
THE FUTURE TENSE IN THE MALTESE LANGUAGE

J. Zammit Ciantar

In the Maltese language the normal complement of every verb consists of two moods; the imperative and the indicative. The indicative mood contains only two simple tenses; the perfect, *Perfett* or *Passat* in Maltese, and the imperfect, *Imperfett* or *Prezent* in Maltese.

Taking the personal pronouns *jien* 'I', *int* 'you' (sing.), *hu* 'he (or 'it)', *hi* 'she (or 'it)',¹ *aħna* 'we', *intom* 'you' (pl.) and *huma* 'they', and the trilateral verb *qatel*² 'he killed' as a model the tenses³ are conjugated thus:

Imperative (in Maltese *Kmand* or *Imperattiv*)

2 nd. sing. *oqtol int* 'you kill' and
2 nd. pl. *oqtlu intom* 'you kill'.

N, *t* and *j* are the preformatives which when prefixed to the stems of the imperative mood form the imperfect tense. This is a sample conjugation:

<i>jien</i> <i>n</i> + <i>oqtol</i> 'I kill'	<i>aħna</i> <i>n</i> + <i>oqtlu</i> 'we kill'
<i>int</i> <i>t</i> + <i>oqtol</i> 'you kill'	<i>intom</i> <i>t</i> + <i>oqtlu</i> 'you kill'
<i>hu</i> <i>j</i> + <i>oqtol</i> 'he/it kills'	<i>huma</i> <i>j</i> + <i>oqtlu</i> 'they kill'
<i>hi</i> <i>t</i> + <i>oqtol</i> 'she/it kills'	

The perfect tense is formed by the junction of verbal morpheme suffixes with the verbal stem morpheme in this way:

<i>jien</i> <i>qtil</i> + <i>t</i> 'I killed'	<i>aħna</i> <i>qtil</i> + <i>na</i> 'we killed'
<i>int</i> <i>qtil</i> + <i>t</i> 'you killed'	<i>intom</i> <i>qtil</i> + <i>tu</i> 'you killed'
<i>hu</i> <i>QaTeL</i> ⁴ 'he/it killed'	<i>huma</i> <i>qatl</i> + <i>u</i> 'they killed'.
<i>hi</i> <i>qatl</i> + <i>et</i> 'she/it killed'	

-
1. There is no neuter in Maltese. All nouns are classified as being masc. or fem. in gender and are replaced by *hu* for 'he' and *hi* for 'she'. The respective *-h*, *-hu*, *-u* and *-ha* pronominal suffixes are then used when needed.
 2. This is the simplest form of the verb in Maltese. As in Arabic, the three radicals Q.T.L. express the basic meaning of the verb, hence 'to kill'. As in the Semitic languages, in Maltese it is a rule to cite the verb by this form, the 3rd. person sing. masc. of the perfect tense. This has a function corresponding to that of the English infinitive in this case, hence 'to kill'.
 3. The model conjugation given *infra* for the tenses is that of the simple verb only. For an extensive study of the different forms of conjugations of other verbs and verbs of derived forms, *vide* E. F. Sutcliffe, *A grammar of the Maltese Language*. 3rd. ed., Malta, 1960, pp. 81 — 137.
 4. As stated in n. 3 *supra* this is the simplest form of the verb. It belongs to

In the absence of a specific tense to denote an action which is going to take place in the future,⁵ Maltese makes use of the imperfect. This is done in various ways, always, however, with the forms of this tense.⁶

GHAD

The indefinite future may be expressed by the use of the adverbial particle *ghad* 'conveying the idea of 'one day', 'perhaps', preceding a verb in the imperfect. E.g. *ghad immur l-Awstralja* which means 'I will go to Australia someday'. A certain amount of uncertainty is expressed by this combination.

KIEN and KELLU

The imperfect tense conjugation of the verb *kien*⁸ 'to be' by itself denotes futurity. *Jiena nkun Spanja* would be translated into 'I shall be in Spain' and *huma jkunu Londra fil-ħin* into 'they will be in London in time'. One cannot translate these phrases into 'I am in Spain' or 'we are in London in time'. In fact, for the latter sense, Maltese would make use of the present participle of the verb *qagħad* 'to stay' which, in the language, expresses also the sense of the English verb 'to

the first Form. In Maltese there are nine other Forms, numbers II to X as against the generally accepted II to XV in Classical Arabic. Vide J. A. Haywood et H. M. Nahmed, *A New Arabic Grammar*, London, 1970, pp. 151 et seq. E. F. Sutcliffe, *op. cit.*, p. 66, omits Form IV in Maltese, because it "... is not in use, though traces of it remain in the [Maltese] language."

