

# Unrecognizable Arabic-Maltese: The innovative "Maltese" element in the Maltese language

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The takeover of the Maltese archipelago by Norman Sicily in the late eleventh century paved the way for the definitive severance of ties, two centuries later, between the then embryonic Maltese language and its acrolect, Arabic. However, although Malta's political, social and religious destinies were bound to be irrevocably dictated by successive European powers, linguistically the situation was to develop otherwise. The relative isolation from Malta's centres of power of the few thousands of the Maltese populace, mainly peasants and fishermen, led to a situation in which the early Maltese language had no other alternative but to fend for itself in finding ways which guaranteed its existence and survival in time.<sup>2</sup> This was achieved by a remarkable balancing act which saw the Maltese language, on the one hand retaining the conservative elements from the previous contacts with the urban centres in the Maghreb and elsewhere,<sup>3</sup> and on the other, proceeding towards the reinterpretation of its native elements to cater for Malta's new exigencies. This reinterpretation of linguistic facts affected all levels of language. The resulting "Maltese" component collocates most naturally with the other elements making up the Maltese language, predominantly Arabic, Italian (especially in its Sicilian variety) and, much later, English. This short lexicological study analyzes a number of local linguistic developments which, notwithstanding their discrete Arabic elements, find no reflexes in the Arabic language. The analysis is based upon the preface of a Maltese publication produced in 2001 by the Academy of the Maltese Language.<sup>4</sup>

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- 1- This paper is dedicated to the mourned and unforgotten scholar Reinhold Kontzi whose work on the "Maltese" element in the Maltese language has greatly enriched our knowledge about this language (see bibliography).
- 2- Siculo-Arabic became extinct by the 12th c., whereas the Arabic dialects in Spain and Pantelleria survived till the 16th c. (Borg 1994: 27).
- 3- Vanhove 1998: 97 states that "... il semble maintenant admis que la langue maltaise provient d'une variété d'arabe proche des parlers des vieilles cités maghrébines de la période préhilalienne, et plus précisément des vieilles cités tunisiennes ...mêmes si des influences proche-orientales ultérieures ont pu s'exercer ...."
- 4- Photocopies of the preface were distributed to the delegates attending the sixth AIDA conference. For reasons of space, this preface of about 360 words could not be

<twagqfet l-Għaqda tal-Kittieba tal-Malti> 'the Society of Maltese Writers was founded':

1. <twagqfet> *twa''fet* 'it was founded, established' (passive of *II wa''af* 'to found, establish'): Whereas the Ar dialects display a range of meanings associated with 'stopping, halting; causing to stand; depending upon', the meaning 'to found, establish (of an institution, society, etc.)' is exclusively Maltese. Whilst retaining the original sense of 'stopping; causing to stand', M has extended the semantic field of this root to include Ar *ta'assasa*,<sup>5</sup> *unji'a*, etc., all unattested in Maltese.

2. <għaqda> [ā'da] 'society, association; unity': In general, the Arabic dialectal forms of '*uqda* and '*aqda* render the meanings: 'knot; contract, agreement; marriage bond; difficulty'.<sup>6</sup> The And '*uqda* 'group, legion', Nefzāwī '*gad* in 'to meet, to form a coherent block', and '*egad* 'a company (of horsemen)', Djidjelli '*qed* 'to tie up, bind; reunite' and Algerian (South) '*agd* 'a troop, a company of men' come close to the sense in M.<sup>7</sup> The extended sense of 'coming together within a society' is very productive in Maltese, yielding words which are unattested in Arabic, e.g. <magħqud> [mā'ūd] 'united' (even in a political sense). The corresponding Arabic words for 'society, association', e.g. *ittiḥād*, *waḥda*, *ḡama'iyya*, *hay'a*, *rābiṭa* are unknown in Maltese.

3. <kittieba> *kitti:ba* 'writers', pl. of <kittieb>: The words in Maltese correspond to Ar sg. *kātib*, pl. *kuttāb* but morphologically they are in the pattern usually reserved for the intensive of *nomen agentis*, indicating profession, etc. The M forms reflect Alg *kattāb* 'a calligrapher; one who writes fast without tiring; a writer of talismans',<sup>8</sup> and therefore they constitute a semantic generalization. Given that the regular Ar word for 'calligrapher' is *ḥaṭṭaṭ*, *kattāb* is very likely a local development within the Alg area.

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reproduced in this article. The following notation and abbreviations have been used: < > enclose Maltese orthography, [ ] enclose phonetic transcription, Alg = Algerian (various authors), Anat = Anatolian (Vocke & Waldner), And = Andalusi (Corriente), Ar = Arabic, Ch-Sud = Chado-Sudanese (Roth-Laly), Daṭ = Daṭīna (Landberg), EAr = Eastern Arabic (Holes), Eg = Egyptian (Hinds & Badawi), Eng = English, Gf = Gulf (Qafisheh), Ir = Iraqi (Woodhead & Beene), It = Italian, Leb = Lebanese, Lev = Levantine (Barthélemy, Denizeau), Lib = Libyan (Curotti), M = Maltese (Aquilina), Mor = Moroccan (Harrell), Pal = Palestinian, Sin = Sinai (Henderson Steward), Sud = Sudanese (Hillelson), Tun = Tunisian (various authors), Yem = Yemeni (Piamenta).

5- Cp. M *isseyyes* 'to be laid (foundations of a wall)' (Aquilina 2.1311).

6- Cp. M *għoqda* 'a knot; knob (in a tree), joint (in a cane); gland, lump; root (of the tongue); nucleus, cluster; robustness'. (Aquilina 2.970).

7- Corriente 359; Ph. Marcais 221; Boris 252; Beaussier 666; Aquilina 2.970.

8- Beaussier 850.

<*ħafna snin wara*> ‘many years later’:

4. <*ħafna*> *ħafna* ‘many’: Whereas in most Ar dialects this word means ‘handful’ or, in Iraqi ‘double handful’,<sup>9</sup> in Maltese the nominal sense has now been lost in favour of a shift towards adjectival and adverbial usages meaning ‘many, much, great deal’. The words in Ar denoting ‘great quantity’, such as *kaṭīr*, *yāser*, *bezzāf*, *ħalba*, *wāğid* etc., do not form part of the Maltese lexicon.

<*L-ewwel ħsieb tal-Għaqda*> ‘the first thought / intention of the Society’:

5. <*ħsieb*> *ħsi:b* ‘thought; intention’: In the vast majority of Ar dialects, the word *ħisāb* and its variants cover the sense ‘a calculation, an account; mathematics’. This is unknown in Maltese, which adopted *kalkolu*, *kont*; *matematika* and restricted the sense of *ħsi:b* (pl. *ħsibiyi:t* – a local formation) to ‘thought; intention; care’. Indeed, the sense ‘intention’ is attested in Yem,<sup>10</sup> and whereas in Mor the sense ‘to think, have the idea’ is attested in idiomatic usage (e.g. *fe-ħsāb* + poss. pron.), in M the word has a freer collocation.<sup>11</sup> The root {f-k-r} generating the Arabic words for ‘thought’ *fikra*, *tafkīr*, *tefkīra*, is reserved for ‘remembering; reminding’ in M, and {ħ-m-m} (*teħmīm*, *teħmīma* in Maghribi) has become specialized in M, meaning ‘worrisome thinking, brooding over s.th. unpleasant’).<sup>12</sup>

<*izda nħasset ukoll il-ħtieġa*> ‘but the need was also felt’

6. <*izda*> *izda* ‘however, but, yet, still, nevertheless’: Various possible etymologies are suggested by Aquilina (1.595). This local formation may well be the result of dissimilation in the contraction of ‘*id* and *dā* or *dāk*. Arabic *lākin* is unknown in Maltese.

7. <*nħasset ukoll il-ħtieġa*> *nħasset ukoll il-ħti:ġa* ‘the need was also felt’:

This is an example of calquing on English. The stem-VII verb, apart from Barthélemy, is not attested in the Arabic dictionaries I consulted. As regards *ħti:ġa* ‘need’ (pl. *ħtiġiyi:t*), it is a local formation

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9- Woodhead & Beene 110.

10- Cf. Yem idiom *ħisāb qalbi* ‘the thoughts in my mind’ (Piamenta 94). Moreover, EAr *ħasba* means ‘a thought, intention; calculation; matter, problem’ (Holes 113). M *ħasba* is also attested, meaning ‘a thought, provision’, but I doubt whether it is still current.

11- Harrell 247. Cp M *biħsiebni*, a contraction of *bi+ħsieb*+pron. suff., means ‘I intend, plan (to do s.th.)’.

12- In the case of {z-n-n}, in M it is restricted to just *donn* + pers. suff. used adverbially (Aquilina 1.199).

derived from the stem-VIII verb *ḥti:ğ* 'to need'. Contrary to Arabic, the semantic field of Maltese *ḥāğ* has been generalized to 'thing', with no reference at all to the sense 'need'.<sup>13</sup> In Maltese there are no reflexes of Ar *ḍarūra* 'need'.

8. <*barra alfabet*> 'apart from an alphabet': Maltese shares with Arabic the adverbial usage of *barra* with its spatial connotations (i.e. 'out, outside; away from, abroad'). However, *barra* is also used in prepositional phrases meaning 'apart from, not counting (s.th.); except'. The corresponding Ar expression *ma 'ada* is unknown in Maltese.

9. <*kien jismu*> *ki:n yismu* 'it was called': This is based on the hypothetical impersonal denominative verb *\*jisem* 'to be named, called' to which object pronouns are suffixed. Thus *jisimni* 'I'm called, my name is', *jisinha* 'her name is', etc.<sup>14</sup> What makes it look like a verb is the suffixation of the 1st pers. sg. objective *-ni*. However, very probably, the form *\*yisem* has developed as a result of the palatalization of the initial *hamza* in the noun *'ism*. This does not seem to find any correspondent in the Ar dialects, even though within the Anatolian area, particularly in Kəndərīb, the form *yJsmū* 'he is called' is attested and is a variant of MHallami *Jsmu*.<sup>15</sup>

<*Tagħrif fuq il-Kitba tal-Malti*> 'Information about the Writing of Maltese':

10. <*tagħrif*> [*tārīf*] 'information, notice, notification': The stem-II verb *'arraḥ* in Maltese and most Arabic dialects renders the sense 'to inform, let s.o. know'.<sup>16</sup> Maltese *Tagħrif* 'information' is indeed attested in formal Arabic, and in the Ar dialects it stands for 'declaration; description, definition; identity' (Alg), 'definition' (Eg, Ir), 'description' (Anat), 'education' (EAr), 'mailing letter' (Yem). M <*tagħrif*> corresponds to Ar *ma'lūmāt*, with no Maltese cognate, or *'ahbār*, meaning 'one news item' in M.<sup>17</sup>

13 The plural <*hwejjeg*> covers such meanings as 'property, goods; clothes', which are also reflected in a number of Ar vernaculars. As regards *ukoll*, its only cognate seems to be Leb *welkell*. (Borg 1996: 146).

14 The forms *ismi* 'my name', *isinha* 'her name', etc. are also possible in M, e.g. *semma ismi* 'he mentioned my name'; *kiteb isinkom* 'he wrote your name', etc.

15 Vocke & Waldner 209.

16 This is the case in And, Mor, Tun, Lev, Anat, EAr, Yem, and Ch-Sud. Moreover, the following meanings are also attested: 'to introduce, present' (And, Mor, Lib, Eg, Ir, Gf, Ch-Sud), 'to define' (Mor, Eg, Ir), 'to confess s.o.' (Lev), 'to write to s.o.' (Yem).

17 Aquilina 2.975; Wehr 606; Beaussier 647; Hinds & Badawi 572; Vocke & Waldner 277; Woodhead and Beene 308; Holes 346; Piamenta 2.323.

<*tiswa wkoll biex wiehed jifhem aħjar*> ‘also serves so that one better understands’:

11. <*tiswa*> ‘it serves’: In most Ar dialects, variants of the verb *sawā* cover the sense ‘to cost, be worth’. This is also the case in M, where, however, its semantic field is wider, covering such senses as ‘to be allowed (in religious contexts)’,<sup>18</sup> as well as ‘to be useful, suitable for’.<sup>19</sup> This is certainly an Italianism, where *valere*, apart from the meanings related to ‘being worth’ also covers the sense ‘to be of use, be effective’.

12. <*jifhem aħjar*> ‘understands better’: Apart from sharing with other Arabic dialects the elative sense ‘better than’, the form [ahyār] in Maltese has also an adverbial function. This does not seem to be the case in other Arabic dialects.<sup>20</sup>

<*kien meqjus bħala l-manwal ufficċjali*> ‘was considered as the official manual’

13. *kċ:n me'yūs* ‘was considered’: In Maltese and most Arabic dialects, the verb *qās* means ‘to measure; try on (for size); etc.’. The semantic field of this verb has also been metaphorically extended to cover such senses as Ir ‘to judge’, Gf ‘to draw conclusions from’, Yem, *qāyas* ‘to suppose’ and *tqāyas* ‘to be studied thoroughly’. The M pass. part. *me'yūs* finds its formal reflex in Yem *maqyūs* ‘measured’, but in M the metaphorical sense ‘considered’ has been added, echoing And ‘to reckon, calculate’.<sup>21</sup> There are no reflexes of *i'tabara* and *i'taqada* in Maltese.

14. <*bħala l-manwal ufficċjali*> ‘as the official manual’: Although related to And, Mor, Alg and M *bħal* ‘like, as, similar to’,<sup>22</sup> this adverb, meaning ‘as, in the capacity of’, seems to be derived from Ar *fī ḥālā* ‘in a

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18- This usage is attested also in Leb, where it is not restricted to religious contexts. E.g. *ma byiswa b-‘əmrun yit'abu hal-qadd* ‘it is not allowed that they (children) should suffer so much.’ (informer).

19-Anat ‘to use, employ’ (Vocke & Waldner 214) come close to the sense in M.

20- M *ahyār* is a reflex of *‘ahyar* in And (Corriente 170); Eg (Hinds & Badawi 271); Lev (Denizeau 159); Ir (Woodhead & Beene 150); Daṭ (Landberg 664); *‘ahēr* in Lev (Barthélemy 225); Ch-Sud (Roth-Laly 2.151); Hillelson 209; Sin *ahayr* (Henderson Stewart 284); Anat (Vocke & Waldner 148); Ch-Sud *ahēyr* and *ahiyar* (Roth-Laly 2.151).

21- Corriente 450; Beaussier 844; Woodhead & Beene 382; Qafisheh 534; Landberg 2545; Piamenta 421. In Mor, the sense shifted to ‘to touch’ (Harrell 109), whereas in Alg, apart from ‘to measure’ it also means ‘to attack; hit; catch; accuse s.o., etc.’ and *maqyūs* stands for ‘attacked; hit; caught’ (Beaussier 844).

22- Corriente 144; Harrell 16; Beaussier 254; Grand’Henry 108; Aquilina 1.112-3.

state, condition', even though syntactically they function differently.<sup>23</sup> This is not attested in the Arabic dialects,<sup>24</sup> where the prepositional phrase *bi-ṣifat-*, unknown in Maltese, is used instead.

15. <*izda billi t-Tagħrif*> 'but since the *Tagħrif*': Although morphologically reflecting Mor and Alg *bellī* 'that', the Maltese conjunction implements a semantic role corresponding to Ar *b-hēt*, *hit*, *bi-ma-'innu*, etc. 'since'. In all probability, this is a loan-translation of Italian *giacché*.

<*dwar kliem ta' nisel Rumanz*> 'about words of Romance origin':

16. <*dwar*> [dwAr] 'concerning': This lexeme is both a plural noun meaning 'surroundings, habitat' and, more commonly, the preposition 'on, concerning, about, as regards'. Whereas cognate nouns and prepositions of place related to the sense 'around' are attested, among others, in Tun, Sin, Lev and Anat,<sup>25</sup> the prepositional usage with the sense 'concerning' is not attested in Arabic. This is a calque on Italian *circa* 'as regards, concerning'.

17. <*nisel*> 'origin' (also 'offspring; extraction, descent, issue; derivation; cause'): In general, *nasl* and its variants in the Ar dialects and Maltese refer to 'progeny, offspring, descendants'.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, in Maltese the word has been semantically extended to include 'origin; cause'. These senses correspond to Ar *'aṣl*, *sabab*, *maṣḍar*, all unknown in Maltese.

<*ħarġet iż-Żieda mat-Tagħrif*> 'the (publication) *Żieda mat-Tagħrif* was published':

18. <*ħarġet*> *ħarōet* 'was published': Apart from the sense 'to come out', Maltese has extended the semantic field of this verb to include a whole range of meanings, among them those related to 'publishing', corresponding to Ar *ṣadara*, *naṣara*, both unattested in Maltese in this

23- The shift from /f/ to /b/ is not unknown in M (cp. Ar /*fazi'al*> M /*beza'*/; Ar /*qafizal*> M /*qabez'*/).

24- In Eg and other dialects a noun followed *bi-ḥāl* + pron. suff. means 'a whole ..., an entire ...'.

25- Cp M prep. *madwar* (pronounced [madwār]) 'around; about, approximately' with Tun *madwar* 'necklace; collar (of dog)' (Stumme 165), Sin *madwar* 'metal ring (attached to a camel bridle)' (Henderson Stewart 211), Lev *ḍawwār maḍāwīr* 'around' (Barthélemy 256), Anat *mādār* 'around'; *madwar* 'wooden crank (in a weaving chair)' (Vocke & Waldner 162).

26- In And it can also mean 'a clan' (Corriente 527), and in Anat 'a generation' (Vocke & Waldner 423).

sense. This led to the coining of the noun *ħarġa* ‘an edition’ of a published document.<sup>27</sup>

19. <*kemm Iż-Żieda kif ukoll l-Aġġornament*> ‘Both *Iż-Żieda* and *l-Aġġornament*’:

The use of *kemm* [A] *kif ukoll* [B] to mean ‘both [A] and [B]’ is not attested in Ar. Even though not a direct calque on Italian, this local formation seems to have developed under the influence of It *Quanto a ...* ‘as regards ...’ and *così come* ‘just as’.<sup>28</sup>

<*ħasbet li tiġbor ir-regoli kollha*> ‘provided for the collection of all the rules’:

20 <*ħasbet li*> The sense ‘thought’ has already been discussed in 5 above. M *ħaseb* ‘to think; consider, regard’ has cognates in various Ar dialects,<sup>29</sup> and it shares with Levantine the sense ‘to make provisions, provide for’ (Barthélemy 156). Moreover, the M stem-II tr. verb *ħasseb* ‘to make s.o. think seriously about s.th., cause s.o. anxiety’ contrasts semantically with the corresponding intr. forms in Iraqi and Gulf Arabic ‘to be, or become anxious’.<sup>30</sup> This latter sense is attested in the Maltese stem-V verb *thasseb* echoed in Levantine *thassab* (*la / mən ħada*) ‘to dread s.o.’.<sup>31</sup>

<*tiġbor*> Apart from the sense ‘to force, compel’, the root {ġ-b-r} in Arabic displays a range of related meanings, such as ‘to set (a broken bone);<sup>32</sup> comfort, soothe (s.o.’s feelings), help (s.o. in distress)’.<sup>33</sup> In M the root has come to be associated with ‘collecting, gathering, picking up’, thus corresponding to Ar variants of *ġama*, *lamm*, *laqqat*, *laqqa*,

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27- The verb *ħareġ* can be both transitive: *L-awtur ħareġ ktieb* ‘The author published a book’ (Ar *‘aṣḍara*) and intransitive: *Il-Ktieb ħareġ* ‘The book was published.’ (Ar *ṣadara*).

28- Re M *ukoll* see note 13 above.

29- And (Corriente 125); Mor (Harrell); Alg (Beaussier 200-1); Lib (Curotti 279); Eg (Hinds & Badawi 203); Sin (Henderson Stewart 234); Ch-Sud (Roth-Laly 2.117); Lev (Barthélemy 156); Ir (Woodhead & Beene 100-1); EAr (Holes 111); Gf (Qafisheh 134-6).

30- In Lev, Ir and Gf *ħassab* means also ‘to think, believe, consider’.

31- Pal *thassab* also means ‘to think, estimate’ (Denizeau 109).

32- Corriente 88-9; Hinds & Badawi 147; Henderson Stewart 237; Barthélemy 101; Woodhead & Beene 66; Holes 82; Roth-Laly 1.85. This is also attested in M.

33- Hinds & Badawi 147; Henderson Stewart 237; Barthélemy 101; Piamenta 59. Other related meanings attested in the dialects are: And ‘to repair (cp. M *ġabbar*); make up for’; And, Eg, Yem ‘to recover’; Sud ‘to restore, make strong’; Yem ‘to patch up (a wound)’; Eg ‘to round up to a whole unit’. In Mor *ġbar* means ‘to find, discover’ (Harrell 232), in Alg ‘to find; meet’ (Beaussier 128), and in Tun ‘to find’ (W. Marçais 199).

etc.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, the semantic extension of M *ğabra* is most impressive, covering such meanings as 'collection, group, quantity of; gathering; thrift, a sense of good domestic management; mental and usually devout concentration'.<sup>35</sup>

< *fīt-līet dokumenti li semmejna* > 'in the three documents we mentioned':

22. <*semmejna*> *semmeyna* 'we mentioned': In most Ar dialects *samma* renders the meanings: 'to name, call; appoint; say the expression *b-ism allāh*'. In Maltese, the sense 'to name' is also attested, but the semantic scope of this root has been extended to include the sense 'to mention'. Ar *dakara*, 'ašāra 'ila are not part of the Maltese lexicon.<sup>36</sup>

23. <*la jagħti ... u lanqas ma jsolvi ...*> 'neither gives ... nor solves ...': The combination of *la ... lanqas ...* corresponds to Ar *lā ... wa-lā ...*, where *lanqas* is a contraction of the definite article *l-* and the elative *anqas*. This local formation has no elative connotations and is a calque on Italian *nemmeno* 'not even'.<sup>37</sup>

24. <*tistampa kotba oħra*> 'it prints other books': The M plural *kotba* does not find any corresponding form in Ar where *kutub* and its dialectal variants are widely attested.<sup>38</sup> In M, the broken pl. pattern CoCCa, although quite rare, has replaced other Ar pl. patterns.<sup>39</sup>

<*nghidu kif għandu jinkiteb*> 'we say how it should be written':

25. <*nghidu*> [nāydu] 'we say': The treatment of the verb 'to say' in Maltese is unique, in that it is of a hybrid type which makes use of two verbs: 'ād and qal. In the pf. tense, forms of 'ād are used in the 1st and 2nd persons, sg. and pl., whereas in the impf. forms of cAd are used throughout. The sense in M is a generalization of the restricted Ar sense 'to repeat; return'.<sup>40</sup>

34- Only *laqqaṭ* has a reflex in Maltese, yet with the restricted meaning 'to pick up things from here and there; lick up food, finish the food one is eating' (Aquilina 1.730).

35- Aquilina 1. 373-4. Cp. Alg *ğbira* 'bag, haversack' (Darmaun 144). M *ğbira* 'collection, quantity of' is confined to proverbial usage.

36- In M, the derivatives of {d-k-r} are only associated with 'impregnation; fecundation'. It is worth mentioning that Daṭ *miṣmī* 'famous' and *masamma* 'well known' (Landberg 1982) are cognates of M *msemmi* 'well-known person' (Aquilina 2. 867).

37- Aquilina 1958: 73.

38- Isolated exceptions are Anat and Sud where the sound plural *ktēbāt* (Vocke & Waldner 361), and *kitābāt* (Roth-Laly 4.405) are attested. Moreover, the form *ktūba* is attested in Algiers (Beaussier 850), and *ktūb* in Alg (Tapiéro 137) and Mzāb (Grand'Henry 129).

39- Borg 1978: 285.

40- Cf. Kontzi 1993: 13-14.



26. [āndu yinkiteb] - The use of prep. *għand* + pron. suff. followed by the impf. to denote the sense 'must, should, have to, be obliged to' is exclusively Maltese. It is evidently a calque on It *avere da* + inf. and Eng *have to* + inf. Alternatively, one may resort to the impersonal *jehtiegħ* 'it is necessary that'. This latter usage is also unattested in Ar, and is yet another calque on the It intr. impers. verb *bisogna*. There are no reflexes in M of Ar *yağib* 'an and prep. 'ala + pron. suff.

*Conclusion* : This paper has to do with aspects of the internal dynamics of a language which, in its isolation from its original acrolect, was, and still is exposed to influences from European languages. The realignment of linguistic facts entailed semantic shifts in the direction of generalization (nos. 1, 2, 3, 8, 12, 13, 17, 18, 22, 25), or specialization (nos. 5, 10, 21).<sup>41</sup> In the case of generalization, a number of roots witness an accretion in their lexical criteria, thus becoming polysemous. This leads, in turn, to a displacement of other roots, rendering them dispensable.<sup>42</sup> In this way, the stock of current Arabic roots in Maltese inevitably shrinks, with no possibility of further replenishment from the copious reserves of the Arabic language. At times, relexification entails restructuring of Arabic-Maltese elements giving rise to loan-translation (nos. 7, 11, 15, 16, 19, 23, 26), and the formation of new words unattested in Arabic (nos. 4, 6, 7, 9, 14, 24). In the whole complicated process, notions discarded from a particular lexical category are very often compensated by loans from non-Arabic sources.<sup>43</sup>

The reinterpretation of linguistic facts in Maltese is one of the causes behind its unintelligibility to the Arabs.<sup>44</sup> The Maltese language has never shunned renewal and is in a continuous state of development. This is dictated by the increasing challenges confronting it locally, particularly in the field of the media which has lately witnessed a proliferation of local radio and television stations, and internationally, being one of the official languages of the EU. The recent enactment of a law providing, among other measures, for the establishment of the National Council of the Maltese Language augurs well for the preservation and fostering of this language.

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41- The terms "generalization" and "specialization" are only relative. Although n. 21 *tiġbor* is, at face value, a case of specialization (the sense being restricted to 'picking up' and its related meanings, one of its derivatives, the noun *ġabra*, is quite polysemous.

42- This is the case, for example, of obsolete M *dann* 'to suppose, be of the opinion that; consider s.o. as; judge' (< Ar *ẓanna*) whose only current form is *donn* (see note 12 above).

43- This is the case of Ar *ḥisāb* corresponding to M 'kalkolu, kont, etc.' See n. 5 above.

44- According to Borg 1994: 31, Maltese phonology accounts for this language's alienness and unintelligibility to native speakers of Arabic.

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