

## **Syncretism and Morphological Complexity in Maltese: The Case of the Dual**

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This paper looks at the over differentiated class of nominal lexemes that take an added Dual feature in the NUM set of morphosyntactic features vs. the SG-PL distinction in the rest of the other lexemes. It shall be shown that this overdifferentiated class is not at all homogenous. There is a continuum of change such that at the left edge of the continuum, there is the real overdifferentiated class of nominals whose Dual feature is obligatory. At the right edge there is a pseudo-overdifferentiated class where in reality there is a form-feature mismatch such that while the dual form is retained, this functions as a PL exponent and as a result it is reinterpreted synchronically as an added allomorph to the PL set of exponents. The focus here will be on the body part class as through this class the end result of the continuum, as well as the transitional/intermediary phase, may be illustrated simultaneously. Furthermore this class provides evidence that the same lexeme may in one paradigmatic context display the Dual feature retention, whereas in another context this may not be so. In discussing the Dual form-feature mismatch, reference is made to uninflected directional syncretism, and overabundance in the paradigmatic cells which shifts from the PL cell to the SG cell. Moreover in discussing stem- and word-form patterns it is hypothesised that this provides evidence favouring an internal paradigmatic force which strives to render homogenous non-alternating paradigms whose trigger is the dual, a form related to the Maltese minor number feature. This displays the independence with which the morphological component works in the language.