

The origin of differential object marking in Maltese
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Since the coinage of the term differential object marking (DOM) by Bossong (1982), more and more languages have been described as varying the marking of the direct object according to inherent, referential and/or information structural properties of the object. DOM is both synchronically and diachronically well attested in Maltese, the most salient basic grammatical structures of which are of North African Arabic origin. Since DOM is not an original Arabic feature and due to the fact that some Arabic vernaculars obtained DOM through language and dialect contact (e.g. in the Levant) this paper deals with possible contact scenarios which could have originated DOM in Maltese. Therefore it scrutinizes three currents: the first one links some Maltese features with the Arabic vernaculars of the Levant (Borg 1996). The second current sees some parallels between Andalusí Arabic and Maltese. These traits might have reached the island directly due to the role of the Aragonese in the Middle Ages and of the Moriscos in the 16th and 17th c. (Zammit 2009/10). Finally, the last current links Maltese with Siculo-Arabic and Southern Italian, i.e. Sicilian, Romance vernaculars (Agius 1996). The linguistic data of the modern vernaculars used in the study comes from field work in Malta, Sicily, Zurich and Saarbrücken (the latter two for Sicilian, Levantine Arabic and Aramaic).

Agius, Dionisius (1996): *Siculo Arabic*. London / New York: Kegan Paul International.

Borg, Alexander (1996): "On some Levantine linguistic traits in Maltese" In: *Israel Oriental Studies* XVI, 133-152.

Bossong, Georg (1982): "Historische Sprachwissenschaft und empirische Universalienforschung" In: *Romanistisches Jahrbuch* 33, 17-51.

Zammit, Martin (2009/10): "Andalusí Arabic and Maltese: a preliminary survey" In: *Folia Orientalia* 45/46, 21-60.