Introducing Maltese Linguistics

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Complex predicates in Maltese
From a Neo-Arabic perspective

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Complex predicate formation in Maltese follows a drift in all Neo-Arabic varieties towards grammaticalizing copular modification in the predicate, whereby all elements, both modifying and modified verbs, remain morphologically finite. After defining copular modification from a morphosyntactic as well as a semantic (functional) point of view, the etymological resources for this construction in Old (Classical) Arabic are inventorized and checked against documented grammaticalized forms in several Neo-Arabic varieties, thus showing that Maltese belongs to this linguistic family (although with some particularities). What makes the case of Maltese special is its standardization as a written language. Examples of the use of copular modification in oral varieties (exemplified by Tunisian Arabic) illustrate this difference, which remains to be explored.

1. Complex predicates are predicates of a single clause that consist of more than one syntactic word. Thus, by definition they are from the point of view of the syntactic structure of the sentence equivalent to a monoverbal predicate as in (1a) vs. (1b)

   (1a) Ṣuk beda igihidli l-istorja
       'your brother started telling me the story'

   (1b) Ṣuk qalil l-istorja
       'your brother told me the story'

There is a division of labor between the constituents of a complex predicate: There is the lexical part which projects the argument structure of the clause by its valency, and there is a grammatical part, which incorporates the specifications of finiteness, i.e., the sentence. In the following I will speak of the modifying element, the modificand (Mₚ) and the modified element, the modificatum (Mₚ₋).¹

1. The following abbreviations (according to the Leipzig Glossing Rules) are use:
   A = accusative, ADJ = adjective, ALG = Algerian Arabic, CA = Classical Arabic, CM = copverb modification, COL = collective, CONT = continuous, DEF = definite, DEM = demonstrative, DUR = durative, EGY = Egyptian Arabic, FUT = future, HC = hypotactic construction, IMP = imperfect, IND = indicative, IMP = imperfective, LEB = Lebanese Arabic, Mₚ = modifier, Mₚ₋ = modificatum, MA = Moroccan Arabic, MAL = Maltese, N = nominative, N/A = noun/adjective, OBJ = object

Stefan Müller

In the following, I will look only at constructions where all parts of the complex predicate are verbal forms: there are other types of complex predicates with non-verbal constituents (particles, pseudo-verbs (cf. Peterson, this volume), etc. This paper presents only a preliminary sketch of work in progress, aiming at an investigation of the complete field of complex predicate formation in Maltese. There is an unfortunate tendency to analyse these complex predicates as translational equivalents of complex predicates in the Indo-European school languages (e.g., English or German). The consequence can be seen in the term “auxiliaries” for the Mmm, which veils the typologically interesting point that the “main verb” in the predicate, i.e., the modified part, is not nonfinite (e.g., infinitive or participle) and need not be “helped” by an auxiliary to build a finite predicate. For this reason I call these verbal modifiers of morphologically finite modified verbs in complex predicates coverbs (Maas 1995).

\[
\text{SENTENCE} \\
\text{validation} \\
\text{(sentence modality)} \\
\text{grounding} \\
\text{(temporal, local)} \\
\text{social relations} \\
\text{(allocation, politeness)} \\
\text{evaluation} \\
\text{(evidentiality, attitudes)} \\
\text{(± verbal)} \\
\text{Mmm} \\
\]

Figure 1. "Finiteness"/sentence structure

2. Even more unfortunate is the consequence of conflating all translational equivalent of Indo-European “auxiliaries”, especially modal operators. Most of these are matrix predicates in Maltese (as in other Neo-Arabic varieties), taking a subordinate clause as their complement. I.e., there are two event variables in a sentence such as

(2) \text{ried imur}
\text{‘he wanted to go’}

Despite being satisfied by the same event referred to in this case, the event variable must be distinguished as the main arguments of the two predicates are selected by the respective verbs independently and the clauses can be independently further specified:

(3) \text{ried li imur}
\text{‘he wanted you to go’}

As (4) shows, there are two event variables involved here:

(4) \text{[ibienah hu kried [imur ghada l]i][ri]
\text{‘yesterday your brother wanted to go tomorrow’}

which could be continued by (5)

(5) \text{... imma lium jef li ma jistax imur}
\text{‘but today he knows that he can’t go’}

There is a difference in construction in the case of an identical main argument in both clauses: In this case, syntactic marking seems to be excluded.3

(6) a. \text{irrid imur} 
\text{‘i wish to go’}

b. \text{irrid li imur}
\text{‘i wish to go’}

There is an alternative syntactic construction in cases involving the same main argument by pronominal “raising”. As an alternative to (3) we have

(7) \text{riedek tmur}
\text{‘he wanted you to go’}

This construction is excluded in case of an identical main argument, cf.

(8) \text{irriden imur}
\text{‘i wish to go’}

In the following I will restrict my discussion to complex predicates and thus to form that do not allow independent specification.

3. There seems to be an interesting difference in acceptability judgements of this construction Urban varieties, showing traces of Maltese English bilingualism, tend to accept ried li jmur ‘he wanted to go’ where it would correspond to English to. Speakers with roots in rural Maltese (as e.g., my main informant F. Chetcuti) strongly reject this construction in the case of identical subject reference for both verbs. I am grateful to M. Mifsud for discussing this problem with me.
For the sake of completeness, I should add that another type of "modal" translational equivalent does not qualify as coverbs in a complex predicate. These are matrix predicates that take a clause as their main argument (subject): formally the matrix predicate has default agreement, i.e., the 3rd singular masculine cf. with the verb *mess* (meaning in absolute use: 'to touch'):

(9) a. *i-miss-ok* t-*mur* t-a-ah
   3SM,IPF-touch:2s 2s,IPF-go:2s 2s,IPF-see:3SM
   'you should go see him'

which can be parsed as

(9) b. [i-miss IPRED, ak OBJ] [t-mur IPRED, ak OBJ] [t-a SUBJ, PROP] [SUBJ, PROP] PROP

The different person marking shows that these are complex sentences and not coverbal constructions - although it is admittedly difficult to imagine an interpretation of these sentences as different events (with independent modification of the two predicates).

From a syntactic point of view these are complex sentence constructions with the particular valency constraint that one argument must be a proposition (clausal). This can be symbolized as in (10), where the dotted lines represent control relations, facultative in (10a), obligatory in (10b):

(10) a. *ried (x1, x2)*
          PROP (x0, x2)

(10) b. *mess (x1, x2)*
          PROP (x0, x2)

Again, this syntactic difference is a common Neo-Arabic phenomenon, cf. the Moroccan Arabic translational equivalent of (9) with *zaw* 'have to' (meaning in absolute use: 'lack', 'lack' in Standard Arabic 'be peculiar'):

(11-MA) *zaw ak*
       t-mfi
t-af-u
   be.peculiar:3sm-2s 2s,IPF-go:2s,IPF-see:3sm
   'you should go see him'

Thus we can define coverbal modification as a premise for the following argumentation in contradistinction to hypotactic constructions (HC in the following):

3. The complex predicate formation by coverbs is a common trait of all Neo-Arabic varieties. In principle, we have the following combinatorial possibilities (see Table 1). Participles present a special case. Maltese has not integrated them into the reconstruction of the verbal system, as has happened in the other varieties. The formation of active participles is rather restricted in Maltese: most of the etymological participles are lexicalized as adjectives. Restrictions are not very well studied; they probably define lexical fields. One field where participles are still productive is with verbs of movement. Where participles are used, they can figure in complex predicates as well. I will exclude these problems from the following exposition.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Complex predicate formation by coverbs in Neo-Arabic</th>
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<td>M&lt;sub&gt;in&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
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If we look at those Arabic varieties that present an advanced stage of this coverbal complex predicate formation, we find a neutralization of the conjunction form in the M<sup>III</sup>, e.g., in Moroccan Arabic, the default case is the M<sup>III</sup> appearing in the prefix conjugation without the indicative marking. A special case is the modification by Maltese kien and its analogues, which already in Classical Arabic had the function of temporal specification and operated in conjunction with the aspectual opposition [± perfective] of the modified verb. In addition to this coverb Old Arabic already had an array of other coverbs that the grammarians of Classical Arabic called the "sisters of kaana" (the Classical Arabic equivalent of Maltese kien), cf. below. Maltese again presents a rather conservative picture, where we find at least three combinatorial types (in addition there are also cases of the participle as part of a complex predicate as well):

(12) Types of coverbal complex predicate formation in Maltese

Type I: grammaticalisation of prefix conjugation of M<sup>III</sup> (type A in Table 1):

- nihiba mmur 'I begin to go'  
  "bdej mort"

Type II: grammaticalisation by harmonisation of conjugation (types B & D in Table 1):

- nergi' mmur 'I go again'  
  "ergi' mmur 'I went again'  
  "ergi' mort 'I went again"  

Type III: aspectual contrast in the M<sup>III</sup>:

- ignum naghmel 'I start doing'  
  qomt naghmel 'I started doing'  
  qomt ghammel 'I started doing'  

5. In fact, the situation is rather complex, presenting last but not least a great deal of dialectal variation which also reflects different degrees of grammaticalization. In some cases, however, the contrast between IPIF and PF is possible in the M<sup>III</sup>. Some informants (but not all) accept e.g.,

- bdi-t  
  -C6. Salam
  begin:PP-1s again become:PP-1s master
  'I had again become a master (in the craft)'

with the M<sup>III</sup> (walti) in the PP. Furthermore, for a small class of complex predicate formation, the pattern is a copy of the PP-form of the M<sup>III</sup> in all parts, e.g., with 'hiby' 'do.first', cf.

- sboq-t  
  -C6. ha
  do.first:PP-1s say:PP-1s-sea
  'I said so first' (I was the first to say so)

The preliminary analysis of the picture in Maas (1995) must be corrected. A new analysis is pending; some of the material is accessible in Maas (2004, chapter IV, on the verbal system).

6. It is unclear whether there is a difference in meaning between the two forms (qomt naghmel and qomt ghammel) for speakers who accept both forms.

Type III is also the pattern found with kien, which presents even more possibilities. There are also a number of restrictions with some coverbs (i.e., sar, jaf), which are not yet well understood, that I leave to a later study.

4. The genesis of these complex predicate constructions out of complex sentence constructions in the history of Arabic is transparent: it amalgamates different paths. We must distinguish as its sources:

- The construction of copular sentences, where the verbal part of the predicate demands a predicative complement which can (but not need) be verbal, e.g., participle (in the accusative, i.e., marked as a complement) or a finite verb. The paradigmatic case is kaana 'to be', already established as a temporal marker in Classical Arabic, where the different aspect forms of the coverb had already become established as a temporal marker:

  (13-CA) a. kam-a  
  1-dewar-u  
  bani-an  
  be:PP-3SM DF-weather-N hot-AIDP
  'the weather was hot'

  with the case marked participle:

  (13-CA) b. kam-a  
  'asfar-an  
  be:PP-3SM be:present:PPC.PP.S-AIDP
  'he was present'

as well as a finite (person marked) verb:

  (13-CA) c. kam-a  
  ja-Snun-u  
  be:PP-3SM 3SM-work:PP-IND.S
  'he was working'

- Clause union of a matrix sentence with a transitive predicate and its propositions complement. In this case, the regular construction is syntactic and demands a subjunctive marker (tan) and the subjunctive form of the verbal inflection. In Classical Arabic this construction was obligatory even with "modal" matrix verbs, cf.

  (13-CA) d. ja-statari-u  
  tan ju-nkia (a)  
  haid:u  
  l-simal-a  
  3SM-be:capable-S-IND that 3SM-execute-SUBJ DEM:SM DF-work-S-IND
  'he can do this work'

7. I treat participles as verbal when they retain verbal valency.
To the classical grammarians, the paradigmatic case for complex predicate formation from this source was kaada 'to approach', already established as a proprietary marker in Classical Arabic.

- clause adjunction (hal-sentence), which was already syntactic in Classical Arabic, with either a participle or a finite verb.

with the participle as a predicative complement, marked by predicative case (accusative):

(13-CA) a. xaraqla-n *harib-an
    leave.nf-3sp fleeradcp-5s-a.idf
    'be left fleeing'

with a finite (person marked) verb:

(13-CA) b. xaraqla-tu hana: wa hab-l-n na-ta. sajjad-u
    leave-nf-1sp I and father-nf-1sp 1sp-hunufpp-nnd
    'I went out with my father hunting'

Integration into a complex predicate is incompatible with syntactic marking (which marks a separation). Thus, the classical grammarians already accepted as grammatical an asyndetic construction in the case of clause union, e.g., a frustrative (Fischer 1987: 195):

(14-CA) a. kaz-1-a n-namaz-1-u ja-tir-u
    approach.pp-3sm df-ostrich.col-n-1 3sm-fly:ipp-nnd
    'ostriches almost could fly'

As well as

(14-CA) b. kaz-1-a n-namaz-1-u hna ja-tir-a
    approach.pp-3sm df-ostrich.col-n subj 3sm-fly:ipp-subj
    'ostriches almost could fly'

5. Brockelmann (1908; vol. 2: 507ff.) has a rather detailed exposition of the development to CM, where he argues that this pattern originates from the hal-sentence. A very detailed description of the coverbs used in classical Arabic can be found in Reckendorf's compendium (1895: 287–296), who already defines the semantic fields of these modifiers. The following reproduces his list of 53 coverbs in texts in Classical Arabic (analysis of stem formation, isolation of the roots and translation added):

(15) Coverbs in Classical Arabic (from Reckendorf 1895: 287–296; "[N]" enclose stem formattives; "[N]" indicates a combinatorial restriction to negated forms; the stem pattern of the derived forms is given in parentheses; the indication of meaning refers to the absolute use of the forms)

- durativity: šabh [N] 'end', šbiq 'continue', šdwm 'continue', šraw 'stand fast', šryj [N] 'leave', šawl [N] 'go away', šfij [N] 'be young', š(h)aj [N] 'be antithetical (b. VII)', šhaww 'remain' (b. IV), šhakl [N] 'be?, (?) š( ḥ)mar [N] 'continue (b. X)', šqub [N] 'become feeble';
- iteration: šdwm 'return';
- stativity, inchoativity: šbd 'return', šbwr 'return', š(h)aww 'change' (b. V), š( t)awl 'change' (b. X), šrdwy 'return', šrad 'draw back' (b. VIII), šwr 'away', šitr 'become', šbwr 'run', šwd 'return', šqds 'sit', šqub 'be';
- being at a certain time (⇒ stativity, inchoativity): š( t)j 'stay the night', š(h)h 'finish' (b. IV), š(tr)w 'be in the morning' (b. IV), š(t)aw 'become' (b. IV) šall 'remain', š(h)aw 'be in the evening' (b. IV);
- inchoativity: š( j)h 'take', šbd 'begin', š( t)awd 'begin', šbwr 'send', šrj 'send', šh 'get', šfrej 'raise', šh 'hang', šbhq 'cover', šlj 'lift', š(t)al 'create' (b. IV), š( ḥ)mar 'be in the evening' (b. IV);
- frustrativity (being almost): šbd 'leave', šh( aw)q (b. XII) 'become smooth', šdj 'eventually', šg( n)rd (b. III) 'approach', šbd 'distribute', šh( d)w 'be close', šh( w)mm 'be IV', šrr 'set in movement', šhbl 'wear out';
- being capable (disposition): š(t)aww (b. X) 'be capable', šsh ü 'be capable'.

Reckendorf mentions that dispositivity is usually articulated hypothetically an synthetically, but there some examples of synthetically constructed cases of want/will (šfij 'šfijaww [b. IV]) as well. Some of these verbs (roots or the relevant stems formations) are no longer used in Modern Written Arabic (for the spoken varietes, see below). On the other hand, literary Arabic is rather conservative in Muslim variety, striving to adhere to the classical models. Thus, the non-Muslim varieties, i.e., Jewish or Christian Arabic, are a better window on the development of the neo-Arabic varieties. Most of this work has yet to be done, but cf. e.g., Bla (1966: 431–445), who analyses coverbs ("auxiliaries" in his terminology) in Christia Arabic texts from Palestine. In addition to the roots included in Reckendorf's list (šdwm, šbih, šdwm, šdwf, škwm, šqwm [b. IV]), šrdwy, š( z)aww [N], šaw [N] (b. i., also b. III "resume"), there are others, not found there, some of which by explains by Aramaic influence (šqbg, šqdm, both in the sense of 'being first i doing', šbl [N] 'continue', šmm [b. I and b. IV]) complete. But it will be seen belo that these coverbs are found in other regions of Neo-Arabic as well (especially in Maghribin varieties).
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<th>FUNCTION</th>
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<td>√grab 'be near'</td>
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<td>qam</td>
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<td>qarab</td>
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<td>√rad 'hand back'</td>
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<td>√sfj 'be capable'</td>
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<td>√shb 'be in the morning'</td>
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<td>(inchoative) dispositive</td>
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<tr>
<td>√tlj 'turn aside'</td>
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<td>√taj 'start'</td>
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<td>√tlj 'go up'</td>
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<td>√tmm 'end'</td>
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<td>√thf 'fall'</td>
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<td>√twl 'be long'</td>
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<tr>
<td>√zjd 'increase'</td>
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<td>zad</td>
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<td>√sll 'remain'</td>
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<td>√xal 'take'</td>
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<td>√zal 'return'</td>
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<td>√zal 'hang'</td>
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<td>√zm 'make'</td>
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<td>√zj 'know'</td>
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10. M. Mishkud (p.c.) has found this verb in 19th century texts.
7. The fluidity of this field is apparent in comparison with Reckendorf’s list above: There are 53 roots in this list – but only 18 of them are already documented in Classical Arabic in coverbal function. The field is defined by semantic dimensions and patterns which can attract new forms by analogy. It is evident that there are certain semantic fields where coverbs can be recruited: verbs of movement and taking, at first in an inchoative meaning, than moving towards a more stative meaning. This variable picture of the grammaticalization process reflects a rather recent development in the Arabic linguistic area — one which also remained in process after Maltese became isolated at least from the Muslim world (relations to the Christian world in the Mashriq are difficult to clarify).

This variation would be even more evident if a closer inquiry into the dialectal and even idiolectal facts served as the basis. Not all informants accept all coverbal modifications. Even if constructions can be elicited, for some speakers some verbs still retain a certain amount of their lexical content that blocks universal grammatical use of them. Quite instructive in this regard was the work with my Tunisian informant E. Labidi, who did not accept for herself some of the forms which she herself had documented from her native Mdina-dialect.

Through inspection of the list of coverbally used roots, four dimensions of this field of grammaticalization became apparent:

- **grounding**: temporal modification (situating the sentence) is already established in Old/Classical Arabic by the use of ـِکَوْن (trykn / trykn), etymologically a verb meaning ‘standing’.
- **dispositives**: not in Classical Arabic (which has transitive syntactic constructions), but already in contemporary spoken Arabic, see above. Only Maltese has maintained ـِکَتْل (taktl) in correspondence with modern written Arabic; the other varieties use different roots; especially interesting in this regard is the otherwise closely related Mdini Tunisian ـیِکَلْ (takel).
- **aspectual**: this rich field of coverbs was already established in Classical Arabic (cf. Reckendorf 1895). This field has innovated regionally in parallel ways, with shifts in meaning (frequently with the development inchoative > durative, as e.g., with Maltese ـیَکَلْ and possibly recruiting fresh sources for the obsolete markers.
- **evidentials**: grammaticalization of this dimension seems to be the most recent layer, rather marginal in the classical language, and regionally very unequally established.

A rather differentiated system of forms is made use of in Moroccan Arabic, e.g., with the roots ـِلْکَلْ and ـیِکَلْ. There is a close interaction with polarity: most of these coverbs can only be used in negated constructions, as in Moroccan Arabic ـلْکَتْل /ـلْکَتْل V, ـلْکَتْل /ـلْکَتْل V: 'to do V reluctantly' (ـلْکَتْل is the verbal negation frame). The semantics of this field is rather diffuse, bordering on evidentiality, and the system of polarity markers (rather elaborated in Old Arabic) demands a closer analysis. The (finite) coverbal negation of Classical Arabic (laiso) is no longer found, but e.g., in Tunisian

Arabic we find coverbal ـیِکَلْ: 'wrong'. Early documented, and also quite common is an aspectual modifier (the root ـیَکَلْ) fused with acceptancy, again restricted to negative articulation, e.g., Moroccan Arabic ـلْکَتْل /ـلْکَتْل V: 'not yet V'.

Apparent we do not find this coverb in Maltese, but there, and only there, do we find a coverb ـیِلْکَلْ /ـیِلْکَلْ: 'having already done something', which can be added to the seri of verbs of precedent such as ـلْکَتْل or ـلْکَتْل, apparently no longer used as coverb (but cf. above), although ـیِلْکَلْ is likely to be an evasivive element used to articulate something unexpected.

This is rather heterogeneous field. Coverbal modification can articulate the sentence level (validation/sentence modality in Figure 1) as well as operate on the clause level with an aspectual and dispositive modifications. Thus a diagrammatic representation of the field of coverbal modification would be the following:

![Diagram](...)

**Figure 2. Domains of coverbal modification**

Core* in Figure 2 serves only as short-hand for the syntactic analysis of the modified clause structure.

Compared to the other Neo-Arabic languages, Maltese presents a rather parsimonious picture of coverbal modifiers. This corresponds to what history leads one to believe.
to expect, as Maltese has been cut off from the cultural processes in other Arabic-speaking countries, with their contact to the classical language on the one hand, and exchange processes between the other Arabic-speaking countries on the other. But Maltese does not show a frozen state of Arabic before the Christian conquest in the 11th century. Close correspondences to the conservative variety of Mdini Tunisian fits this picture, as it was from there that the Muslim conquest of Sicily and Malta proceeded.

But Maltese did more than simply conserve the status quo of the 11th century: it elaborated the grammatical system, implementing in its particular way a drift (in the sense of Sapir) in Arabic evolution — and it did so by mobilizing another etymological resource: the Siculo-Italian, cf. the Maltese coverbs kompla ('complete' > continuative) and spēca ('end' > terminative).

Of course, it is problematic to characterize a language by what can be seen in such a narrow window as that of the coverbs. Coverbal modification is only one aspect of the reorganisation of the system of predicate formation. The key point of the system is the articulation of sentential mode, cf. section 2. The Old Arabic system is articulated by suffixes of the prefix conjugation: -u indicative, -a subjunctive, Ø-injunctive. This system was no longer present in spontaneous spoken language in classical times. Thus the system, the axis of which is the opposition of an indicative vs. non-indicative mode, was renovated. The grammaticalization shows different patterns in the different regions. The forms that continue the old indicative are now used as the unmarked forms of the system: in Moroccan Arabic I call this the propositional, whose primary use is that of a subjunctive — and as Mmm in a complex predicate; a secondary function is in the dimension of evidentiality: the marking of an eventual (potential) in the main predicate.

The indicative is marked in most varieties by a particle which tends to be agglutinated as prefix. There are different forms used for this, some of which can etymologically be traced back to a coverb.11 In the Western area of the Maghreb the prefix ('preverb') is ka- (or its dialectal variant ta-); moving to the East, this form is less fixed: Algerian seems to use it only rather freely (cf. Marçais 1956); in the Mashriq (Egyptian) we find bi- (with an unclear etymology). Maltese shows no trace of this development - similar
to Mdini Tunisian: both apparently reflect an older state of evolution. But here a closer look is necessary. To the extent that these "preverbs" mark the indicative, they should only be found at the head of a complex predicate (in Moroccan Arabic as well as Egyptian). But the same marker also combines with some verbs with a durative interpretation — and thus can also be found on the Mmm of a complex predicate.12

This is only one of the as yet unanswered questions of Neo-Arabic structure. Is it a general problem of describing exclusively spoken languages, i.e., a Neo-Arabic varieties with the exception of Maltese. Thus there is a certain fluidity about the interpretation of recorded forms, which receive their interpretation in the function of the speech situation — in contradistinction to written language, where forms are in principle attributed a fixed, context-free interpretation. Thus a comparison of Maltese to the other Neo-Arabic varieties is biased. When trying to understand the relation of Maltese to the other Neo-Arabic varieties, I believe we should not restrain ourselves to dialectological questions, but should take into account the different status of these languages: Only Maltese is elaborated as a literate language — the other varieties are merely oral languages, spoken in the shadow of the written language, which for these speakers is generally a different language, be it genetically related such as Written Arabic, or a non-related language, such as English or French.

This subject is rather neglected in current research. I can only exemplify it in the following ex negativo, presenting an example from Tunisian Arabic. Apparently, the change to an analytic architecture is well underway. This is mirrored in grammatical descriptions that declare some of the modifying coverbs in complex predicates to be (semantically) redundant. If one isolates sentences from recorded texts, then this is a perception that is sometimes impossible to make. Take the following example from a narrative of a craftsman from Tunis (from Labidi 2007: 38 — in IPA-notation and morphem borders added; otherwise I reproduce the notation of Labidi).

(15-TUN) mn.bāsl dima n-qud-u is-ṣerjī lībi
then how-l say-IMP-3SMP dp-goldsmith REL

ta-bāla uthmān-īj-u qanāt-ij-u w ʕand-u
3SMP-begin-IMP affaire-IMP-3SMP law-NMA-PS and at-3SMP

il-bum-ū ji-mīli li-d-daawa
dp-voucher-3SMP 3SMP-go:IMP to-DP-office

"Then — as we say — the goldsmith, whose affairs are in order in relation to law, and who has a permit (French bon), goes to the office."

12. As the grammaticalization process in current varieties shows, historically speaking, it is the non-personally marked (participial) forms of the Mmm that can congregate to particles and can in a further step be agglutinated as affixes; e.g., MA qayfā still used as a verbal predicate 'is going' > future marker; in some varieties reduced to the suffix ye-, ya-i-mī? 'he will go' (fur-3SMP-go); a parallel to be observed in its beginning is bāq; the particle of bāq 'remain', used as an invariable modifier 'still'. MAL qed (cf. PC qaybād) as marker of dīnā/court shows a parallel development. Personal marking seems to block this development as the robustness of the coverbs documented in medieval times and still in use demonstrate.

13. E.g., in MA kā-i-kāh 'he is writing' (IND-3SMP-write) as well as kān kā-i-kāh 'he was writing' (BEPF-3SMP DUR-3SMP-write) in the koine-variety. As prefix of the Mmm, I gloss it as dīn.
The *ta-bda* ('*bda*j 'begin') does not make sense here as an inchoative verb. The restrictive relative clause articulates a general condition in a general state of affairs. Thus *ta-bda* here appears to be a void verbal copula. This seems even more so when the same verb is used coveragellly without a possible inchoative interpretation, cf. Labidi (2007: 30):

(16-TUN) *xastr fi-t,famaš* w *il-wasaat ji-sta?ml-u*
important in-DIR-north and in-DIR-middle 3-MAKE-REV

*ahna n-qad-u* mduawa i*i-far*i-na ak il*
1P 1-SAY-REV round DPs-Horse (? DEM

*ji-bda* *ji-fash* m*Ba* la-hašwa*
3-MM-begin:REV 3-MM-dance:REV with DPs-Horse

*matš-u* *fi-t,mašib* of-REV in-DIR-ring

'Now, in the north and in the middle they make it like this (we say 'the round of the horse'); everybody dances with his horse in the ring'

Here too, a common custom is described in a general way, and an inchoative marker does not make sense here. In isolation, informants accept such sentences without these verbal markers. In consequence, Singer (1984: 316 ff.), who analyses constructions such as these, subsumes them under "copulative" forms ("verbs of existence"). Things are different if we take the narrative context into account. (15) establishes the starting point for a sequence of actions. This is how the text continues:

(17-TUN) *Snd-u* *il-haq; kulf f*has tu *ji kamiša ji-mši*
at-REV 3-MM-right every month.s in amount 3-MM-GO:REV

*jac-xu* majnun ha min ...[...] ji-mši jac-xu...
3-MM-take:REV responsible-REV from 3-MM-GO:REV 3-MM take:REV

'Each month, he has the right to a certain amount of gold; he goes to take his share from ...[...] he goes and fetches ...'

Similarly, in the continuation of (15), other customs in other regions are contrasted with that in (15). In the following sentences the copverb *ji-bda* is not repeated again; (15) thus marks the starting point of a longer text sequence.

On the other hand, it is evident that there is a relation to the non-reconstructed modal opposition in the Tunisian verb system. *bda* (and *waka* which is used in these texts more or less equivalently) appears where in Moroccan Arabic texts an indicative marker (*ka?/ta*) would be used. This is not an argument against the text-analysis. It is evident that these Tunisian forms do not have the regularity of the grammatical indicative marking of the Moroccan, Egyptian, Chadian, etc. forms. A call for strict regularity appeals to the grammar of written languages where grammatical structures are calibrated to the domain of the sentence as an independent unit. Spoken langua needs a pragmatic analysis, even if the rules of its grammar are rather fixed. 14

We still need much more detailed data from the different Neo-Arabic varieties. But progress in analysis not only requires a further accumulation of (dialectological data; we also need a shift in the conceptual framework of description, as we must: integrate the analysis of the literate structure of written language (as in the case Maltese) in contradistinction to the merely orate structures of the other varieties in the picture.

References


14. In colloquial German we use ("advverbial") particles such as *schon more or less equivalent* to the Tunisian verbal markers, e.g., *und schon war es passiert* 'and so it happened*.
Splitting the verb chain in modern literary Maltese*

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This article addresses one of the problems posed by the Maltese verb chain. Where exactly and by which elements precisely can the verb chain be interrupted? Are insertions arbitrary or do they obey certain rules? It is shown that the relatively high degree of positional flexibility, notwithstanding insertees display clear preferences which allow us to formulate default rules for their placement. What is more, on the basis of a sizeable corpus study, insertion is demonstrated to be motivated largely by pragmatic factors.

1. Introduction

One of the typically Semitic traits preserved in modern Maltese is the high density of finite verb forms that usually goes far beyond the text frequency of finite verb forms which speakers of Indo-European languages such as English, French, German, Italian, etc. are used to. Simplifying, by finite verb, I understand any verb form which is marked for subject person and tense/aspect, be it analytically or synthetically. To prove my point, a simple statistical check of the first chapter of the original

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1. This is largely identical to what Maas (2004: 378-381) calls "morphological finiteness".