Restrictive Relative Constructions in Maltese

This paper presents a description of Maltese relative constructions (RRCs), which are embedded and integrated clauses that restrict their head’s/antecedent’s denotation, and form one intonational unit with it. The presentation of the description will entail an exhaustive account of the possible relativisation strategies employed in Maltese RRCs, as well as the resultant different constructions, and eventually provide an analysis of Maltese RRCs set within Lexical Functional Grammar. The data presented in this paper is partially new, as only a brief description of li-introduced RRCs, such as the ones in (1), has been given in Borg & Azzopardi-Alexander (1997). More constructions will be added here, and some interesting variation found between the standard and the Northern dialectal varieties will also be discussed and accounted for.

1a. It-tifel li rajt
   DEF-boy that saw.1SG
   ‘The boy that I saw’

b. Mara li ġiet tarani
   woman that came.3SGF 3SGF.see.ACC.1SG
   ‘A woman that came to see me’

The paper also discusses the function of the element li in relation to its use in other syntactic constructions, and its diachronic development from the pronominal allaði and the rest of the paradigm in Modern Standard Arabic. Apart from li, Maltese uses a related form, which however has not been attested to occur in Arabic dialects, and is what may be called the partitive-complementiser milli, ‘from.that’ as in (2), constructed from the fusion of the preposition minn ‘from’ and the form li.

2. Fadallek [pasti milli sajjartlek]?
   left.3SGM.DAT.2SG buns from.that baked.1SG.DAT.2SG
   ‘Do you still have from the buns which I cooked for you?’

Reflections on the nature of milli follows, and reasons speculating that such a construction may have necessarily developed out of a headless one, in order for the preposition minn and li to have been fused are also given. Moreover, there is some variation in the construction in (2), between its use in the Standard and the dialect.

A distinct type of relativisation strategy is that which employs the use of wh-pronouns. As is the case crosslinguistically (Falk, 2010), Standard Maltese uses the wh-pronoun strategy in preposition-fronted contexts only, as in (3):

3. It-tifel ma’ min il tqajt ...
   DEF-boy with who met.1SG
   ‘The man with whom I met’

The inventory of wh-pronouns which can be used in preposition-fronted constructions is limited to min ‘who’, for [+Human] antecedents, xiex ‘what’, used with [-Human] antecedents, and fejn ‘where’. Two further relativisation strategies may be thought of as being superimposed on both the wh- and
complementiser-strategies in Maltese, and these are the use of the GAP and resumptive pronoun (RP) strategies. The presentation will discuss the correlation between the wh- and complementiser-strategies vis-à-vis the GAP-RP strategies, as well as the relation between either of the strategies and the in-clause grammatical functions which can be relativised.

References:
