It-tlieta li aħna

'the three of us'

On grammatical and pragmatic aspects of group-formation in Maltese

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Bedside table experience

[Bidu 576]

It-tlieta li   aħna *konna   qed niġu   misjuqa*

DET-three REL we   be:PERF.1PL PROG 1:come:PL PP:drive:PL

għat-telgħa   dejjem fl-istess   kar<r>etta…

for:DET-ascent   always   in:DET-same cart

'**The three of us** were being driven uphill always in the same cart.'

Food for thought

If taken in isolation this sentence is in no way remarkable. However, it is only one instance among a huge number of similar cases which attest a special aspect of group-formation. The text frequency of this and related phenomena is so high in Maltese that it strikes the eye of a native speaker of German, for instance, because German seems to be much more parsimonious when it comes to employing the translation equivalents of Maltese *it-tlieta li aħna* and its next of kin.

This impressionistic observation raises the question whether or not the assumed differences are of a systematic nature.

In my native language I

Maltese: *it-tlieta li aħna*
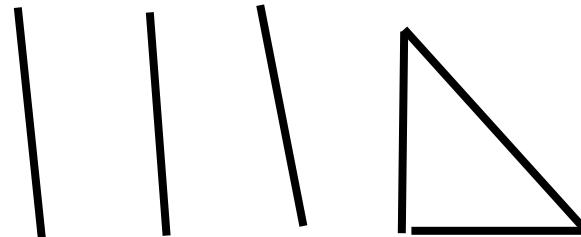
German: *die drei, die wir sind*

The German relative clause is formally possible but sounds odd as it makes sense only under very specific pragmatic conditions.

In my native language II

German: *wir (alle) drei(e)*
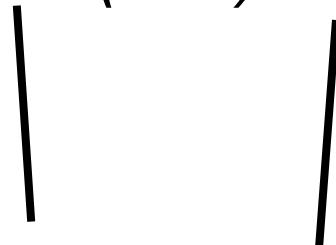
Maltese: *aħna t-tlieta*

The pragmatically acceptable German translation equivalent would be a construction which however resembles another Maltese option more closely in structural terms.

Why has Maltese two options where German offers only one?

Work to be done

The phenomenon I am interested in has never been treated exhaustively in linguistic studies dedicated to the structural properties of Maltese.

Some facets thereof are mentioned in passing in a small number of publications (to be quoted in due course during this presentation!).

The scarcity of available information on the phenomenon does not mean that there are no interesting insights to be gained from an in-depth study of the phenomenon.

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Combination

Pronominal reference

(*aħna, intom, huma*)

+

Quantification

(*tnejn, tlieta, kollha…*)

Collection

SEILER, HANSJAKOB. 1986. *Apprehension. Language, Object, and Order. Part III: The Universal Dimension of Apprehension.* Tübingen: Gunter Narr. [especially pp. 45-59]

Group-formation: The number of individuals forming a group ("collection") which is pronominally referred to is quantified exactly.

~ *we three / the three of us*

Back to the start

quantification

$[$*it-tlieta* $[$*li aħna*$]_{RelC}]_{NP}$ *konna*…

pronominal

reference

A construction type

Three major slots:

[DET-Numeral$_{[Cardinal > 1]}$ *li*   Copula$_{[Plural]}$]$_{Collection}$

----------slot 1------------- slot 2 ----slot 3-----

Copula → *aħna, intom, huma* / [imperfective]

Copula → *konna, kontu, kienu* / [perfective]

Copula → *nkunu, tkunu, ikunu* / [future]

Trivial ways to form groups I

a) Bare numeral

[Bidu 750] *Tlaqna hmistax-il prigunier lejn l-Algieri; sakemm wasalna mietu* **erbgha***.* 'We were fifteen prisoners who went to Algiers; until we arrived **four** had died.'

b) Definite numeral

[Bidu 54] ***It-tlieta*** *reġgħu ċċassaw lejh.* '**The three** stared at him again.'

Trvial ways to form groups II

c) Demonstrative

[Bidu 52] ***Dawn it-tlieta*** *ma kinux se jiġu jitrejqu hawn kieku fit-tverna jsiru laqgħat u ftehimiet li aħjar jinsatru mil-pulizija.* '**Those three** would not come eating here if in the tavern meetings took place and understandings were come to which should be better concealed from the police.'

