

From Maltese pronouns towards a typology of pronominal cellmates

This talk presents some prolegomena for a typology of overabundance (Thornton 2012) in paradigms of independent personal pronouns. Overabundance describes the (non-canonical) morphological configuration of two forms occupying the same cell of a paradigm as “cellmates”. While the nature of pronouns and person marking have seen quite detailed treatments (Bhat 2004; Siewierska 2004; Cysouw 2003), a principled typology of pronominal cellmates and their possible diachronic origins does not exist. A good example of pronominal cellmates can be found in Maltese. For all persons and genders in the singular, two forms occupy the same cell of the paradigm, while for the plural the canonical (Corbett 2007) configuration “one cell, one form” is observed. The Maltese case is described in detail by Stolz & Saade (2016) and Saade (2018).

Table 1: Paradigm of independent personal pronouns in Maltese

	SG	PL
1	jien / jiena	aħna
2	int / inti	intom
3M	hu / huwa	huma
3F	hi / hija	

After revisiting and refining some of the earlier observations on the case, Maltese is taken as a point of departure for the incipient typology of pronominal cellmates. The study tries to address several questions: How widespread is the phenomenon in the languages of the world and what functions and formal relations do cellmates exhibit? Furthermore, the study tries to uncover recurrent morphological splits of cellmates (such as the SG/PL split in Maltese). Lastly, the typology will contribute to the understanding of diachronic sources and common grammaticalization clines for pronominal cellmates in particular and pronouns in general (Heine & Song 2010; Heine & Song 2011).

The preliminary survey presented in this talk is based on a subset of languages included in the Pronoun Paradigms Database created by Simon Greenhill (website: pdb.simon.net.nz). The study shows that overabundance in pronominal paradigms is relative infrequent: 5 % of the languages in the sample exhibit pronominal cellmates. The formal relations between cellmates are naturally quite restricted: phonological relatedness (with reduction as a subtype) and suppletion (with borrowed pronouns as a possible subtype). Functions of pronominal cellmates are very diverse: politeness, emphasis, remnants of case systems, incipient case systems, markers for deceased referents, affectedness, “alone” forms, and animacy. Further analysis shows a correlation between reduction as a formal relation and functions pertaining to grammatical function and information structure, while suppletion in cellmates is correlated with functions relating to register and politeness.

The proposed typology of pronominal cellmates can serve both as window in into the future (incipient grammatical systems) and into the past (remnants of formerly productive systems). Furthermore, the study will broaden the understanding of diachronic processes leading to the reorganization of pronominal systems and provide material for the discussion of the notions of paradigm and cell from a typological perspective.

References

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