5. Today linguists describe the imperfect as the *Present-Future* mood and the perfect or past tense as the *Not Present* mood. Cp. G. F. De Soldanis, *Della Lingua Punica presentemente usata dai Maltesi*, Rome, 1750, p. 88, n., "Il futuro e presente nella nostra lingua è uguale *n ħhobb amo = n ħhobb amerò.*" Vide also *ibid.*, p. 93 and A. Cremona, *Tagħlim fuq il-Kitba Maltija*, I, Great Britain, 1936, p. 57, "... *biex naghmlu l-Preżent-Futur...*" M. A. Vassalli, *Mylsen*, Rome, 1791, p. 154 too called the present tense by the name *Futuro*.
6. For various rules concerning the future tense cfr. :-
 G. F. Agius De Soldanis, *op. cit.*, p. 85 et seq.
 M. A. Vassalli, *op. cit.*, p. 150 et seq.
 A. Cremona, *op. cit.*, pp. 56 - 57.
Id., *Tagħlim fuq il-Kitba Maltija*, II, Malta, 1959. pp. 62 - 63.
 E. F. Sutcliffe, *op. cit.*, pp. 70 - 71.
 H. Grech, *Grammatika Maltija*, Malta, 1973, p. 72.
7. Cfr. De Soldanis, *op. cit.*, p. 88, "Chi è delicato in essa favella, puo aggiungere al futuro, *ghat*, v.g. *ghat en ħhobb io amerò.*" Vide also Dozy R., *Supplément aux Dictionnaires Arabes*, Leide, 1927, *sub voce*, "Quelquefois pour exprimer le futur." A. Cremona, *op. cit.*, II, 6th ed., Malta, 1959, p. 62, "*ningdew bil-particella 'ghad' meta l-futur ikun Indefinit...*" and E. F. Sutcliffe, *op. cit.*, pp. 70 - 71, "The future is expressed by means of the imperfect with *ghad* 'yet'."
8. The imperfect tense conjugation of this verb is *nkun, tkun, jkun, tkun, nkunu, tkunu* and *jkunu*.
9. This form of the verb implies habitude too, as in English. *Issoltu nkun Spanja* would mean that 'usually I am in Spain'. The habitude or futuristic sense may be taken from the context or some other marker. The adverb *issoltu* for 'usually' in this case indicates habitude.

of the imperfect, needs the help of one of several particles that immediately precede the verb. However, there seem to be diverse and, in some cases, mistaken opinions with regard to these future concept auxiliary particles and their use in both spoken and written Maltese. One may find some conformity in their use (or lack of use) in literary works because, I believe, the more popular and generally accepted grammars are strictly adhered to. Yet there is a contrast between the use of these particles in daily speech and "uncontrolled" and possibly "unconditioned" written Maltese and the use of the same particles in "grammatically correct" written Maltese. This confusion derives from both historical and linguistic factors.

THE RADICALS OF THE PARTICLES

In fact we make use of two quite different particles, one with an *h* radical, the other having an *s* as the important radical. In the course of this paper it will be explained why I have qualified *s* as the important radical in the second particle. The former is more often met with in the vernacular, rarely in the literary language. The latter is the particle generally accepted as that grammatically correct as an auxiliary preceding the imperfect tense to convey the future mood.

THE *h* RADICAL

H is the radical of a particle generally accepted by grammarians as being the shortened form of the verb *ħalla*¹¹ 'to leave' or 'to allow'. Cp. *ħalla l-kotba l-iskola* 'he left the books at school' and *għalkemm kienet ix-xita, is-surmast ħalla t-tfal jilagħbu fil-biħa* 'although it was raining the headmaster allowed the children to play in the yard'. Grammarians maintain that this is the nearest etymological affinity of the particle in question — *ħa*. This is simply not correct.

THE *s* RADICAL

On the other hand *s* is the radical of a set of various particles which present quite a perplexing situation in the ensuing phrasal com-

11. Cfr. E. Serracino Inglott, *Il-Miklem Malti*, Vol. IV, Malta, 1977, *sub ħa* " . . . part. awż. verb. inv. (mill-verb *Halla* . . . *bħala taqsira ta' 'ħalli'*)" Clearly the apostrophe indicates that the word is in a shortened form as maintained by most of the grammarians. In fact the first example of its use by the lexicographer is "*mar ħa' jara*" for 'he went in order to see'. Still, later, the author includes a second meaning; "... (2) *tingħad ukoll, għad li m'ħux tant tajjeb, f'xi nħawi, bit-tifs. ta' imperf. (futur qarib jew mistenni), flok ser' jew 'sejjer', dejjem ma' v. iħhor fl-Imperf., bħala awż. tiegħu: eż. Aktarx ħa' tagħmel ix-xita flok . . . Se' tagħmel ix-xita.*" In short, the author is pointing out 'the incorrect use' ("*m'ħux tant tajjeb*") of the particle *ħa'* as an auxiliary to help the imperfect indicate an 'immediate future' ("*futur qarib jew mistenni*"). Neither A. Cremona, (*Tagħlim fuq il-Kitba Maltija*, I, Great Britain, 1936 p. 56; *Ibid.*, I, 3ed. ed., Malta, 1970, p. 58; *Ibid.*, II, 6th. ed., Malta, 1959, p. 62;) nor E. F. Sutcliffe, (*op. cit.*, pp. 69 – 70,) when referring to auxiliary words used to express other tenses, mentions the particle *ħa* in either form.

ination. Which is the correct grammatical form *ser*, *se*, *se'*, *se'r* or *sa*?

The following are some tentative conclusions I have arrived at after observing the usage of all the above mentioned particles in daily spoken Maltese, in unprententious written Maltese and in literary Maltese. Several methods of observation have been employed.

During the last five years the diverse use of these particles in daily speech all over Malta and Gozo has been noted and studied. Several young people coming from different towns and villages in Malta were asked to put down in writing first the way they would "naturally" express themselves in their mother tongue and secondly how they would "grammatically" translate

am about to
 "I am going to write a letter."¹²
 will/shall

Later still, a direct question was put to another group of students coming from Forms IV and V of both government and private secondary schools, again coming from all over Malta. The question was:

"Which of *ha*, *sa*, *se*, *ser*, *sejjer/sejra* do you make use of at home to fill in the blank of the following sentence — *Għada naqbad naħdem?*"¹³

In both cases statement and question were delivered orally. The answer to the latter question was also given in writing.

The frequency of each particle when used to denote the future tense in the journalistic language of the local newspapers in Maltese, namely, *Il-Hajja*, *L-Orizzont* and *In- Tagħna* (all three of the same day of issue 7.12.79), was also noted.¹⁴

12. The group consisted of 100 and the frequency of the particles used in both spoken and written Maltese is shown hereunder.

	<i>ħa</i>	<i>sa</i>	<i>se</i>	<i>ser</i>	<i>sejjer/sejra</i>	<i>other</i>	<i>total</i>
Spoken	20	11	31	32	5	1	100
Written	6	11	20	35	27	1	100

Of course, this is more indicative of the confused idea of the use of the various particles than of their percentual usage.

13. The number of students who helped with this test was 104. 14 of these used only *ħa*, 30 — *se*, 9 — *sa* and 10 — *ser*. The following made use of the two particles: 10 — *ħa/sa*, 15 — *ħa/se*, 3 — *ħa/ser*, 3 — *sa/se*, 1 — *sa/ser* and 3 — *se/ser*. The rest showed that they make use of three particles: 1 — *ħa/ser/sa*, 2 — *ħa/ser/se* and 1 — *ħa/se/sa*. One student put down *ħa/sen* and another made use of other words.

This results in the following recurrences:-

se — 54 or 36.5%, *sen* — 1 or .7%, *ser* — 20 or 13.5%, *ħa* — 47 or 31.7%, *sa* — 25 or 16.9% and other — 1 or .7%.

The high percentage of the usage of the particles *ħa*, *sa* and *se* is immediately noticeable.

14. The following is a table showing the frequency of the different particles used in the journalistic Maltese of the three newspapers mentioned:-

	<i>ħa</i>	<i>sa</i>	<i>se</i>	<i>se'</i>	<i>ser</i>	<i>sejjer/sejra/sejrin</i>
Il-Hajja	—	—	49	—	1	—
In- Tagħna	—	—	34	6	16	3
L-Orizzont	—	—	71	—	1	3

Besides this, the different ways in which the future sense was expressed in various publications which have appeared since the freedom of the press in 1839, were recorded and studied.¹⁵

15. a) The following are several phrases including the use of the future particles found in different publications.
Il-Malti, 19.8.1843, p. 12, "Uliedi minni ser icolcom biss taħbit"; *Ibid.*, 4.11.1843, p. 30, "u seirin iħallu ir-raba"; *Ibid.*, 6.1.1844, p. 45, "it-tabib biss jistagh jara jech it-tifel li sejjer icun imlukkam."
- b) *Il-Hajja u il Vinturi ta Robinson Krusoe* (a translation of C. Dickens' *Robinson Crusoe*), 2nd. ed., Malta, 1857, p. 5, "u wiehed minn shabi kien sejjer imur Londra bil-baħar"; p. 106, "kif giet illi hlomt dil holma li sejjer ngħidilkom ..."
- c) A. Preca, *L'imitazione ta Cristu* (a translation of T. A. Kempis' *Imitation of Christ*), Malta, 1868, p. 45, "Min s'er jiftacar fich uara meutech?"; p. 207, "...u tara li sejjer tincorla ..."
- d) A. Ferris, *Tagħim Jdid u Hafif tal Lsien Ingliz*, Malta, 1883(?), p. 197, "x'seyyer taġmel? — what are you about to do?"; p. 202, "Imma, giċċli, lil min seyjer tikteb? — But, tell me, to whom are you going to write?"; p. 202, "seyyer nikteb liz-zju tigi — I am going to write to my uncle"; p. 202, "seyyer nitui 'l-littra — I am going to fold my letter."
- e) A. Ferris, *Third Book of Lessons*, Malta, 1889, "You will be late for school — Inti sejjer tmur tard l'iscola"; p. 88, "I am going to mend my gown — Seira inseuui il-libsa tighi."
- f) H. Stumme, *Maltesische Studien*, Leipzig, 1904, p. 16, "sennistieg" (Valletta); p. 18, "jéna sentik hāga" (Valletta); p. 19; "féi senniehdok" (Valletta); p. 20, "sengaudi ma-din" and "fei seikun jaf li-thalt?" (Valletta); p. 60, "hannēklek" (Victoria, Gozo); p. 62, "mōr essōt osāp skūna hat-tētlek" (Victoria, Gozo); p. 63, "sa tmūl-limfern" (Xagħra, Gozo).
- g) *It-Tieni Ctieb tal Kari Malti* (with a literal English Translation for use in the Government Elementary Schools), Malta, 1912, p. 15, "Surmast, x'sejjer takrālha? — Sir, what are you going to read to us?"; p. 15, "Coni sejra nidhol ... I was about to come in"; p. 51, "chien sejjer jegħrek ... was about to drown."
- h) G. N. Letard, *Nuova Guida alla Conversazione* (Italiano, Inglese e Maltese ad uso delle scuole), II, Malta, 1931, p. 11, "how much will you charge me — chemm sejjer iġġiaghelni inħallas"; p. 16, "I am going to begin — sejjer nibda"; p. 39, "I am going to bed — sejjer immur fis-sodda"; p. 90, "I am going to send for some — sejjer nibgħat nixtri"; p. 90, "to whom are you going to write — lil min sejjer tictēb?"; p. 181, "I am going to lounge a little — sejjer immur inħatta ftit taż-żmien"; p. 181, "I am going to leave Paris — sejjer insiefer minn Parigi"; p. 187, "I'll go to bed — sejjer norkod."
- i) "In-nassab sa jtir bil-ferħ...", T. Zammit, "In-Nassaba" in *Lehen il-Malti*, 5, Malta, 1931, as reproduced in T. Zammit, *Stejjer u Kitba Oħra*, III, Malta, 1961, p. 71.
- j) "Sejjer nibagħtek isfel halli tiġtakar", T. Zammit, "Aħlef u Ghid is-Sewwa" in *Lehen il-Malti*, 1, 1931, as reproduced in T. Zammit, *Stejjer...*, p. 47.
- k) V. Busuttil et T. Borg, *Dizzjunariju Enciclopedicu*, Malta, 1932, *sub sejjer* "sejjer jispicċa — it is about to finish."
- l) *Ir-Religjon Imghallma liż-Zghar* (Maltese script seen by E. B. Vella), Malta, 1934, p. 15, "li aħna sejrjn nieklu."
- m) *Gabra ta' Ward*, ed. E. B. Vella, 14th. ed., London, 1965, (1st. ed. 1936), p. 54, "x'kien sejjer iġhid wara"; p. 67, "kien ser jiddobba"; p. 94, "X'sejjer

All these were compared with the various grammatical conclusions and rules inferred by the important grammars of the Maltese Language published since De Soldanis' *Della Lingua Punica* ... in 1750.

HA (or ha¹⁶) for HALLI?

In colloquial Arabic "ha is a future prefix and usually relates to impending action and to the firm intention of doing something; ha- is used in, say /haktíblak bagħdi yoméen taláata/ *I'll write to you in two or three days' time.*"¹⁷ The Maltese equivalent may be expressed in a form almost parallel with the Arabic in *ħa niktiblek fi żmien jumejn jew tlieta.*

This future particle is still profusely used in the vernacular all over the islands.¹⁸ In Maltese, however, no attention has ever been drawn to the fact that the particle should, or at least could, be attached to the verb it immediately precedes. In the spoken language it is

tagħmel?"

- n) *Minn Xtut in-Nil*, ed. A. G. Said, (a collection of 12 short stories written by Maltese-Egyptians), Port Said, 1937, p. vi, "*ħrafa Għarbiġa li sa ngibuha kif kitibha*"; p. vii, "*l-ewwel wieħed aktarx sa jkun*"; p. 61, "*u issa x'sejjer tagħmel ?*"; p. 63, "*l-affari sejra tissegwwa tajjeb wisq.*"
- o) G. Galea, *San Ġwann*, Malta, 1939, p. 74, "*mħux sejjer ma jsibx.*"
- p) *Id., Meta Nħaraq it-Tejatra*, Malta, 1946, p. 103, "*int ser toħroġ bis-sewwa.*"
- q) A. E. Caruana, *Ineż Farruġ*, Malta, 1947, p. 156, "*ma basarx min sejjer isib.*"
- r) K. Vassallo, *Graġġa ta' Żewġt Ibliet* (a translation of Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*), Malta, 1950, p. 89, "*x'sa tghidli issa?*"
- s) "*Sa ngibilkom xi siltiet*" and "*Dun Karm, aħna ser nibdew noħroġu perjo-diku bil-Malti.*" Dun Karm "*Taħdita fuq il-Poeżija Maltija*" in *Lehen il-Malti*, 1, 1960, as reproduced in *Antoloġija ta' Proża Maltija*, I, ed. G. Aquilina, Malta, 1977, pp. 95 and 100 respectively.
- t) G. Cassar Pullicino, *Kitba w Kittieba tal-Malti*, I, Malta, 1962, p. 60, "*Id-djalogi li sa ngibu hawnhekk*"; p. 61, "*sa nislet hawnhekk*" and p. 66, "*nisingħu l waħda tghid li sa toħroġ miegħu.*"
- u) F. Ebejer, *Hitam*, 2d. ed., Malta, 1975, p. 64, "*Qatt mħu se jieqaf*", p. 79, "*se nersaq aktar għall-kenn*" and p. 80, "*kemm-il mistoqsija se ssaqsuna.*"
16. As may be seen *infra*, I do not accept this spelling for the simple reason that there is no relationship between *ha* and *ħa*. The latter is merely shown in the sub-title because it is sometimes represented in place of the former.
17. T. F. Mitchell, *Colloquial Arabic* (in the Teach Yourself Books series), New York, 1976, p. 82. Mr. G. Doublesin, lecturer in Arabic at the New Lyceum, drew my attention to this important supporting reference. Earlier, I knew from Mr. Ismat Ali, an Egyptian who, up to 1980, used to lecture in Arabic at the same New Lyceum, that "*ħa* is used as a prefix and joined to the verb helps express the future concept in dialectal Egyptian". Mr. Ali gave me /ħanzuruħu/ for 'I shall visit him'. The initial /ħ/ sound seems to vary in different parts of the same country. Cp. also, "Various means are employed to indicate the Future tense of the Imperfect [in Arabic]. In Egypt we may hear (*ħawwa*) *ħa yimshi...*", J. A. Haywood et H. M. Nahmed, *op. cit.*, p. 500.
18. This is taken for granted by A. Borg, *A Historical and Comparative Phonology of Maltese* (Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctorate of Philosophy to the senate of the Hebrew University), 1978, p. 210, "Future simple: ... *ħa-yiktep* 'he will write'."

sounded as if it were part and parcel of the verbal phrase.¹⁹ However, whenever used in the written language, *ħa* is never joined to the verb.²⁰ Besides, its use in Maltese does not actually express the same sense as in "the living language of Egypt". It does not express any difference between an immediate or remote future either. *ħa* conveys a simple future as may be noted in the following examples: *ħa mmur* 'I am going', *ħa naġħmel eżami f'Ġunju* 'in June I am going to sit for an exam' and *ħa sena ohra ħa nsiefer* 'next year I am going abroad'.

When written in isolated form this particle is indistinguishable from the verb *ħa* 'to take', the root form of an irregular verb with another radical *d* which is dropped when in final position. Hence *nieħu*, *tieħu*, *jieħu* and *tieħu*, but *nieħdu*, *tieħdu* and *jieħdu* in the imperfect tense. *ħa* may also be the dialectal variant of the imperative second person singular form of this same verbal stem morpheme instead of *ħu* 'you take' as in *ħa din* 'take this', *ħa dan l-ilma w ixorbu* 'take this water and drink it' and *ħa l-flus li trid u itlaq iġri* 'take the money you need and leave quickly'.

It has been suggested that *ħa* may in fact be an offshoot or shortening of the form *ħalli*,²¹ an invariable verbal particle. I find this unacceptable and do not feel that *ħalli* could ever replace *ħa* and leave the sense of the future tense unchanged. If it did, *ħa* would naturally be the short form of *ħalli* and written *ħa'*.²²

In the phrases *ħa jitlaq* and *ħa jiddeċiedi*, the particle may have the value of a future marker and in that case conveys 'he is going (to leave)' and 'he is going (to decide)'. The particle could easily be replaced with the supposedly original form *ħalli*. But, of course, any student of Maltese would point out a difference in sense expressed by the new formations *ħalli jitlaq* and *ħalli jiddeċiedi*. An English translation for the latter phrases would be 'let him leave' and 'let him decide' respectively. True, this latter sense could have been conveyed by the shortened form of *ħalli* — *ħa'*, as may be observed in both spoken and written Maltese; cp. "*ħa* (sic) *nibnilek*";²³ *ħa' nġhidlek xi trid taġħme!* 'let me tell you what you have to do' and *ħa mmur ħa' nara x'qegħdin jaġħmlu* 'I am going (in order) to see what they are doing'. Here the particle should be accompanied by an apostrophe when written. In the vernacular the value and function of /ħa/ would be realised from a "study" of the context.

19. Cp. "*ħammieklek*" for *ħa nieklek* as transcribed by Stumme, *vide* n. 15: (f), *supra*.

20. Cp. "*Issa ħa nħallik*" for 'now I am going to leave you', F. Sammut, *Il-Gaġġa*, 2nd. ed., Malta, 1973, p. 128.

21. Cp. "*ħa nibnilek*" (where *ħa* is the shortened form of *ħalli*) for 'so that I can build for you' in *Il-Ħajja*, 7. 12. 79, p. 4. G. Aquilina once suggested that *ħa* seems to derive ("*donnħa ġejja minn*") from Arabic '*akhad* 'to begin', cfr. G. Aquilina, "*Filologija*" in *Lehen il-Malti*, April-Ġunju, 1950, p. 67.

22. Cf. the written form *ħa'* in n. 11 *supra*.

23. *Vide* n. 21 *supra*.

I infer that the future marker *ħa* is the residue of colloquial Arabic. Its origin is lost in the remote past and the vocable has consequently been confused with homophonous morphemes. It has survived as an obscure linguistic fossil used extensively and naturally in various towns and villages in both Malta and Gozo. But it has undoubtedly nothing to do with *ħalli* or any other word.

The following examples are given as further proof that *ħalli* can never replace *ħa* in the future tense.

Jiena ħa niekol 'I am going to eat', *jiena ħalli niekol* will have to be read in a rising tone — *jiena* 'I' in one and *ħalli niekol* for 'let me eat' in a higher tone. *Is-sajjieda ħa joħorgu fuq il-baħar il-lejli li ġej* 'the fishermen are going out to sea tonight'; if *ħalli* were to replace the future marker *ħa* in this sentence, it would bring about this sense: 'may the fishermen go out to sea tonight (and not any other night)'.

Unquestionably, *ħalli* is a verbal morpheme which is the imperative sing form (pl. *ħallu*) of the stem morpheme *ħalla* 'to let' or 'to allow', and when attached to the pronominal suffixes expresses the full emphasis of the Arabic Jussive mood, e.g. *ħallih jitkellem* (*ħalli* + *h* 'him') 'let him talk', *ħalluha toraod it-tarbija* (*ħallu* + *ha* 'her') 'let the baby sleep'. It also expresses the Energetic mood which is also lacking in Maltese, as in the e.g. *ħalli jibki kemm irid* 'may he cry as much as he likes'. Again, this sense, as in Arabic, may be expressed without the help of this form. But this is irrelevant to the subject of this paper.²⁴

SER, SE'R, SE, SE' or SA?

The principal radical of the other particle that helps the imperfect tense to express a future action is *s*. Emphasis is laid on the fact that this is the important radical because the present writer has come to the conclusion that *s* is a radical common to particles similar in form and function but originating from two different and quite distinct morphemes.

The various offshoots of this root result in *ser*, *se'r*,²⁵ *se*, *se'*²⁶ and *sa*.²⁷

24. One final note about *ħa*. In written Arabic there is a particle which may be associated with this particle in Maltese. This is *ħal* and is used to introduce a question. This is not found in Maltese. When *ħa* is used to introduce a question in Maltese *it always conveys* the simple future tense.
25. "The conversational abbreviation of this word [*sejjer*] is written *se'r* or even *ser*." E. F. Sutcliffe, *op. cit.*, p. 70. "... ningdew bil-partiċipju preżent *sejjer* jew b'din il-kelma mqassra *se'r* ..." A. Cremona, II, 6th. ed., Malta, 1959, p. 62. Cp. also *se'r* used by A. Preca in 1863, *vide* n. 15, (c) *supra*.
26. Cfr. E. Serracino Inglott, *op. cit.*, *sub ħa'* where *se* is transcribed with an apostrophe, *vide* n. 11 *supra*. The latter transcription is used very rarely. Cp. *Il-Mument*, 25. 11. 79, p. 10. But cp. also *se* (without the apostrophe) in *ibid.*, p. 1.
27. This is the only other future marker, other than *ħa*, accepted by A. Borg, *op. cit.*, p. 210; "Future Simple: *sa-yiktep* ..." Cp. with n. 18 *supra*.

Both Sutcliffe and Cremona maintain that *ser* (or *se'r*) is the contracted form of the present participle *sejjer* 'going' which, together with *sejra* for 'she is going' and *sejrin* 'they are going', is the only remnant of a verb, the other imperative, imperfect and perfect forms of which have been lost in Maltese.

Neither the tests nor the discernable patterns in journalistic Maltese provided me with a single case of *se'r*. *Se* and *sa* were the particles that provided the highest percentage in use in both cases, although the latter was used less in the newspapers. *Ser* was the future marker that these seemed to prefer. *Sejjer*, *sejra* and *sejrin* were used profusely by the young people.²⁸

Where do the inconsistency and diversity of opinion in the use of the different particles to express the future tense come from? The reasons might be historical and linguistic. This is what I have concluded and what I shall try to confirm here in the second half of this paper.

THE RADICALS S - R

In Classical Arabic there are two verbs which in Maltese are written with the radicals *s* and *r*. These are Arabic *sar* 'to go' or 'to travel' and Arabic *sar* 'to become'. In Maltese we have lost the emphatics of the mother language and we sound and write one *s* for both Arabic *sin* and *sad*. Because of this, the verbs in question are both represented as having one common initial *s* radical, both *s - (j) - r*.²⁹ In fact, in Maltese, we have kept the verb *sar* 'to become' and preserved only the present or active participle of the other *sar* 'to go', 'to travel', in the forms *sejjer*, *sejra* and *sejrin*, mentioned above.

