

# Interrogative –š in Maltese

## Antecedents and Developments

GRAMMATICA

DELLA

LINGUA MALTESE

DI

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SECONDA EDIZIONE,

SCRITTA IN ITALIANO, MOLTO ACCRESCIUTA, ED IN MIGLIOR ORDINE  
RIDOTTA DAL MEDESIMO.

MALTA,

STAMPATA PER L' AUTORE.

1827.

MALTESE GRAMMAR

FOR THE

USE OF THE ENGLISH

BY

*Francisco*  
**FRANCIS VELLA.**

LEGHORN

Printed by GLAUCUS MASI

TYPE-FOUNDER.

1834.

## Interrogative –š: Vella 1831

In our interrogative phrases we affix *x* to the end of the verb ; as,

Have you eaten ?                      Chiltôx ?

*Conjugation of an interrogative verb.*

**Present tense.**

*singular*

*plural*

Jeniex ?

Am I ?

Ah'niex ?

Are we ?

Intix ?

Art thou ?

Intomx ?

Are you ?

Hujex ?

Is he ?

Humiex ?

Are they ?

Hijex ?

Is she ?

Vella, Francis. 1831. *Maltese Grammar for the use of the English*, p. 249

## Interrogative –š: Vassalli 1827

**Hâw, huw? è egli?**  
**Hij, hijw? è ella?**  
**Yntw? sei tu?**  
**Ynâw? ei sono?**  
**Humâw? son eglino?**  
**Yntomw? siete voi?**  
**Ahnâw? ci siamo?**

## Interrogative copulas: Early 19<sup>th</sup> century

	independent pronoun	perfect	imperfect
1s	Jeniex? ‘am I?’	Contx? ‘was I?’	Ncûnx ‘shall I be?’
2s	Intix? ‘art thou?’	Contx int? ‘wast thou?’	Tcûnx ‘shalt thou be?’
3ms	Hujex? ‘is he?’	Chienx? ‘was he?’	Jcûnx ‘shall he be?’
3fs	Hijex? ‘is she?’	Cheinitx? ‘was she?’	Tcûnx ‘shall she be?’
1p	Añniex? ‘are we?’	Conniex? ‘were we?’	Ncûnûx ‘shall we be?’
2p	Intomx? ‘are you?’	Contûx? ‘were you?’	Tcûnûx ‘shall you be?’
3p	Humiex? ‘are they?’	Chienûx? ‘were they?’	Jcûnûx ‘shall they be?’

Adapted from Vella 1831: 249—50

A SHORT  
**G R A M M A R**  
OF THE  
**MALTESE LANGUAGE.**



**MALTA:**  
**1845.**

## Interrogative –š: (Vella?) 1845

**Kiltsh?**

***Have you breakfasted?***

**Yishraqilniesz (<sup>12</sup>) imme-  
la nhawtlu u nāajlu f' din il  
haja, biesz nirbhu ir rehu li  
rhayna sissa, u nilhqu ma'  
l'ohrayn?**

**Does it not become us that  
we should make every effort  
and haste in this respect, in  
order to regain what we have  
till now lost by much delay-  
ing, and to overtake the rest  
of the world?**

**(<sup>12</sup>) The *sh* is also a sign of the interrogative, as we see here in the word *yishraqilnie-sh*; and it is to be remarked that when this sign is preceded by *d, j, t*, it is then pronounced almost like *ch*, as *tridsh* wilt thou? pronounced *trich*.**

Anonymous. 1845. *A Short Grammar of the Maltese Language*, p. 54 & 65

## Interrogative –š: Early 19<sup>th</sup> century: Examples

**Do you think of it?**      **Intix tãh'seb fùku?**

Vella 1831: 251

**Hish tayba it trieq?**      ***Is the road good?***

<b>Åandeksh tfal?</b>	<b><i>Have you children?</i></b>
<b>Kemm huma?</b>	<b><i>How many are they?</i></b>
<b>Tibãathomsh li skola?</b>	<b><i>Do you send them to school?</i></b>

Anonymous. 1845. *A Short Grammar of the Maltese Language*, p. 58-9



## Interrogative –š: Early 19<sup>th</sup> century

Applies to:

- verbs, perfect and imperfect
- pseudo-verbs
- copular pronouns
- polar (yes/no) questions

## Polar Interrogative –š in Maltese:

Some polar questions of our own:

- Has there been a change in usage between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries?
- Does it still apply to copular pronouns?
- Does it hold implications for the history of Arabic?

Or

- Is it unique to Maltese?

Interrogative –š: Early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Sutcliffe 1936)

għandekx il-ħila tmur iggib fitit taċ-ċomb?

‘Have you the courage to go to fetch a little lead?’

“In indirect questions ... the interrogation is frequently indicated by the addition to the verb of the particle –x.”

Ma tistâx tghid sewwa kienux mill-eqdem

‘You cannot tell whether they were of the oldest’

Sutcliffe, Edmund F. 1936. *A Grammar of the Maltese Language with Chrestomathy and Vocabulary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 211-12

Interrogative –š: Late 20<sup>th</sup> century

Is-surmast saqsieni: (jekk) il-ġimgħa d-dieħla  
hux se tkun vaganza

‘The headmaster asked me whether next week  
was a holiday’

“The optional jekk, ‘if, whether’ introduces the indirect question,  
together with the obligatory negative element hux.”

Borg and Azzopardi-Alexander. 1997. *Maltese*. Oxon: Routledge , p. 2 & 33

## Polar interrogatives: Late 20<sup>th</sup> century

Ḥriġtux      mill-forn      kmeini wisq

took-out-š from-the-oven early    too-much

Ḥriġtu      mill-forn      kmeini wisq

‘Did you take it out of the oven too early?’

“It is also possible to form a neutral yes-no question by adding the negative suffix to the verb.”

Borg and Azzopardi-Alexander. 1997. *Maltese*. Oxon: Routledge , p. 4

Indirect questions: Early 21<sup>st</sup> century (Highest Authority)

ħa nkun naf **jekk intix** tassew Għesaw jew le

‘That I might know **whether thou art** truly Esau or not’

Ġenesi 27: 21

tgħidilna **jekk intix** il-Kristu

‘Tell us **whether thou be** the Christ’

Matthew 26: 63

Traduzzjoni tad-Dinja l-Ġdida ta' l-Iskrittura Mqaddsa 2008

## Indirect questions: Early 21<sup>st</sup> century (Korpus Malti)

1. Ma nafx **jekk jienx** ġust f' dan

‘I don’t know **if I am** [being] fair in this’

2. **jekk intix** sinjur jew **jekk intix** fqir huwa relattiv

‘**Whether you are** rich or **whether you are** poor is relative’

3. Nixtieq inkun naf **jekk il-Wiki huwiex** user - friendly biżżejjed

‘I would like to know **if** the Wiki **is** user-friendly enough’

## Polar interrogatives: Early 21<sup>st</sup> century (Korpus Malti)

1. **Aħniex** preżenti kif għandna nkunu ?

‘Are we present as we should be?’

2. Għawdex ! **Intix** djamant ?

Rare

‘Gozo! Are you a diamond?’

3. **Hijiex** Tiziana Rocca omm tal-ġenn !?

‘Is Tiziana Rocca a mad mother!?’



Is it Maltese only?

Hijiex Maltija biss?

# Interrogative –š in Maltese and Tunisian Arabic

## Maltese

‘In our interrogative phrases, we affix *x* to the end of the verb’

Vella 1931: 249

## Tunisian Arabic

‘We form the interrogative by ... intonation ... [or] the form (sh) or (shi) is added to the verb’

Ben Abdelkader, Ayed, and Naouar 1977: xxxii

## Polar interrogatives: Early 21<sup>st</sup> century Tunisia

كيفاش نعمل آنا توا؟ .. نمشيش نخرج نلقاه في وجهي؟؟

[kīfāš na-‘mil anā tawwā?]

ni-mšī-š nu-xruġ ni-lqā-h fī waġh-ī ??

I-go I-exit I-find in face-mine

‘What do I do now? Do I go out and find him in front of me?’

‘and-ikš axbār šərīfa?

عندكش أخبار شريفة؟

at-you-š news name

‘Have you [no] news of Cherifa?’

Television drama *Šayd al-Rīm* (Hunting Gazelle) May 2008

## Polar interrogatives: Early 21<sup>st</sup> century Tunisia

جميل خرج ؟ يرجعش يتعشى؟

Jamīl xaraġ? yi-rġa‘š yi-t‘ašša?

name exit he-returns-š he-sups

‘Has Jamil gone out? Will he [not] come back for supper?’

šuft šī layla?

seen šī name

شفت شي ليلي؟

‘Have you [not] seen Leila?’

Film *el-Kotobia* (The Bookstore) 2002

Rare

## Copular interrogatives: 8<sup>th</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> century Andalus

مُرْ أَيَّاكَ يَا نَازِرُ أَيَّاكَ أَنْ أَشْ نَدْرِي؟

[*qal li man rāk wa lis min asrāk?*]

mira ayyāk yā nāzir ayyāk anīš n-adri ?

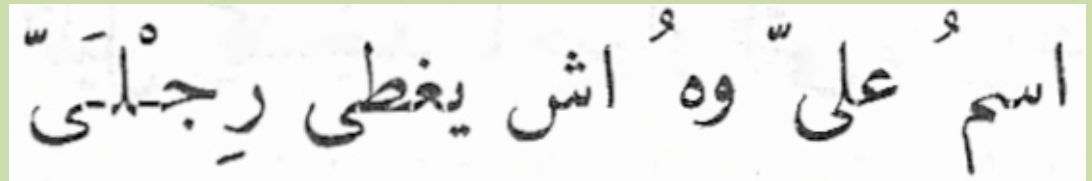
look beware O looker beware, I-š I-know

‘[He said to me, “Who has seen you and is not captivated?]

“Look, but beware, you who look! Do I know?”’

Ibn Xātima (d. 771/1369) *dīwān ibn xātima al-anṣārī* (Diwan of Ibn Xātima al-Anṣārī)

## Copular interrogatives: 9<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> century Andalus



اسم على وه اش يغطي رجلاي

ism-u      ‘aly-ya w      h<sup>u</sup> āš yi-ğtṭi      rğlay-ya ?  
name-his on-me and it      aš it-covers legs-mine

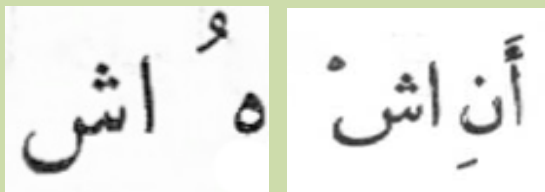
‘His name is on me, but **does it** cover my legs?’

‘An employee who has a wealthy master, and therefore is supposed to earn much money, denies this by saying ... “His fame has not covered for me [even] my ears”’ (Westermarck and El-Baqqali 1931: 160)

Ibn ‘Āṣim al-Ġarnāṭī (d. 829/1425) ḥadā’iq al-azhār (Flower Gardens)

## Copular interrogatives/polar question with –š

anīš, huwāš, etc.?



al-Andalus  
14<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> centuries

*huâšî ist er's? hiâšî ist sie's?*

Tunis – late 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Stumme 1896: 148

**Jeniex ?  
Intix ?  
Hujex ?  
Hijex ?**

**Am I ?  
Art thou ?  
Is he ?  
Is she ?**

Malta – early 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Vella 1831

## Polar Interrogative –š in Maltese: Implications

- Language change in progress:  
18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> → 21<sup>st</sup> centuries
- Link to ancestral forms:  
Tunis → al-Andalus → Sicily? → Malta
- Motivation for the formation of other interrogatives: *āš*, *‘lāš*, *kifāš*, etc.
- Motivation for reanalysis as negator:  
Huwāš? → Lā. mā huwāš!



Grazzi