Trivial ways to form groups III

Attributes

[Bidu 147] *…indaħal Tumas, li ntebah kif **it-tnejn l-oħra** ma fehmu xejn mid-djalett Malti…* 'Thomas intervened who noticed how **the other two** did not understanding anything of the Maltese dialect.'

[Bidu 52] ***It-tlieta li kienu miegħu*** *dehrulu rġiel goffi…* '**The three who were with him** appeared to him to be rude men.'

Trivial ways to form groups IV

Quantification

[Bidu 226] *Min jaf xinhuma jaħsbu* **ż-żewġ qaddejja** *li ġibt miegħi*. 'Who knows what **the two servants** I brought with me are thinking.'

Indefinite (pseudo-partitive)

[Bidu 459] *F'daqqa ġie fuq* **tlieta min-nies**… 'Suddenly he came upon **three people**.'

Trivial ways to form groups V

[Bidu 45] ***Tnejn minn dawk bilqegħda waħidhom*** *osservawh jagħmel hekk b'għajnejn kalmi u skuri…* 'Two of those sitting alone observed him doing so with calm and dark eyes.'

[Bidu 45] *Fil-ħin, qam* **wieħed mill-grupp ta' tlieta** *u resaq lejhom b'inkin profond.* 'At that time **one of the group of three** stood up and approached them bowing deeply.'

Further instances of collectives

[Bidu 323] *fit-tarf tal-**filliera ta' erbgħa*** 'at the end of the queue of four'

[Bidu 381] *ġemgħa ta' xi **nofs tużżana rġiel** jew aktar* 'a crowd of half a dozen men or more'

[Bidu 708] ***ċorma rġiel** żvelti fuq iż-żwiemel* 'a troop of lively men on horseback'

The extent of it

BORG, ALBERT & AZZOPARDI-ALEXANDER, MARIE. 1997. *Maltese*. London: Routledge, pp. 197-198.

„In a noun phrase, a free pronoun can be associated with a numeral.[…] Notice […] the optional relative clause in which the free pronoun occurs in predicate position. The free pronoun in this construction can also be a direct or indirect object […]. In theory there is no limit on the size of the numeral in the construc-tions exemplified […]."

Relative clause

[Det-Numeral$_{[Cardinal]}$ *li* Copula$_{[Plural]}$]

[Bidu 659]

***Lit-tnejn li huma** fakkarthom kif hemm differenza kbira bejn il-Kataj u Spanja l-Ġdida.*

'I reminded **the two of them** of the huge difference between China and New Spain.'

Apposition I

[Pronoun[Plural] DET-Numeral[Cardinal]]

[Bidu 137]

Huma t-tnejn *baqgħu waħidhom madwar il-mejda taʻ l-ikel, li l-bqija tal-mistedin abbandunaw biex ħarġu hawn fil-bitħa.*

'The two of them remained alone at the dinner-table which the rest of the invited left to come out here into the courtyard.'

Apposition II

[Preposition-PRO DET-Numeral[Cardinal]]

[Bidu 327]

*…u ħadd **ħliefhom it-tnejn** ma kien jaf li qed isellmu lil xulxin għall-aħħar darba bʻgħajnejhom.*

'And nobody **but the two of them** knew that they were greeting one another with their eyes for the last time.'

Apposition III

[Verb-PRO$_{[Object]}$ DET-Numeral$_{[Cardinal]}$]

[Bidu 364]

*Ma jistax **iżurhom it-tnejn** bil-lejl*…

'He cannot **visit the two of them** at night.'

Apposition IV

[Noun-PRO[Possessor] DET-Numeral[Cardinal]]

[Bidu 205]

Leħinhom it-tnejn *f'daqqa beda jidwi f'nofs ġbinu minn ġewwa, mingħajr ma hu kien għadu qed jarahom*.

'**The voices of them both** began to echo from behind his forehead although he could not see them yet.'

Universal quantification I

[Pronoun$_{[Plural]}$ *lkoll*]

[Bidu 798]

*Dik hi verità li nafu **aħna lkoll**…*

'This is a truth **we all** know.'

[Preposition-PRO$_{[Plural]}$ *lkoll*]

[Bidu 525]

*Ftit dejquni l-botti ta' sħabi fiċ-ċorma, li b'xejn ma setgħu jifhmu kif jien, **minnhom ilkoll**, idakkart daqstant mit-tagħlim tal-kjeriku li għalihom ma kien xejn ħlief ħela ta' ħin.*

'I was hardly annoyed by the sharp remarks of my comrades in the crew who could not understand that **of them all** it was me who was so influenced by the teaching of the cleric which for them was but a waste of time.'

Universal quantification II

Borg, Albert. 1996. "Distributive and universal quantification in Maltese." *Rivista di Linguistica* 8 (1), 141-152. [here: 147-148]

[*lkoll/kollha kemm* Copula[Plural]]

[Bidu 133]

Ilkoll kemm aħna *nafu kif taħsibha…*

'We all know how you think about it.'

A quote – part I

"The interpretation involving recourse to the notion of 'exhaustiveness' is further reinforced by the possibility exemplified in *[It-tfal kollha kemm huma ġew]* where we have the additional expression *kemm huma*. On its own with the intonation for a question *kemm huma?* Would mean 'How much do they cost'. The meaning of *kemm* obviously has to do with 'extent' and *huma* is the 3rd person plural independent pronoun 'they'. It is significant that while the quantifier *kollha* is singular feminine, the independent pronoun *huma* agrees with the plural nominal *it-tfal*. The expression *kemm huma* reinforces the exhaustive interpretation of *kollha* by spelling out the precise extent of the class of individuals referred to by the subject nominal: 'all the children as many as they are' would be some sort of English equivalent here, or 'every single one of them'." [to be continued]

A quote – part II

"This analysis however is not without problems. I bypass for the moment the possibility that besides its occurrence as a singular feminine expression with plural nouns […], this quantifier can also agree in number (and in the singular, in gender) with its antecedent noun […]. It is possible to have a version […] in which no break is perceptible between the nominal and the quantifier. And there are syntactic contexts where such a break would be clearly ungrammatical, as in [*It-tfal kollha li ġew kienu għajjenin* 'All the children who came were tired.'] There is no way in which a break could occur between the nominal *it-tfal* and the quantifier *kollha* in this sentence, where *it-tfal* is also the subject of the relative clause *li ġew*. This evidence would suggest that *kollha* […] in the rendering involving no suprasegmental break is interpreted as an adjective rather than as a special category of quantifier. This formal difference seems to correlate with a semantic one. The occurrence of *kollha* as an adjective (without a suprasegmental break) is interpreted as universally quantifying the noun. […] The occurrence of *kollha* as grammatical subject of the sentence (with a break following the nominal […]), is definitely interpreted in a distributive way."

That's bad for me

- literary sources

- no clues as to the suprasegmental level

- orthography is no reliable indicator of prosodic pro-perties

- focus on those constructions which do not involve *kollha*

Source text

Alfred Sant. 2001.

La bidu, la tmiem (1599).

San Ġwann: P.E.G.

880 pp. = 20,680 sentences = 422,400 words

[Historical fiction in prose; narrative text, dialogues including bits and pieces of dialectal and non-native Maltese; occasionally style is deliberately anachronistic to lend a Baroque flavour to the story; this does not seem to have an effect on the phenomenon under scrutiny]

Statistics: Construction types

Construction		tokens		share	
Relative clause		68		42%	
Apposition	I	32	49	20%	30%
	II	17		10%	
Universal quantification I		9		5%	
Universal quantification II		38		23%	
Total		164		100%	

 Thomas Stolz

Statistics: Numerals

Numeral	tokens	share
tnejn	66	56%
tlieta	33	28%
erbgħa	16	14%
ħamsa	1	< 1%
ħdax	1	< 1%
total	117	100%

Statistics: Reference

| Person	tokens	share
1st plural	61	37%
2nd plural	4	2%
3rd plural	94	58%
2nd singular	1	< 1%
3rd singular masculine	2	1%
3rd singular feminine	2	1%
total	164	100%

Singular

[Bidu 107]

*Kieku mhux għax naf li int **kollok kemm int** ta' rieda tajba u ħabib tiegħi, kont nissuspetta li bagħtuk hawn biex tbeżżagħni…*

'Would I not know that **you are completely** benevolent and a friend of mine, I had suspected that they sent you here to scare me.'

Why?

- The high token frequency of constructions involving the numeral *tnejn* 'two' is partly explained by the absence of a lexical dual in Maltese.

- Lexical duals are expressions like English *both* or German *beide* which displaysthe properties of a numeral (= [two]), exhaustiveness (= [all]) and definiteness (= [+definite]).

- They may combine with pronouns.

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Two in one

German: *wir*   *beide*
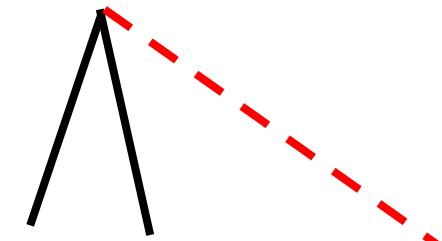
Maltese*:*   *[aħna*   *t-tnejn]*exhaustiveness

German: *wir*   *zwei*

Previous work of ours

STOLZ, THOMAS; KHIZANISHVILI, TAMAR & LEVKOVYCH, NATALIYA. 2007. "Lexikalische Duale. Typologische Gedanken zu den Übersetzungsäquivalenten von Deutsch *beide* in crosslinguistischer Sicht." *Lingua Posnaniensis* 49, 167-194.

Relative clauses

COMRIE, BERNARD. 2002. "Rethinking relative clause types: the Mediterranean area." In: RAMAT, PAOLO & STOLZ, THOMAS (eds.), *Mediterranean Languages*. Bochum: Brockmeyer, 87-98.

CRISTOFARO, SONIA & RAMAT, ANNA GIACALONE. 2002. "Relativization patterns in Mediterranean languages, with particular reference to the relativization of time circumstantials." In: RAMAT, PAOLO & STOLZ, THOMAS (eds.), *Mediterranean Languages*. Bochum: Brockmeyer, 99-112.

LEHMANN, CHRISTIAN. 1984. *Der Relativsatz*. Tübingen: Narr.

STOLZ, THOMAS. 2011. "The possessive relative clause in Maltese." In: CARUANA, SANDRO; FABRI, RAY & STOLZ, THOMAS (eds.), *Variation and Change: The Dynamics of Maltese in Space, Time and Society*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag [in press]

Predication for attribution

predicate

[it-tlieta   [li   aħna]]

head   attribute
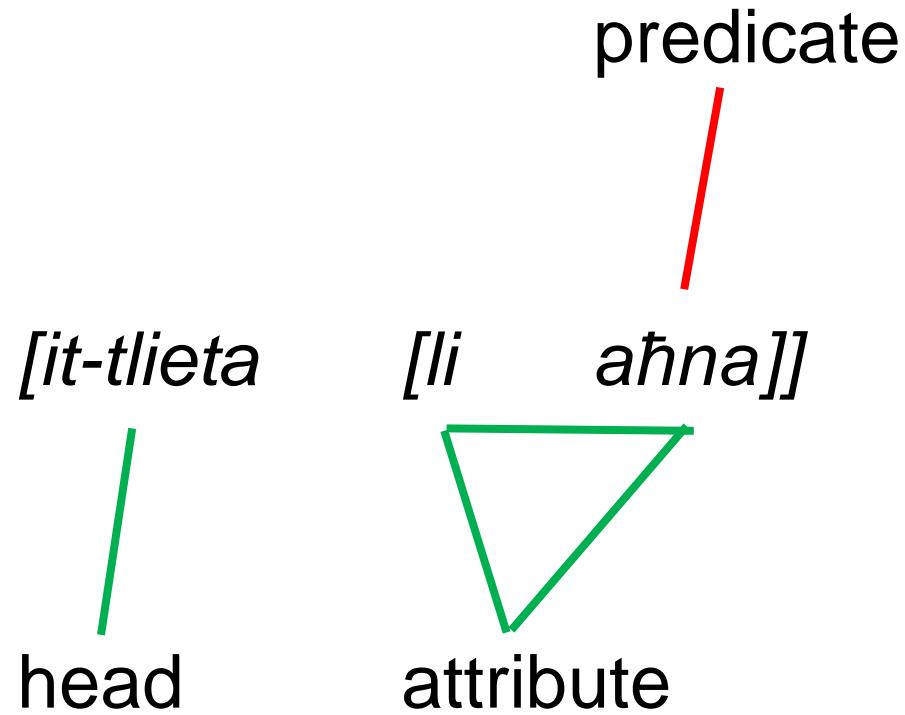
Syntactic functions:
Subject – relative clause

[Bidu 46-47]

*Jeżistu drawwiet fini ħafna li jirregolaw kif **l-erbgħa li huma** kellhom iġibu ruħħom ma' xulxin.*

'There exist very subtle customs which regulate how **the four of them** have to behave among each other.'

Syntactic functions: Subject - apposition

[Bidu 73]

…il-kavalier ftakar f'uħud mill-praspar li **huma t-tnejn** *kien għamlu flimkien ma' xi tlieta oħra minn sħabhom…*

'The knight remembered some of the oddities which **the two of them** had committed together with three others of their comrades.'

Syntactic functions:
Subject – universal quantification

[Bidu 81]

*Telqu **lkoll kemm huma**, bit-tliet żbirri li Bernal kera għall-okkażjoni jġorru t-tebut, lejn iċ-ċimiterju tal-kwartier li jinsab fil-qrib.*

'Together with the three policemen whom Bernal hired for the occasion to carry the coffin, **they all** went to the cemetry of the quarter which was nearby.'

Syntactic functions:
Object I – relative clause

[Bidu 190]

*Minflok tkellmu fuq x'kien qed iqanqalhom **it-tnejn li kienu**, edhew fil-qari…*

'In lieu of talking about what was troubling **the two of them**, they were busy reading.'

Syntactic functions:
Object I - apposition

[Bidu 751]

*…rawna **l-ħdax li konna** mqagħbra u mċerċra ħafna aktar mill-ilsiera…*

'They saw **the fifteen of us** as more harrassed and shabbier dressed than the slaves.'

Syntactic functions:
Object I – universal quantification

[Bidu 81]

*…kien ħallas id-drittijiet tad-difna **kollha kemm huma** u anki aktar, b'rispett lejn il-mejjet.*

'He had payed the **entire** costs of the burial and even more out of respect for the dead.'

Syntactic functions:
Object II – relative clause

[Bidu 238]

***Lit-tnejn li kienu**, l-omm u l-bint, kien fliehom tajjeb u t-tnejn għoġbuh.*

'He inspected **the two of them**, mother and daughter, closely and he liked both.'

Syntactic functions:
Object II - apposition

[Bidu 662]

*Għodwa waħda, daħlu zbirri fis-sala u ħadu **lilna t-tlieta** magħhom f'sala oħra tal-ħabs…*

'One morning, policemen came into the hall and took the three of us with them to another hall of the prison.'

Syntactic functions:
PP complement – relative clause

[Bidu 358]

*Barak baqa' jniżżel id-daqqiet fuq **it-tlieta li huma**…*

'Barak kept hitting the three of them.'

Syntactic functions:
PP complement - apposition

[Bidu 533]

*Barra **minna t-tlieta**, kull ma laqqat biex jieħu miegħu lejn il-Mexxiko kienu tnax-il brigant…*

'Apart from the three of us, what he assembled to take with him to Mexico were twelve outlaws.'

Syntactic function:
Genitival attribute – relative clause

[Bidu 274]

…il-ħarsa **tat-tnejn li kienu** *ċċassat fuq il-bini…*

'The look **of both of them** was fixed on the building.'

Syntactic functions:
Genitival attribute - apposition

[Bidu 451]

Wara, don Bernal ħassu li sar tassew ħabib **tagħhom it-tnejn***…*

'Afterwards do Bernal felt that he had really become a friend **of the two of them**.'

Possession

[Bidu 101]

*Bdejt nibża' li xogħolkom **kollha kemm intom**, int u min hu bħalek, ħajjitkom, fehmietkom… m'għandhom l-ebda tifsira tassew, l-ebda importanza reali.*

'I have begun to fear that the work **of all of you**, yours and that of those who are like you, your live, your opinions have no real meaning, no real importance.'

Exhaustiveness I

[Bidu 588]

*Ċitlalkoatl għarrafni li l-qassis il-kbir tal-belt kien qed jistqarr li l-aħjar ma tkunx dik li joqtlu **t-tnejn li konna**, imma lil wieħed biss u lill-ieħor, iżommuh ħaj, jagħm-luh Mixtek bħalhom.*

'Chitlalcoatl explained to me that the High Priest of the city confessed that the best solution was not to kill **both of us**, but to kill only one and keep the other one alive to make him a Mixtec like them.'

Exhaustiveness II

[Bidu 763]

*Artan deher li qed jimbottani 'l quddiem fit-taħdit li kien ikolli ma' de Saavedra u na-Levi, u fl-istess ħin, inibbet fija suspetti li kull ma kont nagħmel magħhom kien li nara kif ninqeda **bit-tnejn li kienu**, ħalli nwettaq l-għanijiet tiegħi.*

'Artan seemd to push me forward in the talk that I would have with de Saavedra and na-Levi, and at the same time, the suspicion grew in me that all I was doing with them was to see how I could make use **of both of them** to reach my goals.'

Definite numerals - statistics

numeral	tokens		share
it-tnejn	43	[66]	72%
it-tlieta	15	[33]	25%
l-erbgha	2	[16]	3%
total	60	[115]	100%

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What's the difference?

Definite numeral: [anaphor + quantity]

[Bidu 136]

It-tlieta *nfaqgħu jidħku.*

'**The three** burst out laughing.'

Relative clause: [anaphor + quantity + totality]

[Bidu 889]

It-tlieta li huma *daħku.*

'**The three of them** laughed.'

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A continuum

exhaustiveness

it-tlieta   *huma t-tlieta*   *it-tlieta li huma*   *kollha kemm huma*

quantification
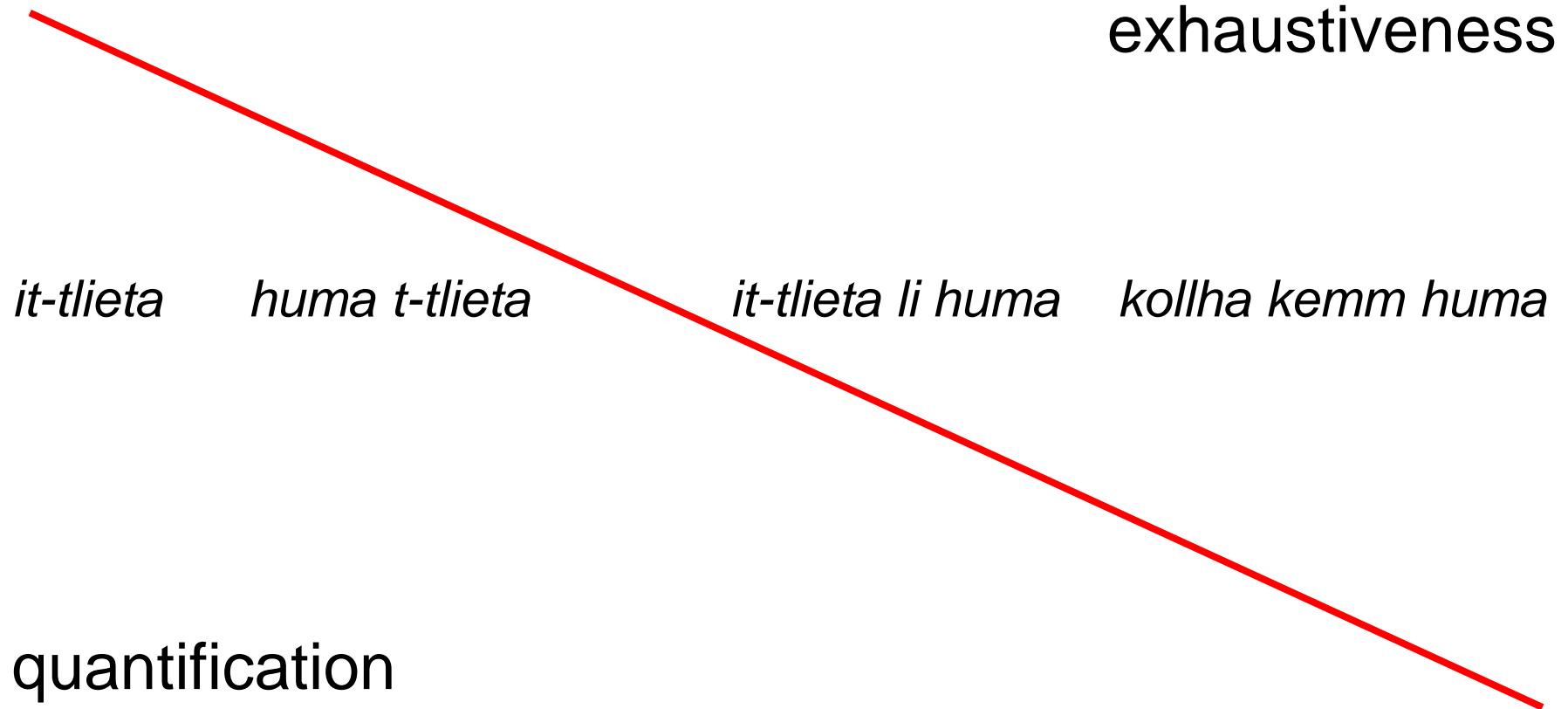
Famous last words

- preliminary results
- work in progress
- corpus needs to be enlarged
- diversification of genres/registers
- focus on pragmatic aspects
- comparison with other languages
- cooperation is welcome