

Morphological Productivity in Maltese: A corpus-based investigation of Romance derivational processes

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As part of the project *Morphological Productivity in Maltese: Corpus-based and experimental evidence*, we are engaged in research on the productivity of derivational processes in Maltese. This research complements ongoing experimental and theoretical work on the significance of root-based processes in the Semitic component of Maltese morphology (e.g. Spagnol, 2011; Ussishkin and Twist, 2009; Perea et al., 2012). Our aims in this project are to explore the productivity of Romance derivational suffixes both from a quantitative, corpus-based perspective and through the use of experimental paradigms. Our starting point is a view of productivity as a gradable, probabilistic phenomenon (e.g. Baayen, 2003), as opposed to the conception in traditional frameworks in which productivity tends to be viewed as a dichotomous distinction between productive and unproductive (e.g. Jackendoff, 1975; Dressler, 2003).

The present paper focuses on results from a corpus-based investigation of the suffixes *-(z)zjoni* and *-ar*. Specifically, we use three different productivity measures proposed by Baayen (2003), with data from the Maltese Language Resource Server corpus. We show that:

1. Both processes are productive, albeit to different degrees;
2. Both processes apply to a number of common nominal stems, but also have their own, unique domains of application.

This data-driven exploration gives rise to an investigation of the theoretical implications of these findings, including an exploration of the possible phonological and semantic factors that contribute to the distinction between these two derivational processes, and the possible reasons for their application to the same stems in some cases.

We conclude with some indications for future experimental work, in particular, the running of a series of lexical decision experiments exploring the potential for priming between derived stems and their hosts (e.g. *sparar* → *spara*). Finally, we would like to investigate the role of these processes as indicators of language change.

References

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