Each of these participial forms imparts a sense of an action equivalent to that of 'to be going', the present continuous of the verb 'to go'. Hence *jien sejjer id-dar*, *dik il-mara sejra s-suq* and *it-tfal sejrin l-iskola* simply render the meaning of 'I am going home', 'that woman is going to the market' and 'the children are going to school' respectively. Cp. also an important phrase which will be referred to later, *ahna sejrin nieklu* for 'we are going to eat' as an answer to the question 'where are you going?', in Maltese *fejn sejrin?*

These forms may also be used as future markers in the Maltese language. In this case they convey a meaning and have a function parallel to that implied by the English verb 'to go' when helping another verb to express an action 'going to (or about to) take place' in the immediate future. In Maltese, it must be observed, there seems to be no immediacy implied.

I recall once hearing a scholar pointing out that in *ser nitkellem*,

28. Cfr. ns. 12, 13 and 14 *supra*.

29. Sutcliffe attempts to reconstruct the various stages of development from *sejjer* in *op. cit.*, p. 70.

the auxiliary particle implies that 'I am going to talk' with an immediate future in mind. He underlined the fact that for a remote future sense the particle *sa*³⁰ would be used instead.

I cannot but feel that the scholar's assertion must be considered artificial and arbitrary since common usage does not support it. Indeed I doubt if any speaker or writer, be he a student or scholar of Maltese, is ever conscious of the possibility of differentiating between the immediacy or remoteness of the future.³¹ Notwithstanding this, grammarians accept the fact that, shortened or not, *sejjer* helps the imperfect tense forms of verbs to express an action which is about to take place in the future.

Is this perhaps the result of the influence of the English language on Maltese syntax?

Both English and Italian, the former present in the Islands since 1800, the latter since the Norman conquest of the Maltese archipelago as early as 1090 (if not even much earlier in the Latin/Low Latin form),³² have left their mark on the phonetics, phonology, vocabulary, morphology and syntax of the Maltese Language. Consequently it is not rash to hypothetise an English way of expressing the future tense in Maltese.

One must nevertheless point out that *ser*, undoubtedly one of the shortened forms of *sejjer/sejra/sejrin*, is, more often than not, used in the spoken language by students of Maltese, students who are conscious of most grammars' emphasising its use in the correct grammatical future tense of the language. It is thus not a natural, environmental, spontaneous particle and is at once noticeable as strange, unfamiliar and obviously pedantic. Whereas if *se* were its variant, it seems to fit better.

E. Serracino Inglott asserts that *se* should be written *se'*.³³ I agree that if the particle were the shortened form of *ser* or *sejjer/sejra/sejrin*, it should be accompanied by the apostrophe usually placed to indicate an elision, or the omission of a letter or letters.

My contention, however, is that *se* is a dialectal variant of *sa* and therefore needs no apostrophe. In fact, in what one might call virgin territory, in areas where the inhabitants speak the vernacular as they

30. Cp. and observe:

i) "*sa nitgharrsu*" ('we are going to get engaged') — remote future in contrast with "*issa ħa nħallik*" ('now I am going to leave you' — immediate future — in F. Sammut, op. cit., p. 128. ii) "*issa sa nħallik*" ('now I am going to leave you') — immediate future — in A. Cremona, II, 6th. ed., p. 62.

31. It has been pointed out to me personally by Mr. E. Mifsud, lecturer in Maltese at the New Lyceum, that in some areas *ħa* is used for an immediate future while *sa* for a remote one. Cp. this opinion with the use of the same particles in n. 30 *supra*.

32. In 218 B.C. Malta was added to the Roman Empire and remained under the Latin influence of the rulers officially until 870 A.D. P. P. Saydon wrote about a possible pre-Arabic Latin element remnant in Maltese (*Orbis*, V, 1, 1956), This was contested by G. Aquilina in a paper "The Constituent Elements of Maltese" in *Papers in Maltese Linguistics*, Malta, 1961, pp. 8-9.

33. Cp. with ns. 11 and 26 *supra*.

have picked it up from their fathers and mothers and not at school or from book, *se* and *sa* are interchangeable and the most popularly used. I believe that these are the actual, original future markers of the Maltese language. I am of the opinion that their use in literary Maltese is restricted because the student of the language is "conditioned" by the grammars and because their precise meaning, etymology and function are lacking. Besides, a possible confusion with a homophonous and identically-spelled particle may add to the vague and uncertain ideas about the particle in question.

The vocable *sa* in Maltese means 'up to'. It is one of the prepositions. Cp. *ejja sa hawn* 'come (up to) here'. *Sa* may also mean 'even' as in the case *kelb bil-ġuħ sa l-ġhadam jiekol* for 'a hungry dog will eat even the bones'. The particle may be used in such a way as to express the meaning of 'until' as in *dam ifittex sa ma sab li ried* for 'he went on searching until he found what he wanted'.

