The construction of a Maltese pedagogical grammar: a study of the noun

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Abstract

This paper discusses the construction of a pedagogical grammar for the teaching of Maltese to native speakers. It illustrates some of the issues that arise in the process of syllabus design by focusing on the noun, and reviews the literature to illustrate differences between traditional and modern linguistics. Starting by taking a critical approach to the syllabus and textbooks of Maltese, it continues by reviewing the literature dealing with the noun as a part of speech. It explores how teaching the 'noun' can be made relevant to learners at a secondary level. This short study proposes a syllabus for the noun with a 'spiral format construction' for the first four years of Secondary level education. This study can act as a guide to teachers who wish to plan lessons taking into consideration scientifically sound linguistic criteria.

Keywords: grammar, syllabus, pedagogy, secondary school

Introduction

One of the main areas of native language education at Secondary school level (age 11 to 16) in Malta is undoubtedly grammar (Portelli & Camilleri-Grima, 2002). The teaching of grammar to school children in Europe dates back to Aristotelian Greece, and it has since then retained an important and often central role in language teaching (Weaver, 1996). In recent times there were some dissenting voices that argued that grammar can be assimilated by learners implicitly through reading, listening and speaking, and other communicative activities, rather than by teaching explicit grammar rules as had been done for centuries. While such methodological arguments were mainly concerned with second/foreign language teaching and learning (Finocchiaro & Brumfit, 1983) within the native language teaching domain, a language awareness movement was born, thanks to Eric Hawkins (1987). The

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langauge awareness approach has become even more relevant in contemporary classrooms as a result of learners' plurilingualism and societies' multilingualism (Breidbach, Elsner, & Young, 2010).

Unfortunately, however developments in the areas of pedagogy and language teaching methodology that are normally brought forward by researchers at universities, are not always reflected in schools. The Maltese classroom is no exception. Teaching in Maltese classrooms relies heavily on the syllabus and textbooks, all centrally determined and often established for a number of years so that very little space for updating or variation can be found.

In addition to international developments in language teaching methodology, the linguistic analysis of Maltese has made great strides forward since the 1980s (e.g. Borg, 1981; Borg, 1988; Borg & Alexander-Azzopardi, 1997; Fabri, 1995). It is, therefore, rather frustrating for teachers to be taught modern linguistics and updated grammatical analysis at university, including in their pre-service courses, only to find out that these cannot be used in schools due to the shape and content of the school and examination syllabi and set textbooks. For example Galea (1999) explains that the grammatical section of the syllabus doesn't give syntactical descriptions of the language and grammatical definitions are solely based on semantics and morphology.

It is the aim of this paper to exemplify these issues. It tackles one grammatical item, the noun, in order to identify some of the shortcomings of the national syllabus, and then to present an alternative for an improved syllabus design.

In what follows, the argument is developed by detailing: (i) the traditional linguistic treatment of the noun; (ii) the presentation of the noun in the national syllabus and current textbooks; (iii) the updated linguistic analysis of the noun, and (iv) an alternative format and content to the school syllabus.

The traditional treatment of the noun

At the beginning of the 20th century Maltese linguists like Cremona (1936) tried to adapt theoretical studies of grammar to textbooks for use in the secondary schools. It took nearly thirty years for important grammar textbooks for schools to be published, one aimed for the primary and another for the secondary by Grech (1960; 1967). For about four decades the books by Grech remained the official grammar textbooks in the Maltese grammar syllabus. Finally at the turn of the century more grammar textbooks were published, such as Zarb (2001) and Muscat & Saliba (2006). Unfortunately however these new textbooks retained a traditional view of Maltese grammar and did not take into consideration important studies in Maltese linguistics

that were being published. One of the major shortcomings is that they base their linguistic analyses on semantics, and do not refer to syntax and morphology as is happening in contemporary linguistics.

4. In-Nomi Komuni nistghu naqsmuhom f'oġġetti, postijiet, annimali u persuni. Għarbel sewwa n-nomi li ġejjin. Wara li tagħmel dan, agħżel in-Nomi Komuni u qeghedhom fil-kaxxi skont jekk humiex persuni, oġġetti, annimali jew postijiet.

~~żagħżugħ~~	restorant	karta	fenek	ġakketta
tiġieġa	skola	xadina		ghasfur
	missier	ġuvni		dar
każin	flixkun	qattus	pjazza	omm
xiha	zija	mejda	fajl	ċikkulata
għalliem	mowbajl	żarbun		tfajla
lampa	hamiema	anzjan	grawnd	
knisja	hmar		villa	
	ajruport	kelba		baqra

Nomi Komuni: Persuni

1. _żagħżugħ_
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____

Nomi Komuni: Oġġetti

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____

Nomi Komuni: Annimali

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____

Nomi Komuni: Postijiet

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____

Figure 0-I Example from Micallef Cann (2010, p. 22)

They also include ortography as one of the aspects of grammar when in fact that is a matter for writing. Similar problems can be found in more recent publications such as those by Azzopardi (2010) and Micallef Cann (2010). In Azzopardi (2010) grammar is linked with other areas of language teaching such as writing and culture which is not wrong in itself, but it still lacks the necessary basic linguistic arguments of syntax among others. In Micallef Cann (2010) like in Grech (1960; 1967) and Muscat & Saliba (2006) the grammar exercises (see Figure 0-**I** and 0-II**)** are in the majority decontextualised (Cilia & Giordano, 2006), and do not present an opportunity for the learners to analyse the language in context as is appropriate for the native language student as opposed to the foreign language classroom (Hawkins, 1987; De Carrico & Larsen-Freeman, D, 2002).

Figure 0-III Example from Muscat & Saliba (2006, p.20)

In the example from Micallef Cann (2010, p. 22) in Figure 0-IV one can see that the student is required to fill in the word bank in the four columns by dividing the common nouns according to whether they refer to objects, persons, animals and things. There is no contextual relationship whatsoever

between the words used and there is no morpho-syntactical description. Another example with the same concerns is illustrated in Figure 0-V from Muscat & Saliba (2006, p.20).

In brief, the approach to the teaching of grammar in all the textbooks mentioned above is identical to that of Grech (1960;1967) as far the linguistic approach is concerned. Thus, in what follows, I shall take one of the main parts of speech, that is the noun, to exemplify the linguistic issues. The following list characterises the traditional linguistic description of the noun according to Grech (1960;1967).

Definition of the noun

The noun is the name of someone or something, or else the name of a person *(tifla)*, animal *(tigra)* or other things *(knisja)*.

Types of nouns

The noun can be divided into these categories: common *(tifel)*; proper *(Marija)*; concrete *(fjura);* abstract *(mħabba)*; verbal *(ħaddiem)*; collective *(ward)* and material *(tajjar)*. It can be animate *(mara)*, or inanimate *(ġebla)*; determinate *(wardiet)* or indeterminate *(ward)*. The collective *(armata, ħobż)* is one of the categories that defines the concrete noun. The material noun *(ħadid)* is a category on its own, and later on it is mentioned that the material nouns are collectives as well. Determination is explained by definiteness, for example with the presence of the definite article *(il-ġebla)* or with a number that denotes quantity *(ħames wardiet).*

Grammatical Agreement

When the subject is a collective noun, the verb agreement is in the singular masculine *(il-ħobż frisk ħafna)* and sometimes in the feminine, but when the collective refers to groups of people, animals or things, the agreement is in the plural *(il-baqar simnu wisq).* It can take a verb that can be in the singular *(il-weraq tar mar-riħ)* or plural *(il-baqar simnu wisq)*. The dual defines an amount of two *(riġlejn)*.

Derivation

The noun is divided according to (a) the origin, and to (b) meaning. In the case of origin the noun can be non-derived *(xemx)*, verbal *(ferħa)* or denominative *(miżbla)*. The derived noun can be formed from a noun, adjective or a verb. The verbal noun is classified under the heading of infinitive *(mixi)*, participial *(mexxej)*, attributive *(d-dħuli)* and mimated *(mansab)*.

The denominative is classified under the heading of mimated (*masġar*, which was already mentioned in the verbal noun), diminutive (*ġnejna*) and abstