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# Non-verbal predication in Maltese

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Abstract:

## 1. Introduction

The Maltese language (Semitic, Afro-Asiatic) originates from a Maghrebi Arabic variety which has been in contact with Sicilian and Italian since the late Middle Ages, and with English since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This long-standing contact situation resulted in many loan words from all three languages, a partial reorganization of the phonological and morphological systems, and syntactic calques (for a recent overview of the consequences of language contact, see Lucas and Čéplö 2020). Maltese is spoken in the Republic of Malta, which includes two inhabited islands, Malta and Gozo, by approx. 450,000 speakers. It is the national language of the Republic, and also the official one, alongside with English. Maltese is written with a Latin-based alphabet, and was introduced as a compulsory subject in schools in 1934.

The analysis presented below is mostly based on the data I recorded from 48 consultants, 35 men and thirteen women, aged between eighteen and 90, in the two islands during two fieldtrips in the mid-1980-s, and with Maltese friends visiting Paris. It consists of approx. 50 hours of oral texts of different genres, mainly in standard Maltese, and, marginally, in several dialectal variants: folktales, songs, procedural texts, historical accounts, religious practices, various traditional techniques, farming and fishing practices, interviews with Maltese writers, dialogues on everyday topics and cinema, interviews on TV during the news, and a lecture on Maltese linguistics (Vanhove 1993: 4–6). All the oral examples are extracted from this corpus. The data for this chapter also include some written texts: a novel by Oliver Friggieri (1986, 194 pp.), four plays by Oreste Calleja (1972, 175 pp.) and their literary study by O. Friggieri (1972, 11 pp.), the proverb collection by Joseph Aquilina (1972, 694 pp.), twelve entries in his Maltese-English dictionary (Aquilina 1987–1990), three issues of a weekly newspaper (*Il-Mument*, 8, 15, 29 February 1987, 108 pp.), and a translation of two books of the Bible, Daniel and Ezra, and also partly Isaiah (*Il-Bibja* 1984).<sup>1</sup> For predicative numerals and quantitative issues, when possible, I also used the online Maltese database (*Korpus Malti* v. 3.0 = KM; Gatt and Čéplö 2013), which counts 249,256,855 words.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, I cannot even provide an approximate number of words, since personal computers were expensive and an unaffordable luxury for me at that time. All my transcriptions and translations of the audio-recordings are hand-written. The books and newspapers are in printed version, with no word counts.

<sup>2</sup> The genres included in the KM database are labelled as follows: Academic and Scientific Text (683,919 words); Culture News (761,317 words); European Law (22,821,688 words); Maltese Law (6,149,850 words); Literature (1,882,985 words); Press: News (89,235,823 words); Opinion Articles and Blogs (6,468,544 words); Parliamentary Debates and Records (119,733,592 words); Religious Texts (439,939 words); Press: Sports News (1,079,198 words). Exact sources are not provided on the website. One of the reviewers suggested that I should consult KM to check whether the quantitative observations on my data were caused by the size and composition of my own corpus or are indeed representative of Maltese in general. Unfortunately, the tagging of the database is, for the time being,

Relevant published results based on the *Maltese Universal Dependency Treebank v. 1* (=MUDTv1) developed by Čéplö (2018) (cf. Zeman et al. 2022) are also referred to (Čéplö 2018; Lucas and Čéplö 2020).<sup>3</sup>

The present chapter is organized as follows: Section 2 provides basic information about Maltese morphosyntax. It is followed by a detailed description of the non-verbal predicative constructions in Maltese, based on the typological approach developed in the Position Paper (Creissels, Bertinetto, and Ciucci, this volume) and on the questionnaire for the contributions to this volume (see the [online appendix at .....](#)). Section 3 discusses the juxtaposition strategy, Section 4 the pronominal copula, Section 5 the locative copula *qiegħed*, Section 6 the verbal copula, Section 7 the locative copula *fi*, Section 8 the adverbial copulas, Section 9 predicative possession and Section 10 wraps up. Each section investigates nominal, adjectival, and adverbial predication, possessive predication, and other uses of the constructions where relevant.

## 2. The basics of Maltese morphosyntax

The following very brief sketch is mainly based on Vanhove (1993) and Borg and Azzopardi-Alexander (1997).

### 2.1. The structure of verbal clauses

The canonical constituent order in verbal clauses is SVO, but it may vary for pragmatic reasons (see Čéplö 2018 for details). Subject and object are morphologically unmarked, but differential object marking occurs with human nouns and pronouns, which are introduced by a dative preposition (Borg and Mifsud 2002; Iemmolo 2020). The presence or the absence of an overt object is the only indication that a verb is transitive or intransitive.

### 2.2. Verbs

The subject is indexed on the verb, which also bears TAM markers and the discontinuous negative morpheme. Pronominal objects are encliticized on the verb. The basic TAM system is aspectual, distinguishing between a Perfective paradigm with suffixes and an Imperfective marked with prefixes (and suffixes in the plural). This binary opposition has been enriched with some 45 auxiliaries, which form over 200 complex predicates expressing various TAM values, a few of which reflect dialectal differences (see Vanhove 1993 for details).

### 2.3. Nouns and noun phrases

Nouns can be definite, marked with a prefixed article, or indefinite (unmarked). Masculine is unmarked, feminine is either marked with a suffix *-a* (which changes to *-iat/-t* before bound possessive pronouns) or unmarked. Plural is marked by stem alternation or by

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insufficient to answer this question for most of the constructions studied here. Since the database lacks syntactic tagging, it is impossible to retrieve automatically the juxtaposition strategy (§3). The pronominal (§4), locative (§§5, 7) and verbal (§6) copulas are not tagged as such, but with a general part of speech label, such as “pronoun”, “preposition”, “verb”, whatever their syntactic function. An automatic search could only be made for the two adverbial copulas (§8).

<sup>3</sup> The MUDTv1 Treebank of written Maltese is extracted from KM; it includes written material dating from year 2000 onwards (with a few exceptions). It consists of online newspapers (113,120,057 words), Parliament records (98,333,466 words), literature (excluding poetry) and blogs (2,437,831 words), academic texts, popular science, sermons and Wikipedia entries (2,351,730 word).

suffixes, masculine and feminine. Nouns are unmarked for case, and genitive relation is either unmarked or marked with the preposition *ta* 'of', and its allomorphs.

## 2.4. Adjectives

There is a distinct class of adjectives. Their stem can be different from or shared with nouns, and there are a lot of adjectival loans. Most adjectives can be used as noun phrase heads by simply adding the definite article, which shows a relative degree of flexibility between nouns and adjectives.

## 2.5. Non-verbal predication in Maltese

Maltese has eight types of non-verbal predication, respectively using: (i) juxtaposition of noun phrases or of noun phrases and prepositional phrases; (ii) a copula of pronominal origin; (iii) a locative copula, *qiegħed*, which is originally the active participle of a stative verb meaning 'sit, stay, inhabit'; (iv) a 'be' verbal copula; (v) the locative preposition *fi* 'in, at' and object suffixes; (vi) locative adverbs; (vii) the locative preposition *għand* 'at' and possessive suffixes; (viii) a grammaticalized 'be' verb, with the dative preposition and possessive suffixes. Unlike a few other Semitic languages, such as Akkadian (Cohen 1984), the language has no non-verbal predicative inflection construction (see Position Paper).

## 3. Juxtaposition of noun phrases and prepositional phrases

Juxtaposition is not the main non-verbal predication strategy in Maltese, but with a total of 389 tokens out of almost 1,200 non-verbal predications<sup>4</sup> in my data, and compared with the 553 tokens for pronominal copula, it is frequent enough not to be considered marginal. The ratio between these two strategies is comparable with that found in the written texts of MUDTV1, where 110 tokens of the juxtaposition strategy are found, as against 181 tokens for the pronominal copula (Lucas and Čéplö 2020: 286). In my data, the proportion of tokens varies according to genres, and juxtaposition is more frequent in daily conversations than in written texts or in oral literature (Vanhove 1993: 335). Juxtaposition covers a large array of semantic relations.

### 3.1. Nominal predication

With the juxtaposition strategy for nominal predication, the subject is obligatorily expressed and always precedes the predicate (Vanhove 1993: 334-350; Čéplö 2018: 238).

#### 3.1.1. Identity

The juxtaposition of two noun phrases expresses identity when both the subject and the predicate are in some way or another definite; however, examples are scarce in my data (1–3). The predicate can be a definite noun (3), a proper noun (1), a deictic, or a personal pronoun (2).

- (1) *jiāna għwakkī:n škembri*  
I Gwakkīn Schembri  
'I am Gwakkīn Schembri.'

- (2) *aħna aħna huma huma*  
we we they they

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<sup>4</sup> This count does not include predicative possession (see §9).

‘We are us, they are them.’ (Friggieri 1986: 76)<sup>5</sup>

- (3) *illu:m is-sibt*  
today DEF-seven  
‘Today is Saturday.’

### 3.1.2. Inclusion

If the predicative noun is indefinite, it expresses inclusion (4–5).

- (4) *il-filosifija lussu l-art-i lussu il-letteratu:ra lussu*  
DEF-philosophy luxury DEF-art-PL luxury DEF-literature luxury  
‘Philosophy is a luxury, arts are a luxury, literature is a luxury.’
- (5) *di:n wahda mi-t-teorijj-i tiġja:-j*  
PROX.F.SG one from-DEF-theory-PL of-1SG.POSS  
‘This is one of my theories.’

Juxtaposition is also used in gnomic utterances (6), where the predicate is a dependent clause. There are only seven examples of this type, all from the oral register.

- (6) *il-ganġ biġ in-daħħal il-ħajt dżo fi:-ħ*  
DEF-hook for 1SG-enter.CAUS.IPFV DEF-thread inside in-3SG.M.POSS  
‘The hook is so that I can enter the thread in it.’

### 3.1.3. Inverse-possessive predication

Inverse-possessive predication, from possessee to possessor, can be expressed as a nominal predication, which can be a definite noun, a proper noun, or a pronoun, preceded by the genitival preposition *ta* ‘of’ (and its graphic and phonetic variants), which in Maltese has a nominal function, equivalent to ‘that of’, ‘(the) one of’, as in *dak minn ta’ Saliba* ‘he is one of the Saliba’s family’ (lit. ‘this from of Saliba’) (Aquilina 1990: 1396).<sup>6</sup> It either marks possession (7–8), or, rarely, inclusion (9). See also Borg and Azzopardi-Alexander (1997: 111–112).

- (7) *di:k ta: antwanett*  
DIST.SG.F of Antoinette  
‘That one belongs to Antoinette.’
- (8) *Għax din l-art tagħkom*  
because PROX.SG.F DEF-earth of:2PL.POSS  
‘Because this earth is yours.’ (Friggieri 1986: 57)
- (9) *di:n ta-l-dżibs*  
PROX.SG.F of-DEF-gypsum

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<sup>5</sup> Examples from my oral data are given in IPA, written excerpts with the Maltese orthography. When the apostrophe ‘ of the Maltese orthography (e.g. ex. 25) corresponds to the elided vowel of the preposition *fi* ‘in’, I have hyphenated it in the glossing line. The apostrophe is not compulsory and the truncated form can be simply agglutinated to the following element; in this case, there is no hyphen in the glossing line (e.g. ex. 90).

<sup>6</sup> Marginally, *ta* ‘ has an adverbial function in idiomatic expressions after two verbs, *ħadem* ‘work’ and *għamel* ‘do, make’: *jaħdem ta’ kafkaf* ‘he works shabbily’ (lit. ‘he works of low quality’), *it-temp jaġħmel tiegħu* ‘there was a spell of very bad weather’ (lit. ‘the weather makes of it’) (Aquilina 1990: 1396); *meta x-xorb kien għamel tiegħu* (lit. ‘when the drink had made of it’) ‘when the drink had taken its toll’ (KM, literature1).

‘This one is (made out) of plaster.’

#### 3.1.4. Ostension

When the subject is a demonstrative pronoun juxtaposed to a predicative personal pronoun, the construction marks ostension (10–11).

(10) *dawk u.ma*  
DIST.PL they  
‘Here they are!’

(11) *Din hi, din hi*  
PROX.SG.F she PROX.SG.F she  
‘Here she is, here she is!’ (Friggieri 1986: 76)

### 3.2. Adjectival predication

Attributive adjectives are marked for definiteness if the noun is definite, except adjectives of Italian, Sicilian, and English origin. In the latter case, only the prosodic contour disambiguates between the attributive and the predicative functions.

#### 3.2.1. Adjectival predication with the argument left unexpressed

Very marginally, Maltese can use an adjective in a predicative construction without an overtly expressed subject in the same clause (12–13). Examples of this sort amount to six tokens in oral narratives and conversations, and two in written texts. (13) is formally an inverse-possessive construction (of a kind already shown in §3.1.3) with a substantivized adjective.

(12) *Jekk jieklu, kuntenti*  
if eat:IPFV.3PL happy:PL  
‘If they eat, they are happy.’ (Friggieri 1986: 150)

(13) *da:k ha:ɟa famu:z-a a:f ta-l-anti:k*  
DIST.SG.M thing.F famous-F because of-DEF-ancient  
‘That is a famous thing, because it is ancient.’

#### 3.2.2. Adjectival predication with an overt argument

Inclusion predication by juxtaposition is marked with an indefinite adjective. The construction can be used for both permanent (14) and contingent (15) states. See also Camilleri and Sadler (2019: 11) for an overview in Arabic varieties and Maltese.

(14) *da:n it-tfa:l a:wɟi*  
PROX.SG.M DEF-child Gozitan  
‘This child is Gozitan.’

(15) *moħħ-i u ɟalb-i ħfiɟ bħa-r-ri:ħ*  
spirit-POSS.1SG and heart-POSS.1SG light as-DEF-wind  
‘My spirits and my heart were as light as the wind.’

The adjectival predicate can be topicalized.

(16) *kbi:r ħafna da:k ir-reservwa:r*  
big very DIST.SG.M DEF-reservoir  
‘It is very big, that reservoir.’

### 3.3. Adverbial predication

#### 3.3.1. Spatial uses

Borg (1987–1988: 59–64) mentions that, for plain-locational predication, a locative preposition is not obligatory if the subject is animate and the predicate a place name, but that it is necessary if the predicate denotes an unusual location of the subject. In Borg and Azzopardi-Alexander (1997: 50), it is further mentioned that “in a subclass of cases, the presence or absence of such a preposition correlates with a difference in meaning”<sup>7</sup> and that “a place nominal can occur without a locative preposition only in those instances where the relationship of location is easily predictable (given the culture), and the subject is animate”. Stassen (1996) is on the same line. Stolz, Lestrade, and Stolz (2014: 225–273), in a detailed study based on two novels, analyze the different parameters that account for the alternation between zero-marking and the *fi*-marking before the ground in spatial relations (including verbal predications and all the copulas). The parameters concern mainly the ground, namely genericity *vs* specificity, and toponyms *vs* common nouns. In my data, with the juxtaposition construction, all adverbial predicates are specific and are preceded by a locative preposition (17–18), or are locative adverbs (19), be they “usual/predictable” (19, 20) or “unusual/unpredictable” (17, 18). Juxtaposition is rarely used to express plain-location: there are only thirteen tokens of this sort, all in my oral data, and with either a prepositional ground or an adverbial ground. The canonical order is figure-ground.

(17) *jiəna fi-s-sodda mari:d-a*  
I in-DEF-bed sick-F  
‘I am in bed, sick.’

(18) *il-moħriət l-anti:k waraj-ja*  
DEF-plough DEF-ancient behind-3SG.F.POSS  
‘The old plough is behind it.’

(19) *Min hu ġewwa ġewwa min hu barra barra*  
who COP.3SG.M inside inside who COP.3SG.M outside outside  
‘Who is inside is inside, who is outside is outside.’ (Friggieri 1986: 76)

In a few instances, a locative adverb is topicalized, a strategy that could be interpreted as marking ostension.<sup>8</sup>

(20) *Hawnhekk il-parlament*  
here DEF-parliament  
‘Here is the parliament.’ (Friggieri 1986: 184)

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<sup>7</sup> Borg (1987-1988: 58), Borg and Azzopardi-Alexander (1997: 50), and Stassen (1996: 182) make a semantic distinction between a construction with the preposition *fi* and without it (for the juxtaposition strategy and the copulas):

*ħija id-dar*  
brother:POSS.1SG DEF-house  
‘My brother is at home.’

*ħija fid-dar*  
brother:POSS.1SG in:DEF-house  
‘My brother is in the house.’ (Borg and Alexander-Azzopardi 1997: 50).

<sup>8</sup> For the use of the short form *hawn*, see §8.

### 3.3.2. Non-spatial uses

Non-spatial uses of adverbial predication by juxtaposition are also rare. This strategy marks characteristic properties of entities (21–23), states affecting individuals (24), and temporal relations (25). Juxtaposition is repeatedly said to be used within a present-referring context (e.g. Stassen 1996; Borg and Azzopardi-Alexander 1997; Camilleri and Stadler 2019), which is largely the case, but (23) shows that this strategy can also occur in a non-present context.

- (21) *Mohħok fil-politika*  
mind:2SG.POSS in:DEF-politics  
'Your mind is in politics.' (Friggieri 1986: 106)
- (22) *kollox bħal dak in-nhar*  
all like DIST.SG.M DEF-day  
'Everything is like that day.' (Friggieri 1986: 139)
- (23) *dġe-w it-torok ila:liəf a:wdef dejjem ekk*  
come.PFV-3PL DEF-Turk.PL because Gozo always thus  
'The Turks came, because Gozo has always been like that.'
- (24) *huma f'saħħithom*  
they in-health:3PL.POSS  
'They are in good health.' (Friggieri 1986: 64)
- (25) *l-ftē:ji:m a:d-u l=bo:d ħafna*  
DEF-agreement still-3SG.M.POSS to=far numerous  
'The agreement is still very far away.'

### 3.4. Predicative use of numerals

Numerals can be used predicatively in the juxtaposition construction.<sup>9</sup>

- (26) *intom tlieta*  
you.PL three  
'You are three.' (KM, Literature 76)

## 4. The pronominal copula

The construction with the pronominal copula is the most frequent non-verbal predicative construction: 553 tokens as against 389 for juxtaposition (and, recall, 181 vs 110 in MUDTv1). This proportion has to be relativized, since non-verbal predication with a pronominal subject rarely makes use of the copula in affirmative utterances: only one such example occurs in my data. A few “archaic” ones are also mentioned in Borg and Azzopardi-Alexander (1997: 52).

This copula is the outcome of the grammaticalization of the independent 3<sup>rd</sup> person subject pronouns (Table 1), a widespread phenomenon in Semitic languages, in particular in a lot of Arabic varieties (see e.g. Camilleri and Sadler 2019). It is used for all persons, although rarely with 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> person subjects.

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<sup>9</sup> No examples with predicative numerals occurred in my oral and written data. All the examples with numerals in this section and the following are either elicited or come from the KM Literature sub-corpus, in which they are not frequent, except with the adverbial copula *hemm* (§ 8.3).



Table 1: The pronominal copula

|      | Short forms    | Long forms         |
|------|----------------|--------------------|
| SG.M | <i>hu</i> /u:/ | <i>huwa</i> /u:wa/ |
| SG.F | <i>hi</i> /i:/ | <i>hija</i> /i:ja/ |
| PL   |                | <i>huma</i> /u:ma/ |

In a very detailed corpus-based study, Stolz and Saade (2016), showed that, overall, long and short forms are almost on a par (55% long vs. 45% short forms) in the entire KM database. But, when looking into individual productions, there are significant differences between authors. This led Stolz and Saade to hypothesize that the length difference also has a stylistic function, and that long and short forms are not necessarily in free variation. In addition, they showed that external sandhi plays a role in the choice of one form or the other to a certain extent. In my own corpus, when the pronouns are used as copulas, long forms are by far more frequent in oral data (351 tokens) than the short ones (7 tokens), but they are almost on a par in written data. This is actually in line with Borg and Azzopardi-Alexander's (1997) account (not based on statistical evidence) for the variation: "When a free subject (third person) pronoun is used as an (optional) copular expression, there is a tendency to use the unreduced forms [...] making the discourse more naturally flowing." (Borg and Azzopardi-Alexander 1997: 196–197).

The pronominal copula is used as an explicit flagging of the non-verbal predicative relation in three types of non-verbal predication, identity, inclusion, and inverse-possessive, but to various extents.

The corresponding negative copula is formed with the personal pronouns of all persons, gender, and number to which the verbal negative discontinuous morpheme *m ... x* /*m- ... -f*/ is added (Table 2). An overt subject is not obligatory. In oral speech, the negative copula may remain invariable, in 3SG.M (ex. 39).

Table 2: The negative pronominal copula

|       |   |     |                             |
|-------|---|-----|-----------------------------|
| 1SG   | <i>m'iniex</i> <sup>10</sup> /miniɔʃ/, <i>mniex</i> /mniɔʃ/ | 1PL | <i>m'aħniex</i> /maħniɔʃ/   |
| 2SG.M | <i>m'intix</i> /minti:ʃ/, /mintʃ/, /minʃ/                   | 2PL | <i>m'inthomx</i> /minto:mʃ/ |
| 3SG.M | <i>mhux</i> /mu:ʃ/, <i>m'huwiex</i> /mu:wiɔʃ/               | 3PL | <i>mhumix</i> /mu:miɔʃ/     |
| 3SG.F | <i>mhix</i> /mi:ʃ/, <i>m'hijiex</i> /mijiɔʃ/                |     |                             |

Borg (1987–1988)<sup>11</sup> considered that "the personal pronoun is excluded in locative predication and in predications of contingent states", as do Borg and Azzopardi-Alexander (1997). My data largely confirms their analyses, however there are some examples of pronominal copula predications for contingent states. Borg (1987–1988) also observed that the pronominal copula, in a study limited to predicates headed by place names, cannot be used for locative predication. Again, my data largely confirms this observation, but this is not an absolute rule.

<sup>10</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> persons, and 3<sup>rd</sup> person long forms can also be written without the apostrophe.

<sup>11</sup> A. Borg is a native speaker of standard Maltese. His research was limited to plain affirmative sentences with 3<sup>rd</sup> person subjects (Borg 1987–1988: 57). He constructed all the examples himself.

## 4.1. Nominal predication

### 4.1.1. Identity

Identity is much more frequently expressed with the pronominal copula than by juxtaposition: 71 tokens for the former construction, and only eight for the latter, a clear indication that the copula is gaining over juxtaposition for the expression of identity. The predicative noun must be definite, as in the juxtaposition construction.

(27) *It-tajjeb huwa t-tajjeb*  
DEF-good COP.SG.M DEF-good  
'The good is the good.' (Friggieri 1986: 169)

(28) *Inti hu Daniel*  
you.SG COP.SG.M Daniel  
'You are Daniel.' (Daniel 5/13)

(29) *di:k miəf il-poezija*  
DIST.SG.F COP.NEG.3SG.F DEF-poem  
'That one is not the poem.'

More frequently than with juxtaposition, the pronominal copula can be used in gnomic utterances (52 occurrences), and in both oral and written registers.

(30) *it-traditsjo:ni ija li a:llm-i:t-na*  
DEF-tradition COP.SG.F CONJ learn.CAUS-PFV.3SG.F-OBJ.1PL  
'The tradition is what it taught us.'

(31) *dmirna hu biss li nivvutaw*  
duty:1PL.POSS COP.SG.M only CONJ vote.IPFV:1PL  
'Our duty is only to vote.' (Friggieri 1986: 29)

### 4.1.2. Inclusion

When the predicate is an indefinite noun, the copula marks inclusion predication.

(32) *Il-ħsibijiet huma fatti*  
DEF-thought:PL COP.PL fact:PL  
'The thoughts are facts.' (Friggieri 1986: 37)

(33) *ħafna minn-om u:ma nisa*  
many from-PL.POSS COP.PL women  
'A lot of them are women.'

(34) *jiəna miniaf delettant ta-l-katffa*  
I COP.NEG.1SG fan of-DEF-hunting  
'I am not a fan of hunting.'

### 4.1.3. Inverse-possessive predication

Although rare, inverse-possessive predication is possible with the pronominal copula.

(35) *di:n i:ja ta:-na*  
PROX.SG.F COP.SG.F of-1PL.POSS  
'This one is ours.'

(36) *jien m'iniex tal-partit tagħkom*  
I COP.NEG.1SG of:DEF-party of:2PL.POSS

‘I do not belong to your party.’ (Friggieri 1986: 58)

## 4.2. Adjectival predication

Adjectival predication always occurs with an overt subject, except in negative utterances. The construction can be used for permanent (37–39) and contingent (40) states, less frequently for the latter.

- (37) *dawn huma dgħajfin*  
PROX.PL COP.PL weak:PL  
‘Those ones are weak.’ (Friggieri 1986: 26)
- (38) *mu:miəf tajjb-i:n*  
COP.NEG.3PL good-PL  
‘They are not good.’
- (39) *di:n mu:f problematika*  
PROX.SG.F COP.NEG.3SG.M problematic  
‘This is not problematic.’
- (40) *disa:jn sena u i: i:ja kburijj-a*  
90 years and she COP.SG.F proud-F  
‘90 years old, and she is proud!’

The adjectival predicate can be topicalized before the copula. In (41), the subject occurs as an afterthought.

- (41) *ħafna u:ma dawn*  
many COP.PL PROX.PL  
‘Numerous they are, those ones.’

## 4.3. Adverbial predication

### 4.3.1. Spatial uses

As already stated, the pronominal copula is rarely used for plain-locational predication in my data. Camilleri and Stadler (2019: 9) even state that locational predication is excluded with the pronominal copula. Nevertheless, three examples occurred in affirmative utterances and two in negative ones, for both permanent (42) and contingent (43) locations. The constituent order is figure-copula-ground. It is possible that the same conditioning for the occurrence of the preposition *fi* ‘in, at’ before the ground, as explained by Stolz, Lestrade, and Stolz (2014) (see above §4), applies to this use.

- (42) *il-ʔamħ ve:ru u:wa dʒo-n-naħa ta: fu:ʔ*  
DEF-wheat true COP.SG.M inside-DEF-side of on  
‘The real wheat is at the top.’
- (43) *inti m'intix wara dik l-iskrivanja*  
you NEG.COP.2SG behind DIST.SG.F DEF-desk  
‘You are not behind that desk.’ (Friggieri 1986: 135)

### 4.3.2. Non-spatial uses

In my data, non-spatial uses occurred in four metaphorical expressions, such as (44–45).

- (44) *Is-šhana ta-f-femf i:ja f-l-aʔwa ta:ħ-ħa*

DEF-heat of-DEF-sun COP.SG.F in-DEF-strongest of-3SG.F.POSS  
 ‘The heat of the sun is at its strongest.’

- (45) *Il-forza hi f'idejna*  
 DEF-strength COP.SG.F in-hand:PL:1PL.POSS  
 ‘The power is in our hands.’ (Friggieri 1986: 38)

#### 4.4. Predicative use of numerals

Numerals can also be used predicatively with the pronominal copula.

- (46) *it-tfal huma tlieta*  
 DEF-child.PL COP.3PL three:F  
 ‘The children are three.’ (elicited)

#### 4.5. Other uses of the negative copula

With finite verbs, Maltese can use the negative copula as a negative focus marker, instead of the negative discontinuous morpheme *ma ... x*. This is more widespread with the Imperfective (47–48) than with the Perfective (49), where it is limited to a handful of dialects (Vanhove 1993: 383–384). Agreement with the subject is not compulsory (47).

- (47) *l-istruttu:r-i mu:f ni-ksir-o:m*  
 DEF-structure-PL COP.NEG.3SG.M 1SG-break.IPFV-OBJ.3PL  
 ‘The structures, I AM NOT breaking them (Lit. the structures, it is not [that] I break them)

- (48) *M'iniex niċċajta*  
 COP.NEG.1SG joke.IPFV:1SG  
 ‘I AM NOT joking (Lit. I am not [that] I joke.) (Friggieri 1986: 107)

- (49) *illu:m l-u:zu tiəj-aw mu:f spiġġ-a*  
 today DEF-usage of-3SG.M.POSS COP.NEG.3SG.M finish-PFV.3SG.M  
 ‘Today, its use IS NOT finished.’ (Lit. its use, it is not [that] it finished.)

The 3SG.M negative copula is also the way to negate focused constituents such as non-predicative nouns (50), adjectives, adverbs, deictics, prepositional phrases (51), as well as complement (52–53) and reason clauses (54) (see also Borg and Azzopardi-Alexander 1997: 88–90).

- (50) *kin-ikoll-om mu:f ʔomos flanelli ta-s-su:f*  
 be.PFV.3SG-have.IPFV-3PL COP.NEG.3SG shirts flannels of-DEF-wool  
 ‘They had, not shirts, woolen flannels.’

- (51) *Kellimtu fuq il-forza u mhux fuq l-argumenti*  
 talk.PFV:2SG:OBJ.3SG on DEF-strength and COP.NEG.3SG on DEF-arguments  
 ‘You talked to him with force, not with arguments.’ (Friggieri 1986: 38)

- (52) *mu:f li a:mil-t if-fieta*  
 COP.NEG.3SG CONJ do.PFV-3SG.F DEF-rain  
 ‘It is not that it rained.’

- (53) *mu:f ma-n-ku:n-f n-a:f imma ni-nsa*  
 COP.NEG.3SG NEG-1SG-be.IPFV-NEG 1SG-know.IPFV but 1SG-forget.IPFV  
 ‘It is not that I don’t know, but I forget.’

- (54) *mu:f imħabba fi:-k ʔom-t*  
 COP.NEG.3SG because in-2SG.POSS get.up.PFV-1SG  
 ‘It is not because of you that I got up.’

## 5. The locative copula *qiegħed*

Maltese has grammaticalized the active participle of the locative verb meaning ‘stay, sit, reside’ to mark adverbial-locative predication (see Camilleri and Stadler 2020 for an overview in Arabic varieties, including Maltese). The copula agrees in gender and number with the figure (Table 3), which behaves as the subject argument. It can be phonetically reduced to [ʔet].

Table 3: The locative copula

| SG.M                    | SG.F                   | PL                       |
|-------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|
| <i>qiegħed /ʔiəjed/</i> | <i>qiegħda /ʔe:da/</i> | <i>qegħdin /ʔe:di:n/</i> |

For Borg (1987–1988: 61), the construction with the locative copula can only mark temporary location. However, this is contradicted by many examples in my data, where *qiegħed* is also used for permanent location, and, marginally, in matrix clauses of purposive or reason subordinate clauses, and for inclusion predication.

The locative copula usually refers to a present-referring context, but, unlike the pronominal copula, it can be preceded by the ‘be’ verb to introduce TAM information (ex. 56).

### 5.1. Adverbial predication

#### 5.1.1. Spatial uses

The locative copula is used in plain-locational clauses. The figure can be a concrete entity or an abstract noun (57). The ground is a locative adverb or a noun introduced by a locative preposition in my data. However, it is possible that the same conditioning for the occurrence of the preposition *fi* ‘in, at’ before the ground, as explained by Stolz, Lestrade, and Stolz (2014) (see above §4), applies for this copula. Contingent (55–56, 58) and permanent (57, 59) locations are possible. The canonical order is figure-copula-ground. The figure can be omitted and retrieved contextually (58).

- (55) *da:na l-ʔattu:s ʔiəjed ħdejn il-kaldaru:n*  
 PROX.SG.M DEF-cat Loc1COP.SG.M next DEF-caldron  
 ‘This cat is next to the caldron.’

- (56) *il-ʔalts-iət tiəja:-j ʔet awn*  
 DEF-trousers-PL of-1SG.POSS Loc1COP here  
 ‘My trousers are here.’

- (57) *Il-poeżija qiegħda fina*  
 DEF-poetry Loc1COP.SG.F in:1PL.POSS  
 ‘Poetry is in us.’ (Friggieri 1986: 173)

- (58) *ʔet dʒo-s-sacristija*  
 Loc1COP inside-DEF-sacristy  
 ‘He is inside the sacristy.’

- (59) *Is-Supermarket li marru fih kien qiegħed*

DEF-supermarket CONJ go.PFV:3PL in:3SG.M.POSS be.PFV.3SG.M Loc1COP.SG.M  
*f'kantuniera*  
 in-corner  
 'The supermarket they went to was at the corner.' (Casha 1975: 61)

Word order change is rather frequent. The ground can be topicalized and precede the copula while the figure follows it (60), or the copula may occur in final position, after the ground (61–62).

- (60) *f-id-ek*                      *ʔe:da*                      *l-liberta*  
 in-hand-PL-2SG.POSS Loc1COP.SG.F DEF-freedom  
 'In your hands is the freedom.'
- (61) *f-da:n*                      *il-volu:m*                      *ʔe:da*  
 in-PROX.SG.M DEF-volume Loc1COP.SG.F  
 'In this volume, it is.'
- (62) *l-imdʒiabaħ*                      *dawn*                      *in-naħa-at*                      *ʔiəjed?*  
 DEF-Imgiebaħ PROX.PL DEF-side-PL Loc1COP.SG.M  
 'L-Imgiebaħ, in these parts is it?'

### 5.1.2. Non-spatial uses

The locative copula is used in a conventionalized temporal interrogative utterance.

- (63) *aħna* *f=ʔe:di:n*                      *illu:m?*  
 we what=Loc1COP.PL today  
 'What day is it today?' (Lit. 'We are what, today?')

Borg (1987–1988: 64) mentions that the locative copula can marginally be used for “abstract temporary (limited present time duration) location in the role identified by the predicate”, and Azzopardi-Alexander (1997: 50, 53) that it can be used to encode a temporary role or state, i.e. a predication where the predicate has a functive function. I have no examples of this sort in my data.

- (64) *Pietru* *qieghed*                      *l-ezaminatur*  
 Pietru Loc1COP.SG.M DEF-examiner  
 'Pietru is the examiner.' (Borg 1987–1988: 64)

Gnomic clauses introduced by the purpose conjunction *biex* /biəf/ are possible with *qieghed*, and, are also found in MUDTV1 (Čéplö 2018: 111).

- (65) *dawk*                      *il-wajərs*                      *il-ħofn-i:n*                      *ʔe:di:n*                      *biəf*  
 DIST.PL DEF-wires DEF-thick-PL Loc1COP.PL so.that  
*i-zomm-u:-a:*                      *so:d-a*  
 3-keep.IPFV-PL-OBJ.3SG.F firm-F  
 'These thick wires are for keeping it firm.'

There is also one instance of a clause that can be interpreted as an existential predication introduced by the reason preposition *għalhekk* 'for this reason'.

- (66) *Il-ħmieġ* *tal-ħitan*                      *hu*                      *ħaġa* *tajba*, *għaliex* *il-ħitan*  
 DEF-dirt of:DEF-walls COP.SG.M thing.F good:F because DEF-wall.PL  
*għalhekk*                      *qegħdin*

for.this.reason Loc1COP.PL

‘Dirty walls are a good thing, because walls exist for this reason.’ (Friggieri 1986: 60)

Although considered as a “mistake” by grammarians and speakers alike, this locative copula is regularly used to express inclusion predication with indefinite nouns (67) and adjectives (68). (67) is a borderline case where the construction could be either interpreted as an inclusion or as an existential predication.

(67) *kian*            *ʔiʔjed*            *romblu*  
be.PFV.3SG.M Loc1COP.SG.M roll  
‘It was a roll / there was a roll.’

(68) *da:n*            *a:nd-u*            *lingwa*            *ʔe:da*            *sewwa*  
PROX.SG.M have.IPFV-3SG.M language Loc1COP.SG.F correct  
‘This one has a language which is correct.’

The predicate can be topicalized.

(69) *skwe:r*    *ʔe:di:n*  
square Loc1COP.PL  
‘Square, they are.’

## 5.2. Predicative use of numerals

*Qiegħed* can also be used with numerals in a predicative position.

(70) *qegħdin*    *tlieta*    *tlieta*,    *erbgħa*    *erbgħa*    *kif*    *gew*  
Loc1COP.PL three three four four as come:PFV:3PL  
‘They were three by three or four by four, as it went.’ (KM, Literature 77)

## 5.3. Other use of the locative copula

The locative copula has been grammaticalized as a progressive auxiliary of a following verb in the Imperfective. It is often reduced to a clitic particle *qed* /ʔet/ (see e.g. Vanhove 1993: 112–152; Camilleri and Stadler 2020).

(71) *a:jd-t-l-u*                            *ʔet=ni-bza*                            *ʔal-l-i*  
say.PFV-1SG-to-OBJ.3.SG PROG=1SG-be.afraid.IPFV say.PFV.3SG.M-to-1SG.POSS  
*ʔet=n-a:jd-l-ek*                            *i-nzel*  
PROG=1.SG-say.IPFV-to-2SG.POSS SG-go.down.IMP  
‘I told him: “I am afraid.” He told me: “I am telling you: go down!”’

(72) *f’dinja*    *wahda*    *li*    *qiegħda*    *tinqasam*  
in-world one.F CONJ PROG:SG.F be.divided.IPFV:3SG.F  
‘In a world that is being divided.’ (Friggieri 1972: 177)

## 6. The verbal copula

As mentioned in various studies (e.g. Borg 1987–1988; Vanhove 1993; Stassen 1996; Camilleri and Stadler 2019), the ‘be’ verb is used as a verbal copula to specify TAM information. This is the case for the three main types of non-verbal predication, nominal, adjectival, and adverbial. The canonical constituent order is S-COP-PRED, but it may vary for pragmatic reasons (topicalization, focusing, afterthought). It is also used as a TAM auxiliary. Negation is formed with the verbal discontinuous negative morpheme *ma ... x*.

## 6.1. Nominal predication

### 6.1.1. Identity

The ‘be’ verb is used for the expression of identity, for all TAMs, with a definite nominal predicate. Below are examples with the Imperfective, which has a future contextual value (73), and with an auxiliary construction, involving both the Perfective and the Imperfective form of ‘be’, marking the Present Perfect (74).

(73) *il-problema dejjem t-ku:n il-problema finantġjarj-a*  
DEF-problem always 3.SG.F-be.IPFV DEF-problem financial-F  
‘The problem will always be the financial problem.’

(74) *il-ġias da:k id-daġs dejjem kien i-ku:n*  
DEF-measure DIST.SG.M DEF-size always be.PFV.3SG.M 3.SG.M-be.IPFV  
‘The measure, has it always been that size?’

### 6.1.2. Inclusion

Inclusion with the verbal copula involves a predicative indefinite noun.

(75) *missiər-i kiən mastrudaffa*  
father-1SG.POSS be.PFV.3SG.M carpenter  
‘My father was a carpenter.’

(76) *jekk tiskot tkun traditur*  
if shut.up.IPFV:2SG be.IPFV:2SG traitor  
‘If you shut up, you’ll be a traitor.’ (Friggieri 1986: 29)

The predicate can be in focus and precede the verbal copula (77), or the subject is in final position, as an afterthought (78).

(77) *aħna bdiəwa kon-na*  
we peasants be.PFV-1PL  
‘We were PEASANTS.’

(78) *kon-na ħbiəb aħna*  
be.PFV-1PL friends we  
‘We were friends, us.’

### 6.1.3. Inverse-possessive predication

Inverse-possessive predication also occurs with the verbal copula.

(79) *l-ħtija din id-darba ma kinitx tiegħu*  
DEF-fault PROX.SG.F DEF-time NEG be.PFV:3SG.F:NEG of:3SG.M.POSS  
‘The fault, this time, was not his.’ (Friggieri 1986: 11)

## 6.2. Adjectival predication

The verbal copula is also used in inclusion predication with unmarked indefinite adjectives.

(80) *i-ku:n mari:d bi-s-stonku*  
1SG-be.IPFV sick with-DEF-stomach  
‘He is sick in the stomach.’

The adjectival predicate can be focalized and precede the copula.



- (81) *a:f mari:d-a kiən-et*  
 because sick-F be.PFV-3SG.F  
 ‘Because SICK, she was.’

### 6.3. Adverbial predication

#### 6.3.1. Spatial uses

The ‘be’ copula can be used for plain-locational predication. The word order is figure-copula-ground, the figure being the subject with which the copula agrees. The figure can only be represented by the personal pronoun included in the copula. The same conditioning for the occurrence of the preposition *fi* ‘in, at’ before the ground, as explained by Stolz, Lestrade, and Stolz (2014) (see above §4.), applies for this copula. Example (82) below exemplifies Stolz, Lestrade, and Stolz (2014) analysis in terms of genericity of a common noun when used without the locative preposition *fi* ‘in’, and example (83) when the ground is a toponym, obligatorily without a locative preposition. For other types of spatial relation between the figure and the ground, other locative prepositions necessarily precede the ground (85).

- (82) *meta konna l-iskola*  
 when be.PFV:1PL DEF-school  
 ‘When we were at school.’ (Friggieri 1986: 10)

- (83) *ktib-t-a: meta kon-t Berli:n ta-l-lvant*  
 write.PFV-1SG-OBJ.3SG.F when be.PFV-1SG Berlin of-DEF-east  
 ‘I wrote it when I was in East Berlin.’

- (84) *kultant l-a:l?a kiən-et t-ku:n l=emm isfel ħafna*  
 sometimes DEF-field be.PFV-3SG.F 3SG.F-be.IPFV to=there down very  
 ‘Sometimes, the field used to be over there, very much below.’

- (85) *di:n se-t-ku:n fu:ʔ il-kuntratt ta-n-nuta:r*  
 PROX.3SG.F FUT-3SG.F-be.IPFV on DEF-contract of-DEF-solicitor  
 ‘This will be on the solicitor’s contract.’

#### 6.3.2. Non-spatial uses

My data provided only one idiomatic expression.

- (86) *jiən kon-t fu:ʔ if-fewk*  
 I be.PFV-1SG on DEF-thorns  
 ‘I was on pins and needles.’

### 6.4. Predicative use of numerals

For TAM specifications, numerals can be used with the verbal copula.

- (87) *Fil-klikka tagħhom kienu tlieta u għoxrin*  
 in:DEF-clique of:POSS.3PL be.PFV:3PL three and twenty  
 ‘In their clique, they were twenty-three.’ (KM, Literature 21)

## 7. The locative copula *fi*

### 7.1. Inverse-locational predication

Maltese has two basic types of inverse-locational predication. It thus belongs to the type of languages where “a predicative construction distinct from plain-locational predication is available to encode an alternative perspectivization of prototypical figure-ground

relationships” (Creissels 2019: 55–56). As in many Arabic varieties, one of the inverse-locational predications is expressed with the locative preposition *fi* ‘in, at’ and the object suffix pronouns,<sup>12</sup> referring to and agreeing with the ground of the construction, which is either a noun phrase or a corresponding pronoun (88), or may be left unexpressed (89). The figure is restricted to inanimate noun phrases. This copula (labelled “pseudo-verb” in Peterson 2009) is negated by means of the verbal discontinuous morpheme *ma ... x* (89). It can also be preceded by auxiliaries to mark TAM distinctions (88). The *fi*-locative copula is far less frequent than the other inverse-locational predications (§8). The word order is strictly (ground-)copula-figure. The figure is most often indefinite, but there are a few examples with a definite one.

(88) *jekk ma-i-ku:n-f fi-ja hafna ilma*  
 if NEG-3SG.M-be.IPFV-NEG Loc2COP-OBJ.3SG.F many water  
*ma-ji-tla:-f*  
 NEG-3SG.M-go.up.IPFV-NEG  
 ‘If there would not be a lot of water in it, it would not go up.’

(89) *Xoǧħol id-dar ma f’ihx tmiem*  
 work DEF-house NEG Loc2COP-OBJ.3SG.M:NEG end  
 ‘There is no end to housework.’ (Aquilina 1972: 169)

## 7.2. Metaphorical uses

Aquilina’s (1987: 333) dictionary provides sixteen idiomatic expressions with this locative copula, some of which are reproduced below. (90) is an inverse-locative predication that expresses possession.

(90) *kullhadd fih tieǧħu*  
 everyone Loc2COP:OBJ.3SG.M of:3SG.M.POSS  
 ‘Everyone has his own particular character.’ (Lit. everyone there is of him)

(91) *in-negozju dak li fih, jorbtok*  
 DEF-business DIST.SG.M CONJ Loc2COP:OBJ.3SG.M tie.IPFV:3SG.M:OBJ.2SG  
 ‘That is the inconvenience of business, it ties you down.’ (Lit. that business [is] what there is, it ties you)

(92) *fih u ma fihix*  
 Loc1COP:OBJ.3SG.F and NEG Loc2COP:OBJ.3SG.F:NEG  
 ‘It may or may not be a cause of complaint.’ (Lit. there is and there is not)

(93) *fih boqqa brodu*  
 Loc2COP:OBJ.3SG.M mouthful broth  
 ‘He is a man to keep at arm’s length.’ (Lit. there is a mouthful of broth)

(94) *fih il-ħobz*  
 Loc2COP:OBJ.3SG.M DEF-bread  
 ‘He is a worthless person.’ (Lit. there is the bread)

(95) *ma finix mniex tistħi*  
 NEG Loc2COP:OBJ.1SG:NEG NEG.COP.1SG.NEG be.shy.IPFV:2SG

<sup>12</sup> Object suffix pronouns differ from possessive ones only in 1SG: *-ni* vs *-i*. See ex. (95).

‘You don’t have to feel shy with me.’ (Lit. there is not me, I am not, you are shy)

## 8. The adverbial copulas

As several Maghrebi Arabic varieties, Maltese has grammaticalized two locative adverbs into inverse-locational copulas: *hemm* /emm/ ‘there’, and *hawn* /awn/ ‘here’ (see Creissels 2022 for a recent overview). In my corpus, the former is twenty times more frequent than the latter (Vanhove 1993: 405). Even if both forms are used by all speakers, the usage frequency may reflect a dialectal distribution. For instance, *hawn* is the preferred adverbial copula of Gozitan speakers. In the varieties in which *hawn* is less frequent, the adverbial copula marks a closer proximity with the personal sphere of the speaker, in line with its original meaning. In KM, the ratio between *hemm* and *hawn* is not significantly different. A search in the sub-corpus “Literature” gave 5130 tokens for *hemm* and 300 tokens for *hawn*, and in the sub-corpus “Press: News” 264,013 tokens for *hemm* and 17,087 for *hawn*, i.e. a ratio of seventeen times more for *hemm* in the former, and sixteen times more for *hawn* in the latter.

Unlike with the locative copula *fi*, the adverbial copulas can be used with both animate and inanimate figures. There are several indications that the adverbs are indeed grammaticalized into copulas and are no longer part of the juxtaposition strategy: as copulas, they can co-occur with their cognate adverbs (104); negation is formed with the discontinuous verbal morpheme *ma ... x* (101); TAM auxiliaries are frozen in 3SG.M, and phonetic erosion took place: the long vowels of the singular of Perfective and Imperfective of the ‘be’ auxiliary are shortened, and ‘be’ forms a prosodic unit with the adverbial copula (98); with the ‘be’ auxiliary, the negative morphemes can frame the auxiliary alone (100), or the auxiliary + the copula (109).

### 8.1. Inverse-locational predication

Unlike with the *fi*-copula, the word order can vary with the adverbial copulas: the canonical order is copula-figure-ground (96–97), but ground-copula-figure when the ground is topicalized (98). The ground can be a locative adverb (101), a concrete (96) or an abstract (100) entity, both introduced by a preposition. As is cross-linguistically frequent, the figure is most often indefinite, but there are a few instances with a definite figure (102–103).

(96) *emm kni:sja za:jr-a dʒo-l-ħajt*  
 Loc3COP church.F small-F inside-DEF-wall  
 ‘There is a small church inside the wall.’

(97) *kemm emm gla:len ta-l-ilma fi-l-baħar*  
 how.much Loc3COP gallon.PL of-DEF-water in-DEF-sea  
 ‘How many gallons of water are there in the sea?’

(98) *dʒo l-gallina:r kin-emm serdu:ʔ*  
 inside DEF-henhouse be.PFV.3SG.M-Loc3COP rooster  
 ‘Inside the henhouse, there was a rooster.’

(99) *anki fejn ma-kiən-f emm aħwa kiən-u*  
 even where NEG-be.PFV.3SG-NEG Loc3COP brother.PL be.PFV-3PL  
*j-a:jn-u l=fulfi:n*  
 3-help.IPFV-PL to=RECP  
 ‘Even where there were no brothers, they would help each other.’

- (100) *fu:ʔ di:k kin-awn pressjo:ni kbi:r-a*  
 on DIST.SG.F be.PFV.3SG.M-Loc4COP pressure.F big-F  
 ‘On that one there was a big pressure.’
- (101) *awnekk m-awn-f ilma*  
 here NEG-Loc4COP-NEG water  
 ‘Here there is no water.’
- (102) *ji-fird-u:-ħ min-n-naħa fejn emm iz-zbu:l*  
 3-separate.IPFV-PL-OBJ.3SG from-DEF-side where Loc3COP DEF-ear.of.corn.PL  
 ‘They separate it from the side where there are the ears.’
- (103) *kin-emm dawk iz-zewđ ħbiab a:nd Fajjenzu*  
 be.PFV.3SG.M-Loc3COP DIST.PL DEF-two friend.PL at Fajjenzu  
 ‘There were these two friends at Fajjenzu’s.’

(104) shows that both functions of *hemm* can co-occur in the same clause, as a locative adverb and a locative copula. The same is true for *hawn*, but more often with its long form, *hawnhekk* (101).

- (104) *da:k li emm emm fu:ʔ*  
 DIST.SG.M CONJ Loc3COP there on  
 ‘That one which there is up there.’

## 8.2. Existential utterances

When no ground is specified, the inverse-locational constructions can be interpreted as existential constructions. Most often the adverbial copulas precede the figure (105–106, 109), but the figure can be topicalized with the *hemm* construction (109), not with *hawn* in my data. The latter word order is also found in interrogative utterances (107). The expression of pure existence (i.e. with reference to non-localizable entities) with the adverbial copulas is however quite rare (106).<sup>13</sup>

- (105) *temmen li hemm Alla*  
 believe.IPFV:2SG CONJ Loc3COP God  
 ‘Do you believe God exists?’ (Aquilina 1999: 956)
- (106) *mhux biżżejjed hemm umdità!*  
 COP.NEG.3SG.M enough Loc3COP humidity  
 ‘It is not enough that there is humidity?!’ (Calleja 1972: 62)
- (107) *f=film emm a:da?*  
 what=film Loc3COP tomorrow?  
 ‘What film is there tomorrow?’
- (108) *ʔabel il-đebel u ħarru:b-a kin-emm*  
 before DEF-stone.PL and carob.tree-SING be.PFV.3SG.M-Loc3COP  
 ‘Before there were the stones and a carob tree.’
- (109) *ʔabel ma-kin-awn-f ma:gn-i*  
 before NEG-be.PFV.3SG-Loc4COP-NEG machine-PL

<sup>13</sup> Maltese also has an Italian loan, *eżist* ‘exist’, far less frequent than the inverse-locational predication.

‘Before, there were no machines.’

- (110) *m-emm-f*                      *malt-i:n*      *j-a:ml-u:-a*  
NEG-Loc3COP-NEG    Maltese-PL    3-do.IPFV-PL-OBJ.3SG.F  
‘There are no Maltese who would do that!’

### 8.3. Predicative use of numerals

Numerals can be used predicatively in existential utterances.

- (111) *Kien*                      *hemm*      *ħamsa*    *b'*      *kollox*  
be.PFV.3SG.M    Loc3COP    five      with    all  
‘There were five altogether.’ (KM, Literature 20)

### 8.4. Presentational utterances

As observed by e.g. Creissels (2019: 53) “[t]he languages that have grammaticalized an [inverse-locational predication] construction often have a complex presentational construction (sometimes called ‘existential cleft’) in which the noun phrase presenting the new participant is introduced as the figure phrase in an inverse-locational clause”. Such is the case in Maltese, with a very large array of uses, as e.g. in French, with both adverbial copulas. They introduce different types of relative clauses with (114) or without (112–113) a relative marker.

- (112) *emm*      *ir-ra:ɖzel*    *t-oħt-i*                      *mari:d*  
Loc3COP    DEF-man    of-sister-1SG.POSS    sick.M  
‘There is my sister’s husband who is sick.’

- (113) *kin-emm*                      *mara*      *ta-ʔta*                      *l-ħatab*  
be.PFV.3SG.M-Loc3COP    woman    3SG.F-cut.IPFV    DEF-firewood  
‘There was a woman who was cutting firewood.’

- (114) *awn*      *min*    *j-a:mel*                      *il-ħali:b*  
Loc4COP    who    3SG-do.IPFV    DEF-milk  
‘There are those who do milk.’

## 9. Predicative possession

Diachronically, like in many Arabic varieties, Maltese has grammaticalized the locative preposition *għand* /a:nd/ ‘at’ into a possessive predicate, which is fully inflected with the possessive pronouns<sup>14</sup> (for the most ancient, to my knowledge, grammatical description of this use in an Arabic variety, see Cohen 1912; for a typological and grammaticalization perspective in Maltese, see Comrie 1982; for a recent overview in Arabic dialects, see Creissels 2022). What is particular to Maltese is that this possessive predicate is limited to Imperfective contexts, and cannot be preceded by a TAM auxiliary as in other Arabic varieties.<sup>15</sup> Instead, Maltese has developed a paradigm based on the verb ‘be’ in the Perfective and Imperfective, to which the dative preposition *l* ‘to’ (a shortened form of *lil*) and possessive suffix pronouns were agglutinated (Table 4). The final *-n* of ‘be’ was assimilated to the consonant of the preposition (except, phonetically, in 1PL where the pronoun starts with *n-*), and the singular inner vowels were shortened. Both ‘be’-based paradigms can co-occur

<sup>14</sup> Unlike in the structurally similar construction with the *fi* preposition, where the object set of pronouns is used instead (§7).

<sup>15</sup> There is one exception to this rule in my data in a Gozitan dialect (Vanhove 1993: 413).

with various TAM auxiliaries (frozen in 3SG.M, see ex. [117]). Similar constructions were the only possible ones in Classical Arabic, and still exist in other dialects, but not in such an advanced stage of grammaticalization as in Maltese.

Table 4: Paradigm of the possessive predicate

|    |    | Imperfective1              | Perfective                | Imperfective2               |
|----|----|----------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| SG | 1  | <i>ghandi</i> /a:nd-i/     | <i>kelli</i> /kell-i/     | <i>ikolli</i> /ikoll-i/     |
|    | 2  | <i>ghandek</i> /a:nd-ek/   | <i>kellek</i> /kell-ek/   | <i>ikollok</i> /ikoll-ok/   |
|    | 3M | <i>ghandu</i> /a:nd-u/     | <i>kellu</i> /kell-u/     | <i>ikollu</i> /ikoll-u/     |
| 3F | 1  | <i>ghandha</i> /a:nd-a/    | <i>kellha</i> /kell-a/    | <i>ikollha</i> /ikoll-a/    |
|    | 2  | <i>ghandna</i> /a:nd-na/   | <i>kellna</i> /kell-na/   | <i>ikollna</i> /ikoll-na/   |
|    | 3  | <i>ghandkom</i> /a:nd-kom/ | <i>kellkom</i> /kell-kom/ | <i>ikollkom</i> /ikoll-kom/ |
| PL | 1  | <i>ghandhom</i> /a:nd-om/  | <i>kellhom</i> /kell-om/  | <i>ikollhom</i> /ikoll-om/  |
|    | 2  |                            |                           |                             |
|    | 3  |                            |                           |                             |

Maltese thus diachronically belonged to the “oblique-possessor” subtype of the “S-possessee” type. It now belongs to the “transpossessive” type (Creissels 2019: 59–60), since the possessive predicate behaves syntactically as an ordinary transitive verb with an object that follows and a subject (often elided) that precedes it, but with morphologically “irregular” paradigms (this is the reason why the possessive predicates are traditionally termed “pseudo-verbs”, cf. e.g. Peterson 2009). This is further confirmed by the fact that the possessive predicates are sensitive to differential object marking: only pronominal and nominal direct objects denoting entities high in the animacy hierarchy (Borg and Azzopardi-Alexander 1997: 55) are marked with the dative preposition *lil* ‘to’. Negation is marked with the verbal discontinuous morpheme *ma ... x* on the pseudo-verbs or on the preceding auxiliary, if any.

### 9.1. Transpossessive predication

Below are examples that show the transitive behavior of the paradigms of predicative possession, with differential object marking and the perfective paradigm (115), with the locative preposition-based Imperfective (116), and with a negative auxiliary (117).

(115) *meta omm-i kelli-a lil=i*  
 when mother-3SG.F.POSS have.PFV-3SG.f to=1SG.POSS  
 ‘When my mother had me...’

(116) *a:da a:nd-na l-ewwel ta-f-fa:r*  
 tomorrow have.IPFV-1PL DEF-first of-DEF-month  
 ‘Tomorrow we have the first (outing) of the month.’

(117) *jiən ma-kiən-f ikoll-i ħobz ħafna*  
 I NEG-be.PFV.3SG.M-NEG have.IPFV-1SG bread many  
 ‘I did not have a lot of bread.’

### 9.2. Physical, emotional and mental states predication

The following examples illustrate the use of the possessive predication for the expression of what Benveniste (1966: 198) called “dispositions subjectives”, i.e. physical, emotional or mental states of the subject. This use is probably due to Italian or Sicilian influence, since such constructions are rare in Maghrebi Arabic.

(118) *kell-i fi tna:fil sena*  
 have.PFV-1SG some twelve year

‘I was about twelve years old.’

(119) *a:nd-i*            *l-dʒu:h*  
 have.IPFV-1SG DEF-hunger  
 ‘I am hungry.’

(120) *a:nd-ek*            *radʒu:n*  
 have.IPFV-2SG reason  
 ‘You are right.’

### 9.3. Presentational utterances

In some examples, constructions with the pseudo-verbs seem to undergo an evolution parallel to the presentational uses of the adverbial copulas mentioned in §8.4, when they head a relative clause without a relative marker.

(121) *a:nd-ek*            *zaʔʔ-ek*            *t-e:lb-ek*  
 have.IPFV-2SG belly.F-2SG.POSS 3F-defeat.IPFV-OBJ.2SG  
 ‘Your eyes are bigger than your stomach.’ (Lit. ‘You have your belly [that] defeats you.’)

(122) *kell-i*            *na:dʒa*    *mit-it-l-i*  
 have.PFV-1SG sheep.F die.PFV-3SG.F-to-1SG.POSS  
 ‘I had a sheep who died.’ (Lit. ‘Who died to me.’)

(123) *kell-a*            *l-pa:tri*    *ħu:*        *r-ra:dʒel*    *taħ-ħa*  
 have.PFV-3SG.F DEF-priest brother DEF-man of-3SG.F.POSS  
 ‘She had the priest who was her husband’s brother.’

### 9.4. Other use of the predicative possession

The three suppletive forms of the possessive pseudo-verb can be used as modal auxiliaries for the expression of epistemic and deontic modalities, a calque from Italian and Sicilian. For details, see Vanhove (1993: 300–306); see also Lucas and Čéplö (2020: 282–283).

(124) *t-mu:r*            *fejn*    *a:nd-ek*            *t-mu:r*  
 2SG-go.IPFV where have.IPFV-2SG 2SG-go.IPFV  
 ‘You go where you must go.’

## 10. Conclusion

Non-verbal predication by simple juxtaposition of noun phrases, even if not marginal in Maltese, is not the most frequent strategy. The language has recourse to additional copulas of different origins: personal pronouns, the active participle of a stative verb, a ‘be’ verb, locative prepositions and adverbs, which may combine with bound pronouns to form pseudo-verbs, in order to mark several semantic types of non-verbal predication. Table 9 recapitulates the morphosyntactic types of non-verbal predications and their functions in Maltese.

Table 9: Non-verbal predication constructions, and their functions in Maltese

| Functions | Constructions |         |                          |                    |                  |  |   |
|-----------|---------------|---------|--------------------------|--------------------|------------------|--|---|
|           | juxtaposition | pronoun | <i>qiegħed</i> ‘sitting’ | <i>fi</i> ‘in, at’ | <i>kien</i> ‘be’ | <i>hemm</i> ‘there’,<br><i>hawn</i> ‘here’ | <i>għand-</i> ‘at’,<br><i>ikoll-, kell-</i> ‘be to’ |

|                                     |      |      |      |                 |      |   |     |
|-------------------------------------|------|------|------|-----------------|------|---|-----|
| identity                            | rare | +    | rare | –               | +    | – | –   |
| inclusion                           | +    | +    | +    | –               | +    | – | –   |
| gnomic                              | rare | +    | +    | –               | –    | – | –   |
| inverse possession                  | +    | rare | –    | –               | +    | – | –   |
| ostension                           | +    | –    | –    | –               | –    | – | –   |
| spatial                             | rare | rare | –    | –               | –    | – | –   |
| non-spatial location                | rare | rare | +    | –               | rare | – | –   |
| predicative numeral                 | +    | +    | +    | –               | +    | + | n/a |
| plain-locational                    | rare | rare | +    | –               | +    | – | –   |
| existence                           | –    | –    | rare | –               | –    | + | –   |
| inverse-locational                  | –    | –    | –    | inanimates only | –    | + | –   |
| Presentational                      | –    | –    | –    | –               | –    | + | +   |
| Transposessive                      | –    | –    | –    | –               | –    | – | +   |
| physical, emotional & mental states | –    | –    | –    | –               | –    | – | +   |
| verbal negation                     | –    | +    | –    | –               | +    | – | –   |
| focus neg.                          | –    | +    | –    | –               | –    | – | –   |
| non-predicative neg.                | –    | +    | –    | –               | –    | – | –   |
| progressive                         | –    | –    | +    | –               | –    | – | –   |
| modal auxiliary                     | –    | –    | –    | –               | –    | – | +   |

## Abbreviations

CAUS = causative; CONJ = conjunction; COP = copula; DEF = definite; DIST = distal; F = feminine; IPFV = imperfective; Loc = locational; Loc1/2/3/4COP = locative copula; NEG = negation; OBJ = object; PERS. = personal; PFV = perfective; PL = plural; POSS = possessive; PRED = predicate; PRO. = pronoun; PROX = proximal; RECP = reciprocal; S = subject; SG = singular; SING = singulative; TAM Tense-Aspect-Mood.

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