

# The Maltese article: Language-particulars and universals

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What can be said about articles in Maltese, summarized in Part 1, is confronted with cross-linguistic generalizations about this category, and it is seen, in Part 3, that much of what was said about articles in Maltese reflects, or is derivative of, general truths about Language.

## 1. Truths about Maltese, concerning articles

1.1. Maltese has a definite article, insofar as the definiteness of (most) noun phrases receives obligatory marking.

(1)	ir-raġel	DEF-man	'the man'
	il-mara	DEF-woman	'the woman'
	it-twil	DEF-tall	'the tall one' (MASC)
	it-twil-a	DEF-tall-FEM	'the tall one' (FEM)
	il-maqtul(-a)	DEF-killed(-FEM)	'the one killed' (MASC/FEM)
	is-sitt	DEF-six	'the six'

A well-delimited subset of definite noun phrases (see especially Nos. 14, 17, 19-22 below) is exempt from such overt definiteness marking, though.

1.2. The marker concerned specializes in encoding definiteness and does not simultaneously perform further functions – such as marking topic, signalling noun-phrase-hood, or converting non-nouns to nouns. When off duty, however, it may be involved in a couple of other functions, though ones with an affinity to definiteness (see below, Nos. 24 and 25).

1.3. It is controversial whether Maltese must be credited with an indefinite article, and the reasons are partly to do with differences between the literary, journalistic, and spoken varieties of the language.

In most varieties of Maltese, especially those codified in grammars (literary, journalistic), the indefiniteness of a noun phrase is expressed negatively, i.e. by the absence of a definite article or other definitizer (a). In lieu of a genuine indefinite article the indefinite pronouns *xi* 'some'

(PL) and *certi/certa/certi* 'certain' (MASC.SG/FEM.SG/PL) or a participative construction with an indefinite pronoun or mid-scalar quantifier as head and with the preposition *minn* 'of, from' may also be resorted to when the indefiniteness of a noun phrase needs special highlighting; but such indefiniteness marking is never obligatory (b). Specific reference of indefinite noun phrases is expressed by a word that is identical to the cardinal numeral 'one', *wiehed/wahad* (MASC/FEM), except that it precedes rather than follows its noun, or also by *certi* 'certain' (c).

- (2) a. raġel man 'a man'  
 mara woman 'a woman'  
 twil(-a) tall(-FEM) 'a tall one' (MASC/FEM)  
 sittia six 'six'  
 xi punt-i some point-PL 'some points'  
 wiehed mill-irġiel one of:DEF-man:PL 'some man'  
 c. wahda mara certain woman 'a certain woman'  
 certi Ghawdxi-n certain Gozitan-PL 'certain Gozitans'

There are indications, in particular in spoken Maltese, that *wiehed/wahda*, i.e. the numeral 'one' that is also used for specific reference, has actually been grammaticalized as the indefinite article, presumably under the influence of Italian, but that its obligatory use as the marker of indefiniteness is limited to animates – yielding this pattern of indefinite and specific noun phrases with animate and inanimate nouns:

- (3) a. \*mara woman '\*a woman'  
 wahda mara a/certain woman 'a woman; a certain woman'  
 b. dar house 'a house'  
 wahda dar certain house 'a certain house'

In what follows the focus will be on the definite article, indubitably well-established in all varieties of Maltese.

1.4. The form of the definite article is, basically, /l/, although this is not the form to occur most frequently.

1.5. The definite article has various allomorphs, conditioned (i) by the first segment of its host (the following noun, adjective or numeral) and (ii) by the last segment of the preceding word. In particular, basic /l/ is only prevocalic (a), and there is a prothetic /i/ when the host begins with a consonant (b) and optionally also when it begins with silent *għ* and *h* (c), unless the preceding word in the same clause ends in a vowel (d); and /l/ completely assimilates to following /tʃ, d, n, r, s, t, ʃ, z, ts/ (orthographically *ċ, d, n, r, s, t, x, z* – the so-called Sun Letters) (e).

- (4) a. l-arja DEF-air  
 b. il-ktieb DEF-book  
 c. (i)l-hemm DEF-grief  
 read DEF-book  
 d. aqra l-ktieb DEF-jackdaw  
 ic-cawla DEF-house  
 id-dar DEF-nature  
 in-natura DEF-man  
 ir-raġel DEF-tall  
 it-twil DEF-sun  
 ix-xemx DEF-horse  
 iz-ziemel

It is the superficial rather than the underlying form of the host that counts: /l/ does not assimilate to /dʒ/ (*g*), but if stem-initial /dʒ/ is itself assimilated to a following voiceless consonant and ends up as /tʃ/ (which is not reflected orthographically), the article is assimilated (again unrecorded by the orthography):

- (5) il-gifen DEF-battleship /il-dʒifen/  
 ig-ġifen DEF-battleship:PL /itʃ-tʃifen/

And see also No. 6 for another instance of the article's sensitivity to the surface form of its host.

The only other form to show such complete assimilation of its final consonant to following initial consonants is the verbal preformative *t-*. The formative *-il* that follows the cardinal numerals 11-19 as well as interrogative and adverbial *kemm* 'how many, as many as' is invariable:

- (6) tnax-il (\*-id) dar twelve-IL house 'twelve houses'  
 kemm-il (\*-ix) xemx how.many-IL sun 'how many suns'

Another form taking prothetic /i/ is the local particle '(i)l. The preposition and object marker *lil* has allomorphs *'il* and *'l*, but does not assimilate.

1.6. The definite article in turn conditions allomorphy of its host, insofar as hosts with initial /tʃ, m, n, s, ʃ/ plus another consonant, and optionally also with certain other consonant clusters (such as /bd/), take prothetic /i/ in the presence of the definite article. In cases of conflict, i.e. when initial /tʃ, n, s, ʃ/, which are among those consonants to cause the article to assimilate, are followed by a consonant, there is a tendency for stem-prothesis (No. 6) to take precedence over assimilation (No. 5) in the case of loan-words, Italian and other (a), while native words often allow both options, assimilation plus article-prothesis or stem-prothesis.

- (7) a. skola 'school' — l-iskola/\*is-skola DEF-school  
 nsara 'Christians' — l-insara/\*in-nsara DEF-Christians  
 spiker 'speaker' — l-ispiker/\*is-spiker DEF-speaker  
 (sometimes spelled *li Speaker*)  
 b. shab 'clouds' — is-shab DEF-clouds  
 bdiewa 'peasants' — il-bdiewa/l-ibdiewa DEF-peasants

1.7. In a few cases the definite article has fused with a noun so intimately as to render their combination formally opaque, inconsistent with the above rules of allomorphy (a); and in at least one or two cases the definite article has been reanalysed as part of the noun, now requiring another article when definite (b).

- (8) a. lemin DEF-right:hand < il-jamin  
 (i)l'im DEF-orphan < il-jatim  
 (i)l'sir/rsir DEF-slave < l-asir  
 b. l-ilma DEF-water < il-ma  
 il-nuccali DEF-glasses < luccali < l-uccali  
 (< Sicilian *ucciali*)

1.8. The definite article optionally fuses with a preceding demonstrative (a), and obligatorily with certain preceding prepositions (b), whose final consonant assimilates to, or is absorbed by, the article's (underlying) /l/. Prepositions ending in a vowel or other single consonants fuse with the definite article unchanged.

- (9) a. dan il-ktieb / dal-ktieb this DEF-book  
 (< dal-l-ktieb < dan-l-ktieb?)  
 b. \*li it-tifla / lit-tifla to DEF-girl  
 \*minn il-Mosta / mill-Mosta from DEF-Mosta  
 (> \*mil-Mosta)  
 \*minn in-nies / min-nies from DEF-people  
 \*ma s-surmast / mas-surmast with DEF-teacher  
 \*ghal il-keleb / ghall-keleb for DEF-dog

1.9. The definite article is formally unrelated to the demonstrative pronouns, which are *dan/din* 'this' (MASC/FEM) and *dak/dik* 'that', and to any 3rd person personal and possessive pronoun forms (independent *hu(wa)/hi(wa)*, bound *-u(-h)/-ha* 'he/she, his/her'). There is some formal similarity to the relative pronoun, *li*, fuller form *illi*.

1.10. The definite article distinguishes neither number nor gender (a), whereas otherwise these two categories are used for noun-phrase-internal agreement. Thus, numeral and specific indefinite 'one', limited

to the singular, agrees in gender (b), and demonstratives and adjectives agree in number and gender with nouns (c).

- (10) a. ir-ragel DEF-man  
 il-mara DEF-woman  
 ir-rġiel DEF-man:PL  
 man one:MASC  
 b. raġel wiehed woman one:FEM  
 mara wahda certain:MASC man  
 wiehed raġel certain:FEM woman  
 wahda mara this:MASC.SG DEF-man  
 c. dan ir-raġel this:FEM.SG DEF-woman  
 din il-mara this:PL DEF-man:PL  
 dawn ir-rġiel DEF-man (DEF-)>learned  
 ir-raġel ((i)l-)gharef DEF-woman (DEF-)>learned:FEM  
 il-mara (l-)gharfa DEF-woman:PL (DEF-)>learned:PL  
 in-nisa (l-)ghorrief

1.11. The definite article precedes the noun, adjective, or numeral (or any other appropriate word) it is used with when these are the only constituents of a noun phrase.

In more complex noun phrases the unmarked order of constituents is as follows, with definite articles preceding either the numeral if there is one or the noun if unaccompanied by a numeral (or if followed by the numeral 'one'), and under certain circumstances also the adjective:

- (11) (Demonstrative -) DEF - (Numeral -) Noun (- DEF) - Adjective)

1.12. In the presence of an attributive adjective, which normally follows the noun, the definite article occurs on the noun and may be repeated, in the appropriate allomorphic form, on the adjective (a); in indefinite noun phrases, zero-marked (b) or with the fledgling indefinite article *wiehed* of animates (c), adjectives do not resume any overt indefinite marking.

- (12) a. il-mara (l-)twila DEF-woman (DEF-)>tall  
 b. mara twila woman tall  
 c. wahda mara (\*wahda) twila a/certain woman (\*a/certain) tall

Re-articulated and bare adjectives are not in free variation in definite noun phrases. Spoken and journalistic Maltese are generally more reluctant than literary Maltese to repeat the definite article with adjectives. Where there is variation it is essentially restrictive adjectives, making a significant contribution to the identifiability of the noun phrase's referent, which deserve a definite article of their own. Thus, in

*il-mara t-twila* a contrast is likely to be implied to a woman that is not tall, while in *il-mara twila* the tallness of the woman is likely to be part of the addressee's advance knowledge. Accordingly, adjectives that are inherently contrastive demand re-articulation (a), and adjectives whose meaning is such as to rule out the possibility of a referential choice, which include those often summarily referred to as 'relational', resist re-articulation (b):

- (13) a. *il-kwadru* \*(l-)lemini DEF-painting DEF-left  
 b. *ir-rumanz* \*(l-)ewlieni DEF-novel \*(DEF-)single  
*il-knisja* \*(l-)lokali DEF-church \*(DEF-)local  
*l-ispirtu* \*(l-)awtentiku DEF-spirit \*(DEF-)authentic  
*il-qaghada* \*(l-)internazzjonali DEF-situation international

Other adjectives refusing re-articulation even when contrastive are those based on proper names:

- (14) *l-ilsien* \*(il-)Gharbi DEF-language \*(DEF-)Arabic  
*il-President* \*(l-)Amerikan DEF-President \*(DEF-)American

If there is more than one postnominal adjective meeting the criterion for re-articulation, all of them may indeed get an article:

- (15) *il-mara it-twila l-hoxna* DEF-woman DEF-tall DEF-stout

It is also possible to omit the article with the first or the second adjective (or both), but the conditions of omissibility are intricate and depend on the nature of the adjectives involved.

There does not seem to be a structural contrast between noun phrases where an adjective has and where it lacks a definite article of its own; in particular, re-articulated adjectives do not seem to be less tightly bound to their nouns or less nominal than unarticulated ones.

1.13. There are circumstances where adjectives may precede their nouns, and numerals (other than 'one') do so regularly (a); these pronominal constituents then take the definite article, and the noun itself does not. Contemporary spoken and journalistic Maltese generally favours pronominal adjectives (b); adjectives intended as ironic move ahead (c); adjectives in the superlative are also pronominal (d), and so are comparative markers when the superlative is formed periphrastically, with the adjective itself staying behind and unarticulated (e); nouns denoting inalienable possessions, such as body parts and kin relations, resist being modified by an adjective in the normal manner, with the

possessor intervening between the noun and its adjective (re-articulated or not), and therefore resort to fronting the adjective (f), where it receives the definite article, although a possession noun in initial position would be without it, being rendered definite by the possessor nominal (see below, No. 20).

- (16) a. *iz-żewġt* \*(l-)ahwa DEF-two \*(DEF-)siblings  
 b. *il-famuż* \*(is-)strajk DEF-famous \*(DEF-)strike  
 c. *l-gharef huk* DEF-wise brother:your  
    'your clever brother' (ironic)  
 d. *l-itwal tifel* DEF-tallest boy  
 e. *l-iktar tifel intelligenti* DEF-more boy intelligent  
    'the most intelligent boy'  
 f. *missier Karla xih* ?father Karla old  
    \*missier Karla ix-xih \*father Karla DEF-old  
    ix-xih missier Karla DEF-old father Karla  
    'Karla's old father'

1.14. In coordinative constructions of two (or more) definite noun phrases, the definite article must not be omitted from the second (or further) conjuncts in literary Maltese (a), unless the two (or more) conjuncts are attributives governed by the preposition *ta'* 'of' and denote office, trade, or occupation (b). (By contrast, prepositions need not be repeated with second conjuncts, nor need demonstratives.)

- (17) a. *l-art u \*(s-)sema* DEF-earth and \*(DEF-)sky  
*fit-teknika u \*(l-)professjoni* in DEF-technique and \*(DEF-)profession  
 (< fi t-teknika ...)  
 (b) *Ministru tax-Xoghol, Impiegi u Sigurtà* Minister of DEF-Public Works, Employment and Social Welfare

In contemporary journalistic Maltese, on the other hand, definite articles are generally omissible from second conjuncts:

- (18) *wara din it-tfittxija u sejba* after this DEF-search and discovery  
 (literary: ... u s-sejba)  
*fit-teknika u professjoni* in DEF-technique and profession

Especially if the two conjuncts are clearly referentially distinct and not amenable to a unit interpretation, definite articles are retained with second conjuncts also in journalistic:

- (19) il-Presidenti u \*(l-)Prim Ministri  
 DEF-Presidents and (\*DEF-)Prime Ministers  
 ir-romol u \*(t-)fjal  
 DEF-widows and (\*DEF-)orphans

1.15. When two adjectives in normal postnominal position are conjoined within a definite NP, the definite article is omissible from the second.

- (20) il-mara it-twila u (l-)hoxna DEF-woman DEF-tall and (DEF-)stout

Coordinate adjectives thus do not differ greatly from stacked adjectives (No. 12), although the omissibility conditions are less straightforward in the case of stacking.

1.16. In addition to prototypical count nouns the nouns that require a definite article in definite noun phrases include those denoting substances (a), colours (b), and abstract notions (c).

- (21) a. il-hadid DEF-iron  
 id-dqiq DEF-flour  
 l-ilima DEF-water  
 b. bl-ahmar with:DEF red 'with red'  
 it-tama DEF-hope  
 is-sengha DEF-art  
 is-sabar DEF-patience  
 is-saħha DEF-health

1.17. In spite of the relevant noun phrases being definite, the definite article is not used with a subset of nouns. This subset of nouns that may be considered inherently definite includes proper names of (a) persons, (b) some countries (mostly ones situated on islands of the same name), (c) (some) islands, (d) some bays, (e) some towns, (f) some villages, and (g) months, but it does not include proper names of (h) other countries (and islands?), (i) other bays, (j) other towns, (k) other villages, (l) mountains, (m) roads, (n) seas, (o) week days, (p) holidays, (q) seasons, (r) languages, and (s) academic subjects, as well as (t) proper names of persons accompanied by a title, all of which require the definite article.

- (22) a. (\*il-)Manwel, (\*il-)Mifsud, (\*l-)Albert (\*il-)Borg, (\*is-)San Ġwann  
 b. Malta, Gappun, Franza, Spanja  
 c. Għawdex, Kemmuna, Filfla, Sqallija 'Sicily', Rodi 'Rhodes'  
 d. Marsaxlokk, (San Pawl il-Baħar)  
 e. Valletta, Victoria, Marsalforn, Napli, Ruma, Ġerusalem, Londra  
 f. Sannat, (Bormla < Bur Mula 'meadow of the lord')

- g. Jannar  
 h. ir-Russja, l-Ingilterra, il-Ġapan, l-Indja, l-Afrika  
 i. l-Għadira  
 j. ir-Rabat [=Victoria], il-Mosta, l-Imdina  
 k. l-Għarb, iż-Zejtun, il-Hamrun  
 l. il-Vessuvju  
 m. is-Salini (no article in *Triq l-Indipendenza* 'Independence Street' etc. because of construct state)  
 n. il-Mediterran  
 o. is-Sibt 'Saturday'  
 p. il-Milied 'Christmas', il-Ġimgħa l-Kbira 'Good Friday'  
 q. ix-xitwa 'winter', ir-rebbiegħa 'spring' (no initial capitals), ir-Randan 'lent'  
 r. l-Ingliż, il-Malti  
 s. il-ġografija, l-istorja, il-Latin  
 t. il-Kardinal Newman, ir-Re Ġorġ Sebgha 'King George VII'

With some proper names of (non-island) countries the definite article is optional:

- (23) h'. (l-)Olanda, (l-)Izrael, Spanja/l-Ispanja

1.18. When a proper name that does not take a definite article is accompanied by a restrictive relative clause or restrictive attributive adjective, it does take the definite article.

- (24) il-Manwel li naf jien DEF-Manwel who I.know I

1.19. In spite of the relevant noun phrases being definite, the definite article is not used with personal (a) or relative pronouns (b).

- (25) a. (\*il-)hu marid (\*DEF-)he sick  
 'he is sick'  
 (\*DEF-)I eaten  
 'I have eaten'  
 DEF-woman (\*DEF-)who ...  
 'the woman who ...'  
 DEF-captain (DEF-)who  
 DEF-lads of-him ...  
 'the captain whose lads ...'

1.20. In spite of the relevant noun phrases being definite, the definite article is not used with nouns carrying possessive suffixes (a). It is used, however, with nouns followed by a possessive suffix attached to the

preposition *ta'* (b); see also No. 19 (b) on such prepositional possessives in relative clauses relativizing on attributive nouns.

- (26) a. (\*id-)dar-i (\*DEF-)house-my  
 (\*iz-)zewg-ha (\*DEF-)husband-her  
 (\*is-)subien-u (\*DEF-)lads-his  
 b. iz-zewg tagh-a xih u ikrah the husband of-her old and ugly  
 'her old and ugly husband'

In the spelling of contemporary journalistic Maltese the definite article occasionally does accompany nouns with a possessive suffix when they are preceded by the preposition *lil* 'to':

- (27) lill-pajjiz-na [= lil-l] to-DEF-country-our

1.21. In spite of the relevant noun phrases being definite, the definite article is not used with nouns in the construct state, i.e. when followed by a nominal attributive not marked by a preposition (a). Prepositional-phrase attributives, which likewise follow their head, do not preclude the definite article on the head and, unlike construct-state attributives, indeed combine with indefinite heads (b).

- (28) a. lehen Manwel voice Manwel 'Manwel's voice'  
 lehen l-avukat voice DEF-advocate 'the advocate's voice'  
 bin is-sultan son DEF-sultan 'the sultan's son'  
 missier u omm il-mara father and mother DEF-wife  
 'the father and the mother of the wife'  
 bieb dar is-sultan door house DEF-sultan  
 'the door of the house of the sultan'  
 b. in-nies ta' Malta DEF-people of Malta 'the people of Malta'  
 il-lehen ta' l-avukat DEF-voice of DEF-advocate  
 'the voice of the advocate'  
 iben ta' l-avukat son of DEF-advocate 'a son of the advocate'

(*Iben* 'son' and singular feminines in -a are the only nouns to have a distinct construct-state form).

1.22. In spite of the relevant noun phrases being definite, the definite article is not used with vocative nouns, vocative being expressed by the particles *ja* or *o*.

- (29) ja/o (\*ir-)Russja! oh (\*DEF-)Russia!

1.23. Alone among the constituents rendering a noun phrase definite,

the demonstrative pronouns require the company of the definite article, provided the noun permits the definite article in the first place.

- (30) dan \*(il-)ktieb this \*(DEF-)book  
 dik \*(il-)mara that \*(DEF-)woman  
 dan Jannar this January

The articulation requirement in noun phrases with a demonstrative does not extend to attributive adjectives, which may be re-articulated or unarticulated (depending on whether or not they are restrictive) as they would be in noun phrases without a demonstrative;

- (31) dawk il-kotba (l-)hodor those DEF-book:PL (DEF-)green

1.24. The definite article is involved in the conversion of cardinal numerals (a) into ordinal numerals (b).

- (32) a. sitt irgiel six man:PL 'six men'  
 is-sitt irgiel DEF-six man:PL 'the six men'  
 b. is-sitt raġel DEF-six man:SG 'the sixth man'

The numerals 1-4 and 100 have slightly or radically different cardinal and ordinal forms; nonetheless, ordinal numerals always take the definite article. This, however, does not suffice to distinguish them from cardinal numerals (other than 1-4 and 100), which are also accompanied by the definite article when their noun phrase is definite (a). It is the combination of a definite article and a noun in the singular that turns cardinal numerals (above 1) into ordinals (b). Alas, with numerals above 10 nouns are in the singular in Maltese anyway, which obliterates the distinction between definite noun phrases with such cardinal and corresponding ordinal numerals; for instance:

- (33) l-ghoxrin student DEF-twenty student:SG  
 'the twenty students'/'the twentieth student'

It would help clarify the role of the article to know (i) how perfectly reasonable requests such as '[the five of us need] a sixth man [to topple over the Ggantija megaliths]' are made in Maltese, and (ii) whether *is-sitt irgiel* might not perhaps also mean '[these are already] the sixth [group of] men [to crawl down Calypso's Cave today]' (or, if not, how else to put such keen empirical observations into words).

1.25. The definite article is also implicated, if perhaps marginally, in

distinguishing superlatives, which lack any specialized marking of their own, from comparatives.

Looking at synthetic comparatives, the only ostensible difference between attributive comparatives and superlatives is that the latter are moved ahead of the noun, with the noun losing its own article in the process, as it regularly does when non-initial (No. 13).

- (34) il-belt il-qawwi DEF-city DEF-powerful  
 'the powerful city'  
 il-belt l-aqwa DEF-city DEF-more:powerful  
 'the more powerful city'  
 l-aqwa belt DEF-more:powerful city  
 'the most powerful city'

If the corresponding indefinite noun phrases were as follows, the definite article would be seen to play a role in distinguishing superlatives from comparatives:

- (35) belt qawwi city powerful  
 'a powerful city'  
 belt aqwa city more:powerful  
 'a more powerful city'  
 ?belt l-aqwa city DEF-more:powerful  
 'a most powerful city'

The last noun phrase being indefinite, its definite article would evidently not be doing what is done otherwise; its function here could only be to transform a comparative into a superlative. However, it is questionable whether Maltese permits such relatives, or their inverted alternatives, with or without the article on the initial comparative.

- (36) ?(l-)aqwa belt more:powerful city  
 'a most powerful city'

When comparison is periphrastic, both comparatives and superlatives do remain postnominal in indefinite noun phrases, and the only difference between them is that the superlative marker (historically the synthetic comparative of an adjective) gets the definite article.

- (37) ktieb sabih book beautiful  
 'a beautiful book'  
 ktieb aktar sabih book more beautiful  
 'a more beautiful book'  
 ktieb l-aktar sabih book DEF-more beautiful  
 'a most beautiful book'

In definite noun phrases periphrastic comparatives and superlatives may likewise stay after the noun, which causes the distinction between them to be neutralized: there actually ought to be two articles in the superlative – one the definite article in its accustomed role as (repeated) definiteness marker and the other an article look-alike serving as a superlative marker, which is what it clearly does in the indefinite periphrastic paradigm (37) – but there is only one.

- (38) il-ktieb is-sabih DEF-book DEF-beautiful  
 'the beautiful book'  
 il-ktieb l-aktar sabih DEF-book DEF-more beautiful  
 'the more/most beautiful book'

When the comparative marker takes the option of moving ahead of the noun, the adjective is unambiguously identifiable as superlative on the strength of the ordering rule that allows superlatives to assume prenominal position – not on the evidence of the article, because there only remains one, and this is the minimum for a definite noun phrase.

- (39) l-aktar ktieb sabih DEF-more book beautiful  
 'the most beautiful book'

In conclusion, the article shares in the marking of the superlative grade in Maltese, but owing to circumstances – to do with ordering regulations and the avoidance of article repetition – this is only a supporting role that is hardly worth the effort.

1.26. None of these 25 truths is guaranteed to be the full truth. They might all be half-truths or less, missing out on all kinds of things which the form, distribution, and functions of the Maltese article could be part and parcel of.

Conceivably, the article that Maltese has and the way it is using it might be to do, directly or indirectly, with, say, (a) word order being basically, though not invariably, SVO, except in adverbial subordinate clauses, where the preference is for VSO; (b) adpositions being placed before rather than after their noun phrases; (c) attributive noun phrases of any kind following their head nouns; (d) relational alignments being essentially all nominative-accusative; (e) pro dropping; (f) affixal case marking being unknown; (g) some nouns but no pronouns inflecting for the dual; (h) verb phrases being productively marked for aspectual contrasts; (i) intransitive predication being unusually versatile; (j) morphology being to some extent introflective, though not adverse to both prefixes and suffixes; (k) word stress being on the ultimate syllable if

heavy (long vowel or short vowel plus two consonants), and otherwise on the penultimate; (l) syllable-final consonants being devoiced; (m) Maltese being genetically Arabic but having over the centuries been in close contact with a wide range of North African and European languages, most recently English and Italian (Sicilian).

Looking only at Maltese, there is not much prospect of knowing whether or not these further truths are the other halves of any (half-) truth concerning its article, strange bedfellows though they might seem. It is all a question of how persistently such truths seek or shun each other's company in places other than Malta, Ghawdex, and Kemuna.

## 2. Question

Are these 25 truths really all peculiar to Maltese? Or are some or all of them general truths about Language, or derivative of such more general truths? In particular, are any of these truths interdependent with one another or with any others (like those in the motley collection in No. 26 above), reflecting universal implications?

## 3. Answers

### 3.1. Recurrent, predictable, both

The basic question raised by Plank is this: "Are the 25 truths really all peculiar to Maltese?" There are two concerns underlying this query, one related to frequency and the other to predictability: (i) Do these facts occur only in Maltese or do they have parallels in other languages? (ii) Are these facts independent of the rest of the grammar or are they necessary consequences of other structural characteristics of Maltese? The two issues are independent of each other. Although grammatical phenomena found in only one language are more likely to be isolated from the rest of the grammar, they may nonetheless be predictable from another equally rare property; and, in turn, common features may not be implicationally linked to anything else.

In this section (3.1) it will be suggested that several of the facts about Maltese articles are either recurrent or predictable or both. Twelve of the 25 factual statements will be discussed, under the following headings:

1. Phonological form of articles (Nos. 3, 9)
2. Co-occurrence and order of the article within the noun phrase:

- 2.1. Article and head (Nos. 17, 18, 19)
- 2.2. Article and demonstrative (Nos. 11, 23)
- 2.3. Article and adjective (No. 12)
- 2.4. Article and possessor (Nos. 20, 21)
- 2.5. Article and conjuncts (No. 14)
- 2.6. Article and case (Nos. 3, 22)

### 3.1.1. Phonological form of articles (Nos. 3, 9)

No. 3 says that nouns in Maltese may be marked for indefiniteness with the numeral 'one'. This suggests that the language has an indefinite article in *statu nascendi* developing from the numeral 'one'. The process is in line with the crosslinguistically recurrent pattern of the numeral 'one' turning into an indefinite article. Givón (1981: 35) calls it a "seemingly universal process" and refers to Romance, Mandarin, Sherpa, Hungarian, Neo-Aramaic, Persian, Turkish, all Creoles, and "various Amerindian and Austronesian languages" as examples.

While it may be an exceptionless universal that, if the numeral 'one' turns into anything, it becomes an indefinite article (and/or a pronoun), the opposite is not nearly as widespread: indefinite articles do not necessarily come from the numeral 'one'. In Moravcsik (1969: 83) a number of languages are noted where the indefinite article has a different origin (Classical Arabic, Kwakiutl, Romani, Tonkawa, Maranao, and Chinook), and Dryer (1989: 86) found that out of 34 languages, 11 have an indefinite article that is quite distinct in shape from the numeral 'one'. (It should nonetheless be noted that Dryer works with an unusually broad definition of the notion article; cf. 1989: 83.) Thus, the Maltese 'one' seems to be running a possibly universal path of change but, looking at the process from the angle of the indefinite article, there is no generalization that would predict its numeral origin.

On the face of it, the shape and historical origin of the Maltese definite article would strike one as much more idiosyncratic: No. 9 states that the definite article is formally unrelated to the demonstratives (as well as to the 3rd person personal and possessive pronouns). This fact seems exceptional in the light of evidence from many well-known languages, where the article is a reduced version of the distal demonstrative. According to Greenberg (1985: 271), this is the predominant pattern: "definite articles are often synchronically identical with or clearly related to demonstratives which are also in the overwhelming majority of cases derived from demonstratives historically" (cf. also Moravcsik 1969: 76). The qualification "often" is explained when he says "(T)he general numeral classifier is in rare instances the source of a definite article..." (286). However, Dryer's study yields a different picture (1989: 86): out of 52 languages, he found 20 with definite articles

whose form was quite distinct from demonstratives. Thus, Maltese, with its non-demonstrative-like definite article, represents a non-predominant but nonetheless widely documented pattern.

In spite of its formal distinctness from demonstratives, the Maltese definite article nonetheless does not stray too far from the cross-linguistically most common pattern. No. 9 also notes that the Maltese definite article is very similar in shape to the relative pronoun. But relative pronouns are in turn often identical to demonstrative pronouns: Downing (1978: 385) cites German, Ewe, and Umbundu as examples. Thus, even though the Maltese definite article does not formally resemble a demonstrative, it bears similarity to a category – relative pronouns – which, in other languages, is serviced by demonstratives.

In addition to providing information about crosslinguistic frequency, Dryer's paper also offers a statistical universal in which the non-demonstrative-like form of the definite article serves as the implicans. Dryer found that "the more distinct the definite article form is from demonstratives, the more likely its position relative to the noun will correlate with the order of verb and object" (1989: 90), with the article being the positional equivalent of the verb. Since Maltese is a VO language with a strongly non-demonstrative-like definite article, the generalization correctly predicts the article's pronominal position noted in No. 11.

### 3.1.2. Co-occurrence and order of the article within the noun phrase

#### 3.1.2.1. Article and head (Nos. 17, 18, 19)

The list of items given in No. 17 regarding what must and must not take the definite article in Maltese is familiar. There are several parallels from Hungarian as well from Portuguese (Krámský 1972: 79-81), Italian (Krámský 1972: 123-126), and English. For example, Krámský points out (79) that in Portuguese, "rivers, mountains and seas" must take the definite article and this is what mountains and seas do in Maltese as well. He also says that, while personal proper names do not take the article in Portuguese (80), proper names accompanied by an attributive do (79), which, according to No. 18, is also the case in Maltese. Similarly, the fact that names of months remain articleless in Maltese is paralleled by Portuguese (80) as well as by many other languages.

The fact that pronominal heads do not take the definite article (No. 19) is a very widespread and possibly universal phenomenon, explainable to an extent by the frequently attested pronominal nature of the article itself (cf. Moravcsik 1994).

#### 3.1.2.2. Article and demonstrative (Nos. 11, 23)

Among the various points made in No. 11 is the fact that the adnominal demonstrative co-occurs with the definite article in Maltese and that, in particular, it precedes it. While the co-occurrence pattern is recurrent across languages but apparently unpredictable for Maltese, the linear realization may be universal.

Regarding co-occurrence: the adnominal demonstrative is unarticled in English, German, or French but it is optionally or obligatorily accompanied by the definite article in many languages, such as Efate, Samoan, Santo, etc. (Moravcsik 1969: 76), or Abkhaz, Bella Coola, Bernice Dutch Creole, etc. (Rijkhoff 1992: 154-157). Plank (1991 (2): 6) proposes an implicational generalization from which the co-occurrence of article and demonstrative is predictable in some languages: if articles co-occur with pronominal possessors, demonstratives do so as well. However, this regularity does not serve to predict the Maltese Demonstrative-with-Article construction since the implicans is not fulfilled: pronominal possessors and articles cannot both occur with the same noun in Maltese (cf. No. 20).

Once articles and demonstratives are allowed to co-occur, there is some indication that their linear order is universally determined if they occur on the same side of the head noun: the demonstrative is consistently more peripheral than the article. This is suggested by Rijkhoff's findings (1992: 152). In his sample of 48 languages, 11 allow the co-occurrence of demonstratives and articles and in all 4 languages that order the two ipsilaterally (Abkhaz, Modern Greek, Guarani, and Hungarian), they are pronominal with the demonstrative preceding the article. The Maltese order is thus an instantiation of this general pattern.

The peripherality of the adnominal demonstrative would be explained if the demonstrative were analysed as a separate noun phrase to which the rest of the phrase – the article and the noun – is appended in appositive-like fashion (cf. Rijkhoff 1992: 153). The head-like status of the adnominal demonstrative, which this analysis suggests, turns out to be supportable by two kinds of evidence outside linear order.

First, adnominal demonstratives generally – perhaps universally – have nominal use as well; e.g., in English, both "this book" and "this" are noun phrases. Greenberg states this to be the case for "most languages" (Greenberg 1978: 75). This is in contrast with the behavior of other nominal satellites: "beautiful books" is a noun phrase but "beautiful" is not.

Second, from among demonstratives, articles, and adnominal adjectives, the category that most frequently shows the inflectional category

ries of the head noun is demonstratives (Siewierska & Bakker 1992: 2; Plank 1994: 50-51). Strikingly, Hungarian adnominal demonstratives are so insistent on agreeing with the head noun in case that they do so not only in affixal case but even in postpositional case (Moravcsik 1995: footnote 9 and section 3.1.7). What this shows is that adnominal demonstratives are not only capable of standing as nouns but they take on the inflectional garb of nouns even in adnominal position.

Since both of these properties of adnominal demonstratives – agreement and nominal use – are present in Maltese as well, the appositive-like character of the Maltese article is supported, which in turn explains the Demonstrative-before-Article order.

### 3.1.2.3. Article and adjective (No. 12)

A similar case may be made for adjectives in Maltese. As stated in No. 12, the postnominal attributive adjective may repeat the definite article of the head noun. Articled adjectives are a recurrent feature across languages especially if they follow the noun and if they involve the definite article (Plank 1995b: 7-12). This may be so because the postnominal adjective is in some respects a separate noun phrase in apposition to the one that contains the noun. A piece of evidence to further document the appositive nature of postnominal adjectives comes from Greenberg's generalization (Greenberg 1963: No. 40), according to which postnominal adjectives have an edge over prenominal ones in taking on the inflectional categories of the head noun.

### 3.1.2.4. Article and possessor (Nos. 20, 21)

The fact that Maltese has two possessor constructions is paralleled in other languages such as English, German, Finnish (Jokinen 1991), Lithuanian (Payne 1994), or Hungarian (Szabolcsi 1994). More strikingly, some of the particular ways in which the two constructions differ are also similar: in one construction the possessor is more determiner-like while in the other it is more modifier-like. Languages with two genitives thus seem to represent the paradigmatic co-occurrence of two distinct types each of which can also be the sole genitive construction of a language (cf. Lyons 1986, Plank 1992c).

Let us take Hungarian as an example to point out some crosslinguistic parallels to the Maltese situation. In Maltese, as noted in No. 21 and further expanded on by Fabri (this volume) and Koptjevskaja-Tamm (this volume), the clusters of features that characterize the two possessive constructions include the following:

	CONSTRUCT STATE POSSESSIVES	ANALYTIC POSSESSIVES
(1) possessum can be any noun?	no	yes
(2) possessum can take article?	no	yes
(3) possessum can take other satellites?	no	yes
(4) possessum agrees with possessor?	yes or no	yes
(5) possessor is case-marked?	no	yes
(6) order of possessor and possessum free?	yes or no	yes

(Regarding features Nos. 4 and 6: agreement and free order co-vary: possessor and possessum have free order if the possessum agrees with the possessor but not otherwise.)

Some of these features cluster the same way in Hungarian. Here are examples of the two constructions:

– construct-state-like possessive construction:

Mari kez-e

Mari hand-3SG

'Mari's hand'

– analytic possessive construction:

Mari-nak a kez-e

Mari-GEN the hand-3SG

'Mari's hand'

The construct-like possessive in Hungarian shares three features with the Maltese construct-state possessive construction: the non-occurrence of the article with the possessum (2), non-case-marked possessor (5), and rigid order (6). The Hungarian construction is, however, freer than its Maltese counterpart since the possessum is not lexically restricted to inalienable possession (1), it may take adjectives and numerals (2), and it seems to have more independence in that it in all instances incorporates features of the possessor through agreement. In spite of the differences, it is still true that in both languages, one of the two constructions involves a closer relationship between possessor and possessum than the other does (cf. Koptjevskaja-Tamm, this volume: section 0).

A general issue that is latent across points 3.1.2.1, 3.1.2.2, and 3.1.2.4 – whether the definite article may or may not occur with nouns that are either inherently definite or which already have determiners such as a demonstrative or a possessor – is the additive versus redundant status of the definite article. The question is this: does the definite article confer definiteness on the noun or does it duplicate it? Languages differ in this regard, just as they do regarding the article's function as a

nominalizer, as a formative of superlatives and ordinals, and as an indicator of gender, number, and case: in all of these cases, the article is the sole carrier of these functions in some languages while in others it simply duplicates information stated by other noun phrase constituents (cf. Moravcsik 1994). Apparently, variation holds not only crosslinguistically but also language-internally: a language does not always uniformly opt for either economy or redundancy. In Maltese, for example, the article is allowed to be redundantly present in noun phrases that include a demonstrative but not with proper names and possessed nouns in the construct state. Whatever dependencies may govern the distribution of the article-as-adding-information and the article-as-repeating-information are to my knowledge yet unexplored.

### 3.1.2.5. Article and conjuncts (No. 14)

In Maltese, non-initial conjuncts must have their own articles (No. 14). Whether this is required or not is a variable property of languages. Spanish and French are like Maltese (cf. Plank 1991 (1)), but in Portuguese, for example, the repetition of the article on a non-initial conjunct is ungrammatical (Krámský 1972: 81). For a cross-linguistic survey of this parameter, see Plank (1991 (1)).

### 3.1.2.6. Article and case (Nos. 3, 22)

Definiteness and case may be crosslinguistically linked in two ways. First, the definiteness status of an unarticled noun phrase may depend on the case of the noun phrase. In articleless languages, if a case marker forces definite interpretation, that case is likely to be the accusative; and if a case forces indefinite interpretation, that case is likely to be the genitive or partitive. For example, Turkish accusatively marked nouns can only be interpreted as definite (or specific), and in Finnish, Estonian, and Basque, partitive objects – just as genitively marked objects in Polish or Russian – often favor an indefinite interpretation (cf. Moravcsik 1978: 265-272). Maltese fits this pattern: as noted in No. 3, one of the expressions of indefiniteness is supplied by the partitive construction.

The second way in which case may condition definiteness holds in languages that do have articles: certain cases may be restricted to or banned from co-occurrence with one or the other article. An instance of this occurs in Maltese: the vocative does not collocate with the definite article (No. 22). Although vocatives seem predominantly articleless across languages, the Maltese situation is not fully predictable: Szabolcsi (1994: section 5.2) cites Rumanian as a language where the definite article can occur with vocative nouns and Greenberg points at Lotuko as

a similar counterexample (1978: 65). The Maltese pattern is thus probable but not necessary.

### 3.1.3. Conclusion

In conclusion, it was suggested that none of the aspects of the Maltese article considered here were unique: they are either crosslinguistically recurrent or typologically predictable or both. Here is an overview:

- Maltese article features that are crosslinguistically recurrent but not predictable:
  - (a) lexical constraints on the head noun for occurring with the definite article (Nos. 17, 18)
  - (b) the co-occurrence of the demonstrative and the definite article (Nos. 11, 23)
  - (c) the existence of a determiner-like and a modifier-like possessive construction (Nos. 20, 21)
  - (d) the obligatory repetition of the definite article on non-initial conjuncts (No. 14)

– Maltese article features that are crosslinguistically recurrent and statistically predictable:

- (a) indefinite article arising form to the numeral 'one' (No. 3)
- (b) definite article distinct in shape from any demonstrative (No. 9)
- (c) articulated adjectives being post-nominal (No. 12)
- (d) vocative nouns not taking articles (No. 22)
- (e) the definite article being pre-nominal (Nos. 11, 23)

– Maltese article features that are crosslinguistically recurrent and predictable by possibly exceptionless universals:

- (a) the demonstrative having a more peripheral position than the article (Nos. 11, 23)
- (b) the absence of articles with pronominal heads (No. 19)
- (c) the partitive construction forcing indefinite interpretation (No. 3)
- (d) the numeral 'one' turning into an indefinite article (No. 3)

## 3.2. Existence and behaviour

### 3.2.1. Truths of existence

If you pick a language at random, what are the odds that it will have an article? It has been conjectured by Dryer (1989), on the basis of a 600-strong sample, that as many as about a third of the world's languages employ articles. It would thus be against the odds, although not espe-