The fact that *sa* (and its variant *se*) is not related to the lost verb /*sa:r*/ 'to go' or 'to travel' is quite evident from the following examples: *sa/se nsiefer*, *sa/se mmut bil-ġuħ* and *sa/se nqum* for 'I shall go abroad', 'I am going to die of hunger' and 'I am going to wake up/ stand up'. *Sa* could be replaced by the dialectal variant *se* as may be seen. Even the abbreviated form *ser* could be used and the future concept would not be disturbed. But cp. *sejjer insiefer*, *sejjer immut bil-ġuħ* and *sejjer inqum*. *Sejjer* here sounds strange and incongruous. Of course the most awkward would be *sejjer immur* and *sejjer niġi* for 'I shall go' and 'I shall come', perhaps as strange as 'I am going to go' and 'I am going to come' in English. Evidently *sa/se* is at once natural and grammatically correct.

Prof. J. Aquilina provides two instances where *sa* is used immediately preceding a verb to express the future tense. Cfr. "*jeħk jitle l-mewġ id-dġajsa sa tegħreq*, 'if the waves rise, the boat will sink'"³⁴ and "M[altese] *sa* is the only inseparable particle which indicates the future that is common to Maltese and Arabic. Ex. *sa nidhol* 'I shall enter'."³⁵

Hence *sa*, as in Arabic, is a particle that helps the verb express a future action. It is to be considered an important part of the Semitic element which must have found its way into the language of the Islands during the rule of the Arabs and established itself within a syntax which gradually gave way to a Romance, and later still to a Teutonic, influence with the change of historical, cultural and linguistic ties.

In Arabic, *sa* indicates an immediate future tense. Like *ħa* in colloquial Arabic, the particle is a prefix and, joined to the verb, it helps convey a futuristic action. Arabic makes use of another prefix /*sawfa*/ to convey a remote future.³⁵ There is no trace of this in the

34. J. Aquilina, *Maltese Arabic Comparative Grammar*, Malta, 1979, p. 174.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 153.

Maltese language.³⁷ Moreover, like *ħa*, *sa* remains an independent particle in Maltese.³⁸

Questions that may be raised after a reading of the above considerations are a) Do the Maltese actually distinguish between the use of *ser* (or its variants) for an immediate future and that of *sa* for a remote future? (*Se* cannot be included in this argument as a variant of *sa* because it has always been considered to be a variant of *ser*. b) How is it that *sa* for an immediate future in Arabic comes to convey a remote future in Maltese, if it really does, as suggested or pointed out by the scholar? c) Is the usage of *sejjer* (and its variants) as future markers a result of the influence of the 'going to' future auxiliary in English (cp. "...which we are going to receive..." in the Grace before meals translated into "*illi aħna sejrin nieklu*" in Maltese mentioned earlier in this paper)?³⁹

These differences do not really exist. There is no difference in shades of futurity in any of the examples studied, including those found in the newspapers. As may be observed, a general sense of uncertainty and confused opinions persist throughout the general usage of the particles playing the part of future markers. An ear attentive to the speech of our "unconditioned" Maltese inhabitants would notice the natural and profuse usage of *sa* and its variant *se*.

CONCLUSION

Ha and *sa* are Semitic particles that used to and still help us express the future in the absence of a specific tense in the Maltese language. *Ha* remained more colloquial because it has never been "prescribed" by the grammarians. *Sa* was not properly studied and hence is sporadically mentioned as a future marker in grammars. On the other hand, the dialectal variant *se* has been confused with *se'* (if there ever existed such a form), and the shortened forms of the participles *sejjer* / *sejra* / *sejrin*, without ever being identified as affinite to original *sa*, etymologically and morphologically.

36. "The imperfect in itself denotes only unfinished action, but it may be made to indicate the future by putting the independent word *sawfa* before it or prefixing the contraction *sa...*", J.A. Haywood *et* H.M. Nahmed, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

37. Only the contracted form remained in Maltese. Cf. n. 36 *supra*.

38. But cp. *se* represented as a prefix in the phonetic script by Stumme in n. 15 (f) *supra*. *Sa* is also written as part of the word in a certain way by P. P. Saydon, *Ktieb il-Genesi*, Malta, 1929, p. 58; "*Jaqaw sas-saltan fuqma ...*" ('Are you going to rule over us ...') (Gen. 37, 2) After the official recognition of the *Alfabbett ta' l-Għaqda* and the grammar in 1934, Saydon writes "*ara int sa tiled iben ...*" ('You will conceive in your womb and bear a son ...') in *L-Evanġelju ta' San Luqa*. Malta, 1954, p. 3 (Lk. 1, 31).

39. Cp. also the literal translation of *sejjer/sejra/sejrin* for English future 'I am going to' in the phrases quoted in n. 15 (c), (d), (e), (g), (h) and (k) *supra*.

From my observations I have concluded that both *ħa* and *sa* are particles that help us express both immediate and remote future actions. More immediacy may perhaps be implied by the "English form" *sejjer* (and its variants). The former are used naturally and should be accepted as belonging to the Maltese language. Besides they provide us with more, and very much needed variety in the expression of the future concept in both spoken and written Maltese.