sabiha tbissmit-lu.*
 this-DEF-woman DEF-beautiful smiled at-him
 'This beautiful woman smiled at him'

Given a definite noun, the crucial factor in the choice of definiteness on the adjective is, therefore, referential ambiguity of the noun in context, or, in other words, the knowledge that there might be a potential choice of referents in context. The hypothesis I would like to test is the following: A definite adjective implies that there is a potential choice of

the individual referents denoted by the noun within the discourse context. An indefinite adjective implies that there is no such choice, i.e. that the reference is unambiguous in context.

This can be supported by the examples in (32), which show the use of the noun *xemx* 'sun'. The example in (32) should be contrasted with those in (29) and (30).

- (32) a. *F-is-sajf ix-xemx shuna tisreg il-gurnata kollha*
 in-DEF-summer DEF-sun hot shines DEF-day all
 'In summer the hot sun shines all day'
- b. ??*F-is-sajf ix-xemx is-shuna tisreg il-gurnata kollha*
 in-DEF-summer DEF-sun DEF-hot shines DEF-day all
 'In summer the hot sun shines all day'

In this case the preferred option is (32a), where the adjective is indefinite, while (32b) sounds very odd. This is so because from our experience of the world, which here is equivalent to the world of discourse, we know that there is only one sun in our galaxy. The reference of *sun* is therefore unambiguous because there is no choice of suns to create ambiguity. In contrast, nouns like *man* in (29) and *woman* in (30) can have more than one potential referent in the relevant world of discourse. Note that (32b) would be perfectly acceptable in the context of a science fiction story in which a fictitious world or planet had more than one sun. The question marks, therefore, again imply that rather than being grammatically ill-formed, this construction is pragmatically infelicitous.

The examples discussed so far show that the choice of whether there is an article on the adjective or not depends on the speaker's knowledge about the potential referents of the modified noun. Indeed, the use of either a definite or an indefinite adjective modifying a particular noun may result in a different interpretation of that same noun as having only one possible referent (when combined with an indefinite adjective) or a number of possible referents sortal (when combined with a definite adjective). The following examples illustrate this point:

- (33) a. *il-Kotba Mqaddsa* b. *il-kotba l-imqaddsa*
 DEF-books holy DEF-books DEF-holy
 'the Holy Books' 'the holy books'

(33a) refers to the specific set of written records known as the Holy Books, while (33b) refers to any books which are holy because they have been blessed by a priest, in contrast to any other books that have not been blessed and are therefore not holy.

8. RELATIONAL NOUNS

Nouns denoting body parts and family relations are relational or functional since they imply a one-to-many or one-to-one relationship between objects. In Maltese, close family and body part relations are usually expressed by means of the construct state, which basically means that

the "possessor" noun is strictly right adjacent to the "possessed" or head noun (see (34) and (35)). In the construct, the head noun never acquires the definite prefix *l-*, since it is inherently definite, or more precisely specific, by virtue of its being in the construct state (see Fabri, 1996, for a more detailed description of the facts and Koptjevskaja-Tamm, 1996, for a comparative study of the construct).

- (34) a. *oħt Pawlu*
sister Paul
'Paul's sister'
- b. **l-oħt ta' Pawlu*
DEF-sister of Paul
- (35) a. *għajn Pawlu*
eye Paul
'Paul's eye'
- b. **l-għajn ta' Pawlu*
DEF-eye of Paul

By their very meaning certain nouns imply a choice of possible referents in context. Body parts often naturally come in pairs, e.g. eyes and ears. Such nouns, therefore, imply a potential of at least two referents in context and, according to the above hypothesis must obligatorily occur with a definite adjective, which is the correct prediction, as the following example shows.

- (36) a. *l-għajn il-blu ta' Pawlu*
DEF-eye blue of Paul
'Paul's blue eye'
- b. ??*l-għajn blu ta' Pawlu*
DEF-eye blue of Paul
- c. ??*għajn Pawlu il-blu*
eye Paul DEF-blue
'Paul's blue eye'

Note that, for some unclear reason, it is seems that it is not possible to use a modifying adjective with a body part noun in the construct (36c). As example (36a) shows, in such cases the periphrastic construction with *ta'* 'of' must be used. In any case, the point is that the adjective in such cases must be definite, since a choice of referents is implied. However, (36b) would be acceptable, and indeed preferred if Pawlu only had one eye, so that no choice were implied.

The situation is similar (though not exactly the same) with typically relational nouns like *oħt* 'sister', as (37) shows, with the difference that the periphrastic construction is not available here (see (37c)). This is the case with the closest relations, namely *oħt* 'sister', *ħu* 'brother', *omm* 'mother', and *missier* 'father', while other relations can, and normally do, occur in a periphrastic construction if modified by an adjective (see (37d)).

- (37) a. *oħt Pawlu l-ħoxna*
sister Paul DEF-fat
'Paul's fat sister'
- b. **l-oħt Pawlu ħoxna*
sister Paul fat
- c. *l-oħt l-ħoxna ta' Pawlu*
DEF-sister DEF-fat of Paul

- d. *iz-zija l-hoxna ta' Pawlu*
 DEF-aunt DEF-fat of Paul
 'Paul's fat aunt'

The interpretation of (37a) is that the possessor has more than one sister. However, if a relational noun like *oħt* 'sister' and *ħu* 'brother' has only one referent in context because the person being talked about only has one sister/brother, (37b) would still not be acceptable. It seems that the construct simply does not allow the occurrence of an indefinite adjective.

9. FUNCTIONAL NOUNS

By definition functional nouns such as *omm* 'mother' and *xagħar* 'hair' are referentially unambiguous in the sense that they can only have exactly one referent in context. They should, therefore, occur only with indefinite adjectives since no contextual choice of referents is implied.

This prediction is borne out by the data, as shown in (38). Note that here too the periphrastic construction is used as in (36).

- (38) a. *Ix-xagħar twil ta' Marija jogħgob-ni*
 hair long of Mary pleases-me
 'I like Mary's long hair'
- b. **Ix-xagħar it-twil ta' Marija jogħgob-ni*
 hair DEF-long of Mary pleases-me

Since nouns like *omm* 'mother' and *missier* 'father' do not have the periphrastic option, they never occur with a right adjacent attributive adjective. Thus, for example, the phrases 'Karla's old father' and 'Peppi's beautiful mother' cannot be expressed with an attributive adjective, as shown in (39)':

- (39) a. **missier Karla xiħ*
 father Karla old
- b. **missier Karla ix-xiħ*
 father Karla DEF-old
- c. **omm Peppi sabiħa*
 mother Peppi beautiful
- d. **omm Peppi s-sabiħa*
 mother Peppi DEF-beautiful

In such cases there are two options, one of which is illustrated in (40). Here a marked construction is used in which an obligatorily definite adjective occurs to the left of the noun it modifies instead of to the right.

1 Note that all the examples in (39) are acceptable if understood as copulaless sentences. They are then equivalent in meaning to *Karla's father (is) old* for (39a), *Karla's father (is) the old one* for (39b), *Peppi's mother (is) beautiful* (39c) and *Peppi's mother (is) the beautiful one* (39d).

- (40) a. *is-sabiha omm-ok* b. *ix-xih missier-ek*
 DEF-beautiful mother-your DEF-old father-your
 'That beautiful mother of yours' That old father of yours'
- c. **sabiha omm Peppi* d. **xih missier Karla*
 beautiful mother Peppi old father Karla

As the glosses show, this construction is not only marked syntactically in having the modifying adjective in a prenominal position, but it is also marked semantically in that it always has a negative or ironic interpretation.

The second, preferred option is to use an apposition or a relative clause as shown in (41).

- (41) a. *omm Peppi, mara sabiha,*
 mother Peppi woman beautiful
 'Peppi's mother, a beautiful woman, ...'
- b. *omm Peppi, li hi mara sabiha,*
 mother Peppi that is woman beautiful
 'Peppi's mother, who is a beautiful woman, ...'

If the nouns *omm* 'mother' or *missier* 'father', however, occur without a complement, i.e. not within the construct state, as in (42a), the modifying adjective is only definite if there are a number of mothers/fathers in context to choose from and one specific one is being referred to, as in (42b).

- (42) a. *l-omm qalet lil ulied-ha*
 DEF-mother told CASE children-her
 'The mother told her children...'
- b. *l-omm it-twila qalet lil ulied-ha*
 DEF-mother DEF-tall told CASE sons-her
 'The tall mother told her children...'
- c. **l-omm twila qalet lil ulied-ha*
 DEF-mother tall told CASE sons-her

On the other hand, if the noun *omm* 'mother' is used in a generic sense, then the modifying adjective must be indefinite, the reason being again that no choice of individuals is implied here since a noun used generically does not refer to specific individuals in context.

- (43) a. *l-omm għaqlija dejjem taf il-bżonnijiet ta' wlied-a*
 DEF-mother clever always knows DEF-needs of children-hers
 'The clever mother always knows her children's needs'
- b. **l-omm l-għaqlija dejjem taf il-bżonnijiet ta' wlied-a*
 DEF-mother DEF-clever always knows DEF-needs of children-hers
 'The clever mother always knows her children's needs'

Finally, just like functional family relations, body part nouns such as *ras* 'head' are also typically functional, since normally most creatures

Notice that it is possible for *lemini* to be indefinite and follow a definite noun as in (48). However, in this case the word *lemini* has a different meaning from that in (47) and it can be translated as 'rightist' or 'right-wing'.

- (48) *il-partit lemni*
 DEF-party right
 'the right-wing party'

Just as there are adjectives that imply a choice, there are also adjectives like *ewlieni* 'principal/only', *aħħari* 'final', *waħdani* 'only', *primarju* 'main/primary', and *principali* 'main/principal' that exclude a choice since in some sense they refer to unique objects. Thus, for example, if an object is described as 'primary' or 'final', then by definition there can only be one object of that type. These adjectives are always indefinite (see (49)) since there never is a potential choice of referents denoted by the noun they modify in a given context. A definite adjective would imply a choice of individuals in context, which would contradict the meaning of the adjective itself.

- (49) a. *ir-rumanz waħdani ta' Briffa*
 DEF-novel only of Briffa
 'Briffa's only novel'
 b. **ir-rumanz il-waħdani ta' Briffa*
 DEF-novel DEF-only of Briffa

Note also that such adjectives, unlike the 'right/left' type, always occur with a definite noun (cmp. (50a) and (50b)).

- (50) a. *Jien sibt żarbuna leminija/oħra*
 I found shoe right/other
 'I found a right/another shoe'
 b. **Jien sibt rumanz principali/waħdani*
 I found novel principal/only

11. INDEFINITE NOUN AND DEFINITE ADJECTIVE

A question that must be asked at this stage is why a construction with an indefinite noun and definite adjective is excluded in Maltese, as shown in (51).

- (51) **persuna l-interssanti li ltqaj-t magħ-ha*
 person DEF-interesting that met-1sg with-3fsg

Intuitively, this construction is excluded for the same reason that (52b) would be excluded as a possible continuation of (52a) in English. In (52b) the underlined adjective is stressed, and therefore it is interpreted as contrastive, thus implying a choice of possible referents which, however, is not given by the use of an indefinite noun in (52a).

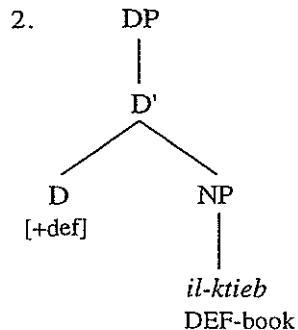
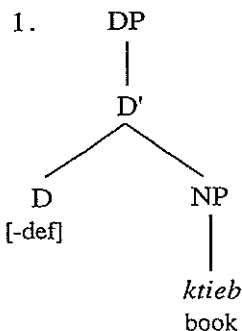
- (52) a. *I met an interesting person yesterday.*
 b. ??*The interesting person told me that ...*

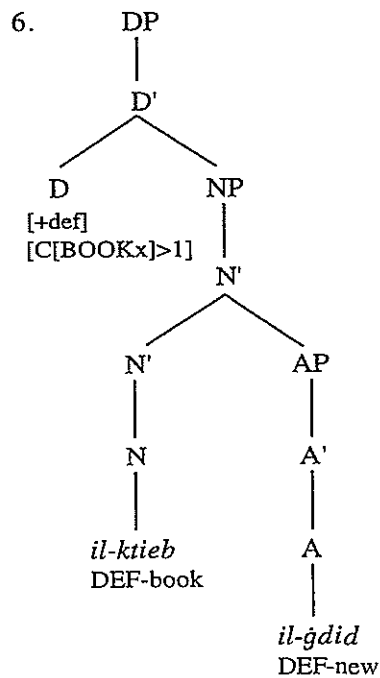
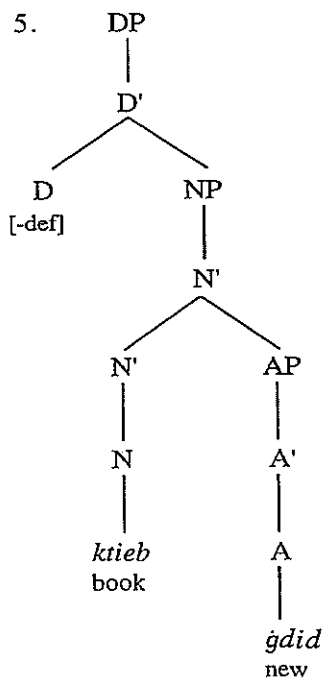
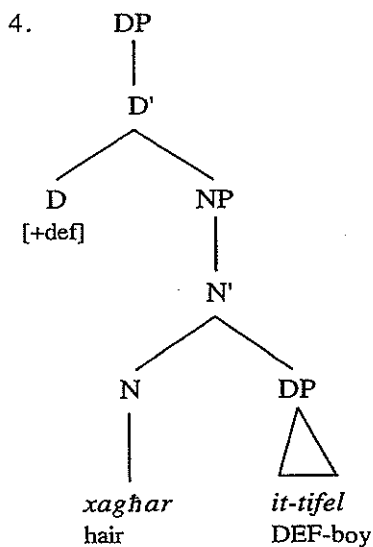
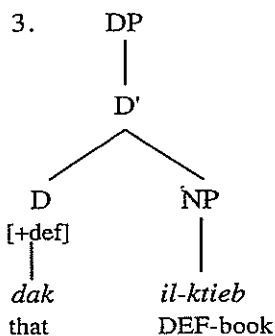
Indefinite nouns obviously do not imply a choice of possible referents in context. In fact, following Löbner (1990), one could assume that, semantically, indefinite nouns do not refer to individual entities at all but are predicates and therefore refer to sets, rather than individuals. Thus, an indefinite noun excludes reference to a potential choice of individuals in context, and since a definite adjective implies just such a choice, a contradiction results if a definite adjective occurs with an indefinite noun.

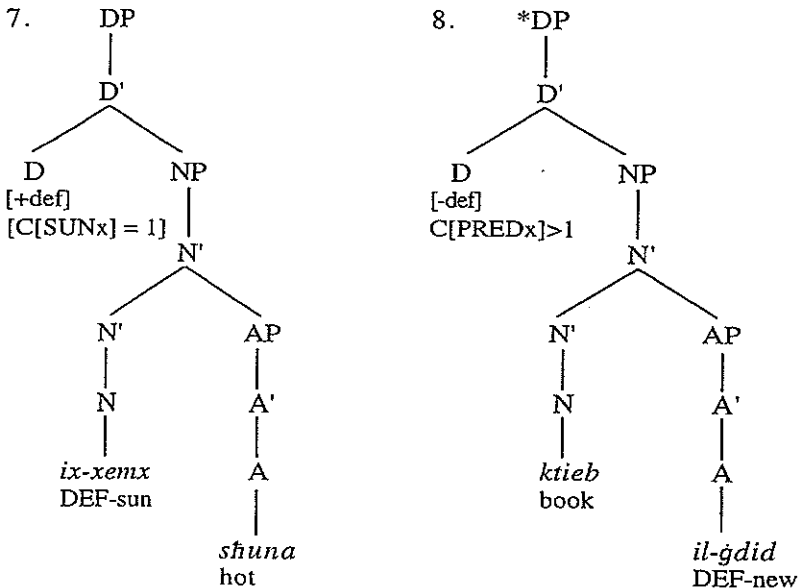
12. CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the above data indicates that the use of the definite article on the adjective in Maltese is systematically determined by semantic and pragmatic factors and not by syntactic or morphological ones. It certainly cannot be seen as some form of grammatical agreement, since a large number of exceptions would remain unaccounted for. The question is what the syntactic status of the article attached to the adjective is; and the answer must be none whatsoever. Since it has no syntactic status, then it would seem reasonable to assume that it does not project its own DP (determiner phrase). In fact, just as was assumed in the case of the noun (see section 2 above), the pre-adjectival definite article does not occupy a D position. The clitic *il* can again be analysed as the spell-out of a contextual feature in the D position of the DP dominating the NP. This feature is sensitive to the whether the number of referents in the discourse context is equivalent to exactly one or whether it is larger than one. This then determines whether the definite article on the adjective is spelled out or not, depending on whether there is a potential choice of referents or not.

The following (simplified) syntactic representations show the structures assumed in the cases described above. I will not go into a discussion about the most appropriate formal encoding of the information about whether there is a choice of individuals referred to by the noun. In the following, the (very informal) formula $[C[\text{PRED}_x] > 1]$, with C = cardinality, is simply interpreted as encoding the fact that there is a choice of individuals of the type PRED_x in the discourse context.







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