

Full and reduced pronouns in Maltese

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The typology of person forms (Bresnan, 2001; Siewierska, 2003 & 2004), categorizes personal pronouns along the dimensions of independence and reduction:

(1) zero → bound → clitic → weak → (full) pronoun

This paper deals with the rightmost part of the typology, the border between weak and full pronouns. While the general usefulness of this typology is not contested, the exact definition of weak pronouns is still a topic of debate. Siewierska (2004: 34) posits that “[...] weak forms are not attached, either phonologically or morphologically, to any other constituent” and that “[...]they are not just unstressed versions of independent forms but rather differ from them both phonologically and in terms of syntactic distribution” while Cardinaletti & Starke (1999) put forward other restrictions for the term *weak* pronoun including the inability of *weak* forms to be modified or coordinated. In the Maltese system all full singular pronouns have reduced counterparts, while the plural only has one unreduced form per person.

Person	Singular	Plural
1	jien(-a)	aħna
2	int(-i)	intom
3.M	hu(-wa)	huma
3.F	hi(-ja)	

Free Personal Pronouns in Maltese (Borg & Azzopardi-Alexander, 1997: 198)

This study tackles the question of whether the reduced pronouns in Maltese can be classified as traditional *weak* pronouns, as another, albeit reduced, set of full pronouns, or as a class which lies in between the two established categories of the typology. First, this paper will establish the status of the reduced pronominal forms using several of the proposed criteria: independence, stress, syntactic distribution, coordination, and modification. Second, using the *Maltese Language Resource Server* (MLRS) corpus, the paper analyzes the distribution of reduced forms regarding text type and person. A Configurational Frequency Analysis (CFA) is used for this corpus study, which analyses the distribution of variable configurations, in this case *form* (full - reduced), *person* (1 – 2 – 3) and *text type*. Furthermore, the notion of markedness is put to a test in comparison with the general and text type specific frequencies of Maltese pronouns (Haspelmath, 2006). These analyses show interesting splits in the use of full and reduced pronouns in Maltese with respect to person and text type, which can only be explained by also taking into account notions of politeness and information structure.

References:

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