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# Clitics and non-definite NPs in Maltese

Ray Fabri, Institute of Linguistics, Malta

# Double trouble with clitic doubling

Ray Fabri, L-Istitut tal-Lingwistika, Malta

Loppju doppju bl-  
irduppjar tal-klitik

Kummenti  
introduttorji

# Warning

- a beginning: work in progress
- not exhaustive analysis

interesting linguistic data

- tend to focus on the general, unmarked case
- ignore as 'quirky' and therefore not worth considering 'unusual' or marked constructions
- such marked constructions often turn out to have very interesting properties
- e.g. marked syntactic structures can trigger marked semantic interpretations
- potentially they can tell us a lot about syntax-semantic interface

Two examples from Maltese  
that have not yet been properly investigated

1. prenominal adjectives

Adj N instead of N Adj

2. topic construction and clitic doubling  
with an indefinite NP double

# 1. A preceeding instead of following N

dik            is-sabiħa            ommok  
that            the-pretty            your-mother  
that pretty mother of yours  
= that silly mother of yours

dak            iċ-ċuċ            missierek  
that            the-stupid            your-father  
that stupid father of yours

- generally has or obtains  
ironic, offensive interpretation

- can speculatively serve as pattern for generation of similar constructions, without marked semantic interpretation
- as discussed in mawel's radio programme: might be serving as basis for a new productive pattern, and possibly trigger change

e.g. dawk      il-varji      programi  
 those      the-various      programmes  
 those various programmes

instead of:

dawk      il-programmi      varji  
 those      the-programmes      various

Second example:

a marked variant of:

the topic construction involving clitic doubling

e.g.

# The unmarked topic construction

<b>Il-ktieb</b>	<b>xtraj-t-u</b>	<b>jien</b>
the-book	bought-1sg-3msg	I
	Sb-dO	

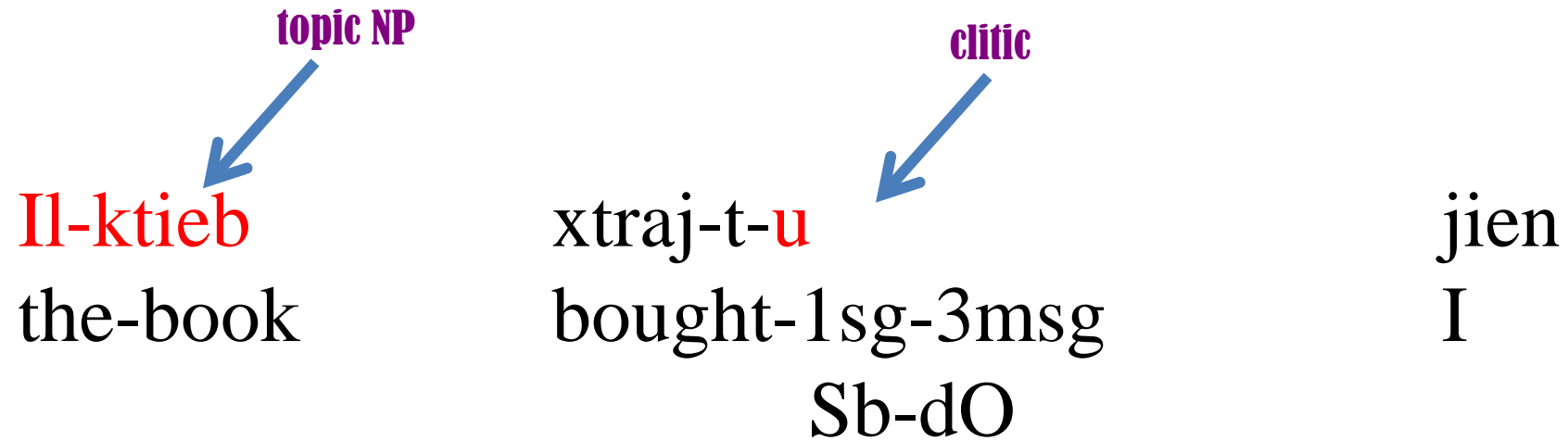
I've bought the book

The book, I've bought it

Me, the book, I've bought it

Some basic properties of the topic construction

## pronominal enclitic on verb and doubling



I bought the book

The book, I bought it

**(object ) clitic is obligatory in topic context:  
i.e. clitic licenses a topic NP**

a) Lil Pawlu raj-t-u jien (U Pawlu?)  
Cs Paul saw-1sg-3msg I And what about Paul?  
Sb-dO  
Paul, I saw to him

b) #Lil Pawlu raj-t jien (U Pawlu?)  
Cs Paul saw-1sg I And what about Paul?  
Sb-dO

## clitic excludes focus interpretation

- a) #Lil Pawlu raj-t-u (Lil min rajt?)  
Cs Paul saw-1sg-3msg Who did you see?  
I saw Paul/It's Paul I saw
- b) Lil Pawlu raj-t jien (Lil min rajt?)  
Cs Paul saw-1sg-3msg  
I saw Paul/It's Paul I saw

# **Topic construction not restricted to verbal predicates**

Also:

- prepositional constructions
- possessive construction  
(construct state)

# Possessive topic constructions

**Pawlu** ras-u kbira

Paul head-3MSG big

Paul's head is big

Paul, his head is big

# Prepositional topic constructions

Lil	Zorro	Carmen qabẓ-et	fuq-u
Cs	Zorro	Carmen jumped-3FSG	on-3MSG
		Sb	prepO

Carmen jumped on Zorro

Zorro, Carmen jumped on him

## free word order

object NP 'released' from structure  
(freely adjoined at S/IP level)



**il-ktieb**  
the-book

xtraj-t-**u**  
bought-1sg-3msg

jien  
I

xtraj-t-**u**  
bought-1sg-3msg

jien  
I



**il-ktieb**  
the-book

# Verbal/sentential topic constructions

Jien xtraj-t-u l-ktieb  
I bought-1sg-3msg the-book  
Sb- dO

I bought the book (The book, I bought it)

jien	xtrajtu	<b>l-ktieb</b>	Sb	V	<b> Tp/dO</b>
jien	<b>il-ktieb</b>	xtrajtu	Sb	<b> Tp/dO</b>	V
<b>il-ktieb</b>	jien	xtrajtu	<b> Tp/dO</b>	Sb	V
<b>Il-ktieb</b>	xtrajtu	jien	<b> Tp/dO</b>	V	Sb
Xtrajtu	<b>il-ktieb</b>	jien	V	<b> Tp/dO</b>	Sb
Xtrajtu	jien	<b>il-ktieb</b>	V	Sb	<b> Tp/dO</b>

## agreement

clitic agrees with 'doubled' object NP in  
gender, number, person



**Il-ktieb**

**the-book(3msg)**

xtraj-t-**u**

bought-1sg-**3msg**

Sb-dO

jien

I

I bought the book

The book, I bought it

\*Li-r-raǵel            jien    raj-t-ek  
CS-DF-man(3MSG) I    saw-1SG-2SG

\*Lil-l-mara            jien    raj-t-hom  
CS-DF-woman(3FSG) I    saw-1SG-3PL

\*Lil-l-mara            jien    raj-t-u  
CS-DF-woman(3FSG) I    saw-1SG-3MSG

## **agreement**

enclitic ‘agrees’ with topic NP in  
definiteness/specificity

clitic pronoun licenses definite (specific) topic NP

# clitic pronoun licenses specific/definite topic NP

- Il-ktieb** xtraj-t-u jien (f-l-aħħar)  
the-book bought-1sg-3msg I in-the-last  
Sb-dO  
I bought the book at last
- \***Ktieb** xtraj-t-u jien (f-l-aħħar) (??)  
book bought-1sg-3msg I in-the-last  
Sb-dO
- Ir-raġel** jien raj-t-u xi siegħa ilu  
DF-man(3msg) I saw-1sg-2sg some hour ago  
I saw the man about an hour ago/The man, I saw him...
- \***Raġel** jien raj-t-u xi siegħa ilu  
man(3msg) I saw-1sg-3msg some hour ago

Therefore:  
the ‘normal’, unmarked case  
object NP definite/specific

(U r-raġel?/What about the man?)

<b>Ir-raġel</b>	n-ara- <b>h</b>	kuljum	jien
the-man	1sg-see-3msg	every.day	I

<b>*Raġel</b>	n-ara- <b>h</b>	kuljum	jien
man	1sg-see-3msg	every.day	I

Not to be confused with anaphoric:

hemmm	ragel	nara-h	kuljum	jien
there	man	1SG-see-3MSG	every.day	I

There is a man (who) I see (him) every day.

hemmm	ragel	li	nara-h	kuljum	jien
-------	-------	----	--------	--------	------

that

And this is where the  
trouble starts!



There are cases,  
arguably more common in spoken variety,  
in which  
a clitic is bound to a non-definite NP,  
i.e. licenses a non-definite NP

Some examples

Kissir-ha                      karozza!

broke(3msg)-3fsg    car

He totally destroyed the car!

Kissir-ha                      il-karozza!

broke(3msg)-3fsg    the-car

He destroyed the car

in context

Ustra! Ara kif kissir-**ha** **karozza!**

Wow! look how broke(3msg)-**3fsg** **car**

Wow! See how he destroyed the car!

another example in context

Iva! Fottej-t-**ha** **ćajta!**

yes screwed-2sg-**3fsg** **joke**

Oh come on, you've ruined the joke!

# Types

2 types of such constructions

# Type 1

Nerik farrk-**u** **mutur!**

Henry ruined-3msg motorbike

Henry ruined the bike completely!

Miskin, bezzaj-t-**u** **tifel**

poor.thing scared-2sg-3msg boy

You scared the poor boy out of his wits

These examples have a marked interpretation:

1. tend to express strong emotions (!)
2. generally suggest a negative evaluation

Kissir-**ha**                      **karozza!**

broke(3msg)-3fsg    car

My God! He destroyed the car!

Grammaticalisation of value judgement

cmp.

Kissir-**ha**                      **l-karozza!**

broke(3msg)-3fsg    car

He destroyed the car.

A matter of fact statement

cmp.

Hasl-it-**u**                      **kelb**  
washed-3fsg-3msg dog  
She drenched the dog (poor thing)!

Hasl-it-**u**                      **l-kelb**  
washed-3fsg-3msg the-dog  
She washed the dog

## Type 2

Jien **gazzetta** n-aqra-**ha** f'ħames minuti

I newspaper 1SG-read-3FSG in five minutes

I (can) read a newspaper in five minutes/

It only takes me five minutes to read the newspaper!

U **ktieb** ġieli qraj-t-**u** f'siegħa

and book sometimes read-1SG-3MSG in hour

Sometimes it would take me just an hour to read a book!/It's normal for me to read a whole book in an hour!

**Artiklu** ġieli            domt            ġimgħa    n-aqra-**h**  
article sometimes    it-took-me    week       1sg-read-3msg  
Sometimes it has taken me a whole week to read just one  
article!

Compared to type 1:

1. not a 'negative' interpretation

2. also expresses 'emotional' content: boastful,  
shameful

e.g. I am such a good reader that I can read a book  
in 1 hour

I am such a good reader that I can read a book  
in 1 hour

cmp.

Ilbieraħ Pawlu gazzetta ra-ha f'ħames minuti  
yesterday Paul paper saw(3msg)-3fsg in five minutes  
Paul read a newspaper in **only** five minutes yesterday

Ilbieraħ Pawlu l-gazzetta ra-ha f'ħames minuti  
yesterday Paul the-paper read(3msg)-3fsg in five minutes  
Yesterday Paul read the newspaper in five minutes/  
The newspaper, Paul read it in five minutes yesterday

Comparison of both types to topic construction

Topic

**Il-pizza** sajjar-**ha**

the-pizza cooked(3MSG)-3FSG

He cooked the pizza/The pizza he cooked it

\***Pizza** sajjar-**ha**

pizza cooked(3MSG)-3FSG

Therefore: indef NP and clitic not allowed.

However can be 'saved' in two ways:

1. by adding a time restriction
2. by placing it in a negative context
3. by changing the verb to a 'negative' one

# 1. adding a time restriction

Pizza            sajjar-**ha**                            f'ħames minuti  
the-pizza    cooked(3msg)-3fsg in five minutes  
He cooked a pizza in five minutes

Ara    kif    sajjar-**ha**                            **pizza**  
look    how    cooked(3msg)-3fsg    pizza  
Look at how he cooked the pizza!

Aside for Maltese native speakers:

can this possibly have positive interpretation

### 3. changing the verb to a 'negative' one

Haraq-ha pizza!

burnt-(3MSG)-3FSG pizza

He managed to burn the pizza!

Factors to be considered

How do we obtain the interpretation of this construction? syntax-semantic interface

What is syntactic the relation between the clitic and the indef NP?

What, if any, are the restrictions on the clitic indef construction?

What are the properties of the clitic indef construction when compared to the topic construction?

E.g. Is it also possible with Prep and PossN?

Is it possible with the indirect object?

Does it also allow free word order?

Example: word order

## word order

Is the indef NP as free as the def NP?

Dak ħaraq-**ha** **pizza**!

that burnt-(3MSG)-3FSG pizza

That one (he) managed to burn the pizza!

dak ħaraq-**ha** **pizza**

dak **pizza** ħaraq-**ha**

ħaraq-**ha** dak **pizza**

ħaraq-**ha** **pizza** dak

**pizza** dak ħaraq-**ha**

**pizza** ħaraq-**ha** dak

Therefore:

clitic indef construction is as flexible as topic construction

Therefore:

NP freely adjoined at S/IP

Is clitic indef construction also possible with  
preposition and possessive noun?

Ara kif għamel għali-**ha** **tifla!**  
look how made(3MSG) for-3FSG girl  
Just see how he attacked the poor girl

B'saħħtu xagħar-**ha** (jkun) **tfajla ta' tmintax**  
with strong hair-3fsg is girl of eighteen  
An eighteen-year-old girl's hair is strong/healthy

Is clitic indef NP construction also possible with indirect object?

Is the interpretation of the indef noun generic or specific?

Ara	kif	kissir- <b>ha</b>	<b>karozza</b>
look	how	broke(3msg)- <b>3fsg</b>	<b>car</b>

Wow! See how he destroyed the car!

The reference here is specific. It is a specific car that's being referred to and not just any car.

Need to explore possible effects of different verbs (aktionsarten) and different aspectual forms

E.g. imperfective still retains specificity:

Attent	ghax	karozza	j-farrak-hie-lek	dak
careful	because	car	3msg-destroy-3fsg-3msg	that

Be careful because that guy will destroy your (??) car/any car you give him

etc. etc. etc.

Grazzi

Kummenti

u

mistoqsijiet