It-tlieta li aħna 'the three of us':

On grammatical and pragmatic aspects of group-formation in Maltese

Thomas Stolz, Bremen/Germany

While reading modern Maltese prose, I have noticed the frequent use of expressions which strike me as remarkable from the point of view of a native speaker of German. The expressions I allude to belong to the realm of group-formation i.e. to the class of expressions which serve the purpose of referring to a number of entities as a (non-permanent) group (or collection in the sense of SEILER 2000) of countable units. Better known examples of cases of this type are *par* 'a couple, a pair' and *tużżana* 'a dozen' which are usually accompanied by a complement NP (e.g. *par ħamiem* 'a couple of pigeons' [AQUILINA 1990: 1032] and *tużżana pastizzi* 'a dozen cheesecakes' [AQUILINA 1990: 1490]). There is thus a syntactic frame or construction template in which these elements occupy one of two slots the other being reserved for a NP as filler. Constructions of this kind have been studied intensively for a wide variety of languages.

In STOLZ/KHIZANISHVILI/LEVKOVYCH (2007), we have compared so-called lexical duals (e.g. translation equivalents of English *both*) in a variety of languages among which Maltese figured prominently. Maltese has no lexical dual of the kind represented by English both. What is used in Maltese is the definite numeral - pre-nominally *iż-żewġ(t)* NP ~ post-nominally NP *(i)t-tnejn*. This construction type is by no means confined to expressions referring to binary groups as theoretically any definite cardinal numeral may occupy the slot alongside the quantified NP. What, however, happens if the entity which is quantified and subject to group-formation is represented by a pronominal element? I know of no other study which has investigated this area of Maltese grammar specifically.

Maltese offers a variety of solutions three of which are especially interesting, namely:

(1)   *it-tnejn li huma* 'the two of them'

(2)   *huma t-tnejn* 'they both'

(3)   *ikoll kemm huma* 'all of them'

In my paper I outline the grammatical and pragmatic implications of the above constructions and discuss their internal relationship on the basis of data drawn from modern literary Maltese. Some of the questions I like to answer are: Are their syntactic constraints (e.g. syntactic function) which determine the use of (1)-(3)? Are there semantic preferences (e.g.

animacy) which regulate the employment of (1)-(3)? Is their use triggered pragmatically (e.g. by focus phenomena)? Where possible the Maltese data will be checked against those found in English and Italian prose.

References

AQUILINA, JOSEPH. 1990. *Maltese-English Dictionary*. Volume II: M-Z and Addenda. Malta: Midsea Books.

SEILER, HANSJAKOB. 2000. Language *Universals Research: A Synthesis.* Tübingen: Narr.

STOLZ, THOMAS; KHIZANISHVILI, TAMAR & LEVKOVYCH, NATALIYA. 2007. 'Lexikalische Duale. Typologische Gedanken zu den Übersetzungsäquivalenten von Deutsch beide in crosslinguistischer Sicht.' *Lingua Posnaniensis* 49, 167-94.