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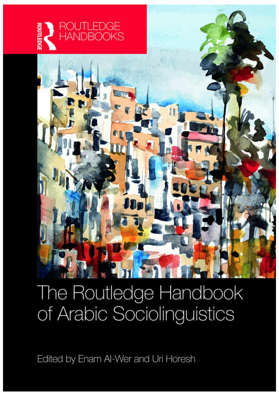
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15

MORPHOSYNTACTIC VARIATION

Focus on Maltese and other western varieties

Maris Camilleri

Introduction

As a complement to Choueiri's chapter (this volume), this chapter concentrates on morphosyntactic issues internal to western varieties of Arabic. These include varieties spoken in the geographical area that stretches from Mauritania to Libya, including Maltese, as well as extinct varieties such as the Andalusian and Sicilian Arabic (Siculo-Arabic) (Vicente 2008). While each individual dialect itself involves internal variation, and idiosyncrasies that cut across all levels of linguistic structure, the approach taken here is more of a bird's-eye view of a number of properties that can be said to be a broad characteristic identifier of a set of dialects that can collectively be grouped as Moroccan Arabic, or Tunisian Arabic, for instance.

In the course of this chapter, I concentrate on three aspects of Arabic morphosyntax: negation; complementiser choice in the context of clausal complementation; and the way in which existential constructions are expressed. While a number of individual grammars and descriptive works do discuss the set of morphosyntactic properties discussed here, this chapter provides an account of the variation across this specific group of Arabic varieties, adding a comparative perspective.

The inclusion of Maltese specifically in this group of Arabic varieties follows a number of classifications present in the literature (Stumme 1904; Aquilina 1961, 1979; Owens 2010; Hammett 2012, but see Vanhove 1998; Kaye 2009; Kaye & Rosenhouse 2013; Zammit 2014 *inter alia*, for an emphasis on the ambivalent nature of Maltese as an independent language, even if an offshoot of this branch).[1] The inclusion of Maltese within this group of western varieties is not aimed at disproving or approving of the membership of Maltese within this particular classification. It is clear from linguistic analysis at different levels that indeed, Maltese maintains traits from the western group of dialects, such as the properties discussed in this chapter, as well as others discussed in Camilleri & Sadler (2016): for instance, *wh*-pied-piping, which occurs in Maltese not solely in the context of interrogative constructions (as is the case in Levantine dialects), but also in relative clause contexts. Yet several other features in Maltese (e.g., the phonological process known as *imāla* – raising of /aː/ to [iː] (Vanhove,1998), or the morphosyntactic ability of doubling (and marking) indirect objects, in particular (yet see Souag 2017 for a broader overview), and differentially marking the object function) parallel observed behaviours present in eastern dialects. The comparative outlook towards western morphosyntactic properties, and an assessment of the differences and similarities that lie within the different dialects that characterise this group, will be a novel contribution. Specifically, I argue that Maltese is no different structurally from other dialects of Arabic in containing a mixture of linguistic features that have different origins. At the same time, Maltese, unlike any other Arabic vernacular, is the national and official language (co-official with English) of a sovereign country – Malta – and one of the official languages of the European Union.

The novel aspect of the analysis I present in this chapter is that morphosyntactic variation is at the heart of the comparison across the different western varieties. For the most part, other scholars have compared Maltese to individual western dialects: Maltese and Tunisian (Zammit 2014; Chaouachi 2014); Maltese and Algerian (Nassima & Moulay-Lahssan 2017); and Maltese on the one hand and Tunisian and Libyan on the other (Čéplö et al. 2015). Vanhove (1998) does survey Maltese in relation to a number of western varieties yet concentrates on phonological, morphological and lexical traits. The analysis here will, for the first time, deal specifically with morphosyntactic variation, rather than lexical or phonological variation, as in most of the available existing literature.

Aspects of negation

Discussions of the morphosyntactic variation that exists across the Arabic vernaculars always makes reference to the expression of negation (e.g., Brustad 2000); in particular the presence, absence or optionality of the bipartite expression of negation (see Choueiri, this volume, and references therein) involving *ma-ʃ* (and morphophonological variations thereof). Rather than concentrate on this fact, given how there is not much difference in this regard when it comes to the realisation of verbal negation across the western varieties, I here choose to concentrate on the realisation of sentential negation when non-verbal predicates are involved. The major split that differentiates the western varieties from one another is whether or not these employ the bipartite negation strategy, otherwise present in the context of verb forms, to negate non-verbal predicates. Varieties that demonstrate these features include Moroccan (Harrell 1965; Brustad 2000; Heath 2002; Agaudé & Elyaacoubi 1995) and Libyan (Lafkioui 2013; Ghadgoud 2017). As illustrated in (1) and (2), *ma-ʃ* attaches onto adjectival, participial and nominal predicational forms in Moroccan and Libyan dialects, respectively.

(1) a. ana **ma** farħan-**ʃ** bəzzaf[2]
I NEG happy-NEG very
'I'm not very happy'. Slime (2017: 15)
b. ħtta fil-maɣrib **ma** məʕruf-**ʃ**
even in.DEF-Morocco NEG PASS.PTCP.know.SGM-NEG
'Even in Morocco he isn't known'. Brustad (2000: 291)

(2) a. ana **mo** Taalib-**ʃ**
I NEG student-NEG
'I am not a student'. Lafkioui (2013: 58)
b. huwwə **ma**-hnaa-**ʃ**
he NEG-here-NEG
'He is not here'. Ghadgoud (2017: 180)

This strategy, in Moroccan and Libyan dialects, alternates with the one where *ma-ʃ* attaches onto the (free NOM) pronominal forms. This pronominal negation strategy, however, happens to be the only strategy of sentential negation which dialects such as Tunisian (example (3), Scholes & Abida 1966; Bahloul 1996) and Maltese (example (4)) can employ, in such syntactic contexts.

(3) l-biit **ma**-hiye-**ʃ** nđiif-a
DEF-house.SGF NEG-3SGF-NEG clean-SGF
'The house wasn't clean'. Scholes & Abida (1966: 57)

(4) a. Jien **mhux** ~ **minix** hawn[3]
I NEG.3SGM ~ NEG.1SG here
'I am not here'.
b. *Jien **m**'hawn-**x**
I NEG.here-NEG
Intended: 'I am not here'.

Another parallel between Tunisian (Belazi 1993; McNeil,2017) and Maltese (Spagnol 2009; Camilleri 2016), which is yet again not found in other western dialects or eastern dialects, is the fact that while, as illustrated in (3) and (4), pronominal negation is used in the context of non-verbal predicates, verbal predicates, specifically imperfective verbal predicates, in declarative contexts, can be (sententially) negated through both the usual bipartite realisation of negation and pronominal negation otherwise employed with non-verbal predicates. The alternation in the negation strategies employed, however, is in correlation with the value expressed by the imperfective verb form, thus creating the contrasts in (5) and (6) below (Tunisian and Maltese, respectively). The presence of *ma-ʃ* as a means for expressing NEG vis-à-vis the imperfective verb form associates with a habitual reading (5a and 6a). The presence of pronominal negation, vis-à-vis the imperfective verb form, on the other hand, results in a progressive reading (5b and 6b).

(5) a. **maa** yi-ʕaawin-**ʃ** ħattaa Tarf
NEG 3SGM-help.IPFV-NEG even a.bit
'He doesn't help a bit'. Habitual reading
b. **muʃ**/**maahuʃ** yi-ʕaawin ħattaa Tarf
NEG 3SGM-help.IPFV even a.bit
'He is not helping at all'. Progressive reading
Belazi (1993: 61)

(6) a. **Ma** n-iekol-**x** ħafna
NEG 1-eat.IPFV-NEG a.lot
'I don't eat a lot'. Habitual reading
b. **Mhux**/**minix** n-iekol ħafna
NEG.3SGM/NEG.1SG 1-eat.IPFV a.lot
'I am not eating a lot'. Progressive reading
Camilleri (2016: 53)c

The contrast observed in (5) and (6) in Tunisian and Maltese, respectively, is incidentally in contrast with data from Egyptian, cited in Soltan (2014), and also discussed in Choueiri (this volume). As illustrated in (7), the presence of *ma-ʃ* or pronominal negation in relation to imperfective forms results in no change in the aspectual interpretation expressed, and only a habitual reading is possible.

(7) a. **ma**-bi-y-ruħ-**ʃ** ig-gamʕa
NEG-INDIC-3SGM-go.IPFV-NEG DEF-university
'He doesn't go to the university'.
b. **miʃ** bi-y-rūħ ig-gamʕa
NEG INDIC-3SGM-go.IPFV DEF-university
'He doesn't go to the university'. Soltan (2014: 95)

Complementiser distinctions

In what follows, I concentrate on a split that has not been given much attention in the literature. Some dialects distinguish between the complementisers *(il)li* vs. *ʔenn* (-/+INFL, or default 3SGM.ACC) in order to express the equivalent of 'that' in English, with the former being used in relative clause constructions, and the latter used to introduce clausal complements. Other dialects make use of the same *(il)li* base for the complementiser form that heads both adjunct clauses such as relative clauses, as well as clausal complementation. The former type of split is what one finds in Levantine and Egyptian dialects, as illustrated in (8a) for Lebanese Arabic and (8b) for Egyptian.

(8) a. kariim ʔaal **ʔennu** zena ħiky-it
Kariim say.PFV.3SGM COMP.3SGM.ACC Zena talk.PFV-3SGF
maʕ-o
with-3SGM.GEN
'Kariim said that Zena talked with him'. Aoun (1993: 720)
b. **inni** saħb-it-na ti-skot, ʔabadan
COMP friend-SGF-1PL.GEN 3SGF-be.quiet.IPFV never
'That our friend would keep quiet, never!' Woidich (2006: 162)

When considering what takes place across the different western dialects, we start by observing that Libyan employs a split between *ennu* (or variations thereof) in complement clauses (9) and *illi* in relative clauses (10) (which also happens to involve a clausal complement introduced by *ennə*).

(9) a. ħəbbee-t **ennə-h** ma kaan-iʃ kbiir
like.PFV-1SG COMP-3SGM.ACC NEG be.PFV.3SGM-NEG big.SGM
'I liked that it was not big'. Ghadgoud (2017: 242)
b. gaal-ət l-i **ʔənna** m-saafr-a
say.PFV-3SGF DAT-1SG COMP ACT.PTCP-travel-SGF
'She said that she was travelling'. Pereira (2008: 411)

(10) đ-điib **llii** ma-huu-ʃ ʕaarif **ennə**
DEF-wolf COMP NEG.3SGM-NEG ACT.PTCP.SGM COMP
laila jaayy-a
Laila come.ACT.PTCP-SGF
'The wolf that does not know that Laila is coming'. Ghadgoud (2017, 266)

Hassaniyya, spoken in Mauritania, follows suit in employing the complementiser *ʕann*+ACC inflection (where /ʕ/ has replaced the original /ʔ/) in the context of (non-factive) clausal complements as in (11):

(11) a. wassay-t **ʕann-u** ṛaažel
believe.PFV-1SG COMP-3SGM.ACC man
'I believed he was a man'.
b. ya-ʕṛav ʕann-u. . .
3SGM-know.IPFV COMP-3SGM.ACC
'He knows that he. . . ' Ould Mohamed Baba (2008: 345)

Algerian seems to also employ the complementiser *an*/*in* plus inflection to introduce clausal complementation.

(12) ħulm-ha l-waħid **in-ha**
dream.SGM-3SGF.GEN DEF-one.SGM COMP-3SGF.ACC

tu-ħkum pɔst
3SGF-secure.IPFV job
'Her one dream that she gets a job'. Zouari-Ferhat (2015: 28)

On the other hand, relative clauses are introduced with *(i)li*.

(13) intuma **ili** ʕrad-tu-na
you.PL COMP invite.PFV-2PL-1PL.ACC
'You who invited us'. RC: Zouari-Ferhat (2015: 32)

While the data in (12) and (13) align Algerian with Libyan and Hassaniyya, which have the complementiser split also present in Egyptian and Levantine dialects, Algerian also makes use of the complementiser *belli* to introduce clausal complements, as in (14). One could argue that such a complementiser essentially incorporates the form of the erstwhile preposition *bi* 'with' onto the complementiser form which otherwise introduces relative clauses (as in (13)).

(14) a. baʃ t-kun *sure* **belli** laħg-ət
in.order.to 3SGF-be.IPFV certain COMP arrive.PFV-3SGF
'So that you are sure that it arrived'. Mendas (2013: 130)
b. ga-t-l-i **belli** *ma* *mère* ʕand-ha. . .
say.PFV-3SGF-DAT-1SG COMP 1SGF.GEN mother have-3SGF.GEN
'She told me that my mother has. . . ' Mendas (2013: 136)

Incidentally, this *belli*, except for some phonological variations thereof, is the same item that one finds used in the same syntactic contexts in Moroccan (Harrell 1965; Heath 2002; Ennaji et al. 2004), as in (15) below. The difference is that the forms *bəlli*/*blli*/*billa* in Moroccan do not seem to alternate with *in*/*enn* (or any of its phonological variants) when a complement clause is introduced, unlike what is found in Algerian.

(15) ʕraf-t (**blli**/**billa**) ʕali ka-y-xdem məzyan
know.PFV-1SG COMP Ali IPFV-3SGM-work hard.SGM
'I know that Ali works hard'. Ennaji et al. (2004 104)

The relative clause is then merely expressed through the complementiser *lli* without any fusion with the preposition, as in (16).

(16) l-bent **lli** ʃəf-t
DEF-girl COMP see.PFV-1SG
'The girl that I saw' Agaudé (2003: 306)

Fusions of prepositions with the complementiser are quite common across the different western varieties, yet it is clear that their distribution (and form) differs. For instance, the complementiser (*il*)*li* fused with a preposition may commonly introduce adjunct clauses at the sentential level, rather than at the nominal level, in dialects such as Tunisian and Maltese (for more discussion about the latter, see Camilleri & Sadler (2016: 123), as opposed to the use of *belli* in Algerian and Moroccan, where a clausal complement, rather than an adjunct, can be introduced. Having said that, the complementiser/conjunctor/subordinator *melli* 'since', which involves the fusion of the preposition *min* 'from' with the complementiser, is then used in both Algerian and Tunisian to introduce a sentential adjunct clause.

In both clausal complement contexts – see (17) for Tunisian and (18) for Maltese – and in relative clause contexts – (19a) and (19b) respectively – both Tunisian and Maltese make use of the form *(il)li*.

(17) a. qaddaʃ min rājəl qul-t (**illi**) kān-u fil-bīt?
how.many from man say.PFV-2SG COMP be.PFV.3-PL in.DEF-house
'How many men did you say were in the house?' Jouini (2012: 49)
b. yu-đhur **illi** l-mTar bāʃ t-Sub
3SGM-seem.IPFV COMP DEF-rain FUT 3SGF-pour.IPFV
'It seems that it is going to rain'. Halila (1992: 243)

(18) Na-ħseb (**li**) n-af x'ġara
1SG-think.IPFV COMP 1SG-know.IPFV what.happen.PFV.3SGM
'I think that I know what happened'.

(19) a. l-iktaab **illi** qrii-t-u
DEF-book.SGM COMP read.PFV-1SG-3SGM.ACC
'The book that I read'. RC: Halila (1992: 157)
b. Kulħadd kiel **li** sajjar Pawlu
everyone eat.PFV.3SGM COMP cook.PFV.3SGM Paul
'Everyone ate what Paul cooked'. Free RC: Sadler & Camilleri (2018: 15)

While the form *(il)li* has been discussed from a syntactic perspective across different dialects, with varied analyses as to whether these forms, in both complement and adjunct contexts, are complementisers heading some CP in the constituent-structure, or not, it is beyond the scope of this chapter to engage in such a discussion. Suffice it to provide a platform that will illuminate this kind of morphosyntactic variation across these varieties. In line with this theme, it becomes quite interesting to note that in Hassaniyya, while complement clauses are introduced through *ʕann*+inflection, as illustrated in (11) above, complements internal to prepositions, which, taken together as a constituent, introduce sentential adjunct clauses, are introduced through *əlli*.[4] We have also observed splits between clausal complementation and adjunct clause complementation with respect to RCs, or the lack thereof, as in Levantine dialects and

Libyan on the one hand, and Tunisian and Maltese on the other. Similarly, we have seen the presence of preposition-fused complementisers employed only in the contexts of clauses introducing sentential adjuncts, as opposed to sentential complements, as in the difference between Tunisian and Algerian. Data such as *əl-waqt əlli* lit. 'the time that', used to mean 'when', and *mən sāʕət lli* lit. 'from hour that', used to mean 'since' (Ould Mohamed Baba 2008: 345) may have well been precursor structures of the preposition-plus-complementiser fusions present across the different western dialects, despite different distributions in different dialects.

Existential constructions

The different behaviours and alignments observed across the different dialects in our discussion of complementiser forms in the previous section will be replicated in this section, as we consider the expression of existential constructions of the type expressed in English in (20).

(20) There are five people reading a book.

Discussions on the individual structures that correspond to (20) in the different Arabic dialects are available, e.g., for Syrian (Jarad 2015); Palestinian (Mohammad 2000; Hoyt 2000; Boneh & Sichel 2010); Egyptian (Eid 1993); Saudi dialects (Al-Kulaib 2010); Moroccan (Brustad 2000); and Tunisian (Halila 1992). The variation that exists across North African and Levantine vernaculars[5] pans out the different strategies of Freeze's (1992) typology of the realisation of existentials, crosslinguistically. Without going into much detail, these include:

a. a predicative prepositional construction;
b. a form that relates to the verbs 'be', 'have' or 'exist', as is the case in the MSA use of the verb *yuwjad* 'exist';
c. spatial/deictic/locative forms – the use of distal *there*, in English.

While the syntax and function of the item within the existential construction may be distinct from the syntax otherwise associated with the erstwhile form, i.e., there is a likelihood that a prepositional predicate or a locative pronominal form within the existential construction may *not* be taking the same function, below is a representation of this threefold categorisation as it manifests itself across different dialects.

Levantine and Egyptian dialects (as well as a number of other dialects in the Arabian Peninsula) display the prepositional strategy, where the preposition *fi* lit. 'in', at times along with the attachment of the default 3SGM GEN pronominal form, expresses the core existential meaning, as in Syrian (21a) and Egyptian (21b):

(21) a. **fī** ʔiTTa taħt il-kirsi
in cat under DEF-chair
'There is a cat under the chair'. Jarad (2015: 234)
b. ma **fī**-ʃ ħad hinaa
NEG in-NEG no.one here
'There is no one here'. Soltan (2014: 117)

Although not given much prominence in the literature, Libyan also makes use of this same strategy with *fi*.

(22) kān fi-h el-bell d-dīr māʕūn
if in-3SGM.ACC DEF-camels 2SGM-do.IPFV pot
'If there are camels, you take the pot (to collect the urine of the animal)'. D'Anna (2017: 360)

a. məʃ mā fi-ʃ mʃākəl
NEG NEG in-NEG problem.PL
'It's not that there are no problems. . . ' Benmoftah & Pereira (2017: 320)

Algerian data, too, indicate the availability of this construction.

(23) a. ma-kan-eʃ **fi** l-ʒzayer *joueur* kima lhadji
NEG-be.PFV.3SGM-NEG in DEF-Algeria player like Lhadji
'There was no player like Lhadji in Algeria'. Cotterell et al. (2014: 3)
b. ma-raħ-iiʃ y-kuun **fi** ʕəSiir fiθ-θəllājə
NEG-FUT-NEG 3SGM-be.IPFV in juice in.DEF-fridge
'There will not be juice in the fridge'. Ghadgoud (2017: 200)

Algerian, however, also offers us instances such as (24), where another strategy expressing the existential construction is employed.

(24) a. **kayən** *un* *marché* fə-l-ʒzayer
be.ACT.PTCP.SGM INDEF.SGM marker.SGM in-DEF-Algeria
'There was a market in Algeria'. Mendas (2013: 93)
b. ma-**ka**-ʃ bəzzāf *les* *groupes*
NEG-be-NEG many DEF.PLF group.PLF
'There aren't many groups'. Mendas (2013: 71)
c. kaʃ/kayən ħlib əl-yum?
be.any/be.ACT.PTCP.SGM milk.SGM DEF-today
'Is there any/Is there milk today?' Souag (2016: 507)

The strategy employed in the Algerian data in (24) is paralleled by data from Moroccan (25). In both data sets we observe the employment of the verb-like strategy in Freeze's typology. The specific strategy employed involves the form (shortened, default, or inflected) of the active participle of the verb *kān* 'be'.

(25) a. lli y-ʕāwn-k mā-**kāyn**
that 3SGM-help.IPFV-2SG.ACC NEG-be.ACT.PTCP.SGM
'There is no one to help you'. Brustad (2000: 307)
b. **kayn-in** le-uqid?
be.ACT.PTCP-PL DEF-match.PL
'Are there [any] matches?' Harrell (1965: 204)

It is rather interesting to find that the existential construction in Maltese (26) is expressed through the form *hemm*, otherwise functioning as a distal locative/spatial/deictic pronoun meaning ‘there’, as illustrated through the locative structures in (27).[6]

(26) (M’)**hemm**-(x)   Alla   wieħed
NEG-EXIST-NEG   God.SGM   one.SGM
‘There is/isn’t one God’.   Existential construction

(27) a. Itlaq   ‘l   **hemm**
leave.IMP.2SG   ALL   there
Lit: ‘leave towards there’
‘Go away!’
b. It-tifla   mhix/mhux   **hemm**
DEF-girl.SGF   NEG.3SGF/NEG.3SGM   there
‘The girl is not there’.   Locative uses of *hemm*

While this strategy patterns with one that is also employed in MSA where *θamma(ta)* ‘there’ is used, this spatial strategy is in fact the one employed in Tunisian. *famma* (or *θamma*, depending on the dialect), the counterpart to Maltese *hemm*, is the distal locative deictic pronoun (28), which is also employed in other dialects, e.g., *təm* in Moroccan and *temma* in Algerian. In Tunisian, however, in parallel to the Maltese counterpart, it doubles as the strategy with which to express the existential construction, as shown in (29).

(28) ħuTT   l-iktāb   **famma**
put.IMP.2SG   DEF-book   there
‘Put the book there’.   Halila (1992: 261)
Locative use of *famma*

(29) a. **famma**   ktaab   fuq   iT-Tāwla
EXIST   book   on   DEF-table
‘There is a book on the table’.   Halila (1992: 9)
b. ma   **fammɛ̄**-ʃ   warda   blɛ̄ʃ   ʃūk
NEG   EXIST-NEG   rose   without   thorn.PL
‘There is no rose without thorns’.   Čéplö et al. (2015: 133)
Existential constructions

Given this overview on the strategies employed in the expression of existential constructions across different western varieties, we find that, just as was the case with the complementiser choice (see previous section), Libyan displays behaviours associated with Egyptian and Levantine dialects in these contexts. Algerian, on the other hand, allows for alternating strategies that align it either with Libyan or with Moroccan, while Tunisian and Maltese broadly align with one another in contrast to other varieties in their classificatory group.

Conclusion

The overview presented in this chapter involves a limited number of morphosyntactic domains. Yet it nevertheless hoped that this coverage contributes to the growing body of literature that analyses morphosyntactic variation, both across all dialects of Arabic and specifically within the group of dialects traditionally viewed as western.

It is particularly interesting to observe how geographical proximity does not necessarily correspond to sameness at the morphosyntactic level. There are many other aspects of syntactic negation which have been not considered here, and where the behaviours observed would align the different dialects in distinct ways. One such dimension to negation where this is the case is the expression of negation in imperative contexts. Libyan, Tunisian and Moroccan varieties, for example, express the imperative through the *ma-ʃ* negation strategy. In contrast, Maltese optionally makes use of the NEG-marker *la*, and not *ma*, in this morphosyntactic context. The use of *la* in Maltese may well be yet another shared retention with eastern varieties, given the use of *la* as a NEG realisation strategy in Syrian (Cowell 1964). Nevertheless, one does find the presence of *ma* (*-ʃ*) in Lebanese (Aoun et al. 2009), Palestinian (Lucas 2013) and Jordanian (Al-Momani 2011), apart from the presence of *la*. Furthermore, the alternation of both *la* and *ma* along with an optionally suffixed *-iʃ* is also present in Sudanese (Manfredi 2013). *la*, on the other hand, just as is the case in Maltese, is the only marker available in imperative contexts in Hassaniyya, as opposed to the use of *ma* in non-imperative contexts (Ould Mohamed Baba 2008). This particular aspect in the domain of negation thus not only shifts the alignment of the different varieties internal to the western branch, but also blurs the eastern and western divide.

Apart from increasing the awareness of the richness of the morphosyntactic variation that exists, this chapter has also contributed to the inclusion of Maltese in comparative accounts that consider the language (in sociolinguistic terms) on a par with the Arabic vernaculars at the level of grammatical considerations, while moving on from considerations that merely zoom in on lexical and phonological features. The close parallels observed between Maltese and Tunisian in the domain of morphosyntactic variation discussed in this chapter may be used to explain and refine the findings by Čéplö et al. (2015), who have examined the degree of mutual intelligibility amongst Maltese, Libyan and Tunisian. While the authors concentrate on the phonological and lexical differences that distinguish and characterise the three different varieties, they showed that the level of intelligibility between Maltese and Tunisian Arabic was at around 30%, while level of intelligibility was lower between Maltese and Libyan. They additionally observed that the level of mutual intelligibility between Libyan and Tunisian stood at two-thirds. These varied degrees of mutual intelligibility are themselves an indication of how much comparative variationist study is necessary in order to unravel the differences that lie at the different levels of linguistic structure, both internal and across dialects, as well as both within closely related dialects, such as the western group of Arabic varieties considered here, and more diverse ones.

Notes

1 The question of whether Maltese is a variety of Arabic will not be dealt here. In my analysis here and elsewhere in my scholarship (e.g., Camilleri 2016: 1), following Owens (2010) and other scholars, Maltese is treated as one such variety.

2 Transcriptions in the examples are as given in the original sources. Note that ‘T’ is equivalent to IPA [$t^ʕ$] and S to IPA [$s^ʕ$].

3 Maltese orthography will be used throughout when it is data from Maltese that is being presented.

4 Apart from other instances where the complementiser *ma* is involved.

5 This excludes other strategies present in Gulf Arabic, such as in Bahraini, where strategies borrowed from Persian are found; see more detail in Holes (1990).

6 Maltese is also able to express the existential construction through the non-distal counterpart *hawn* 'here', as a means with which to express the existential (see Borg & Azzopardi-Alexander 1997 for more detail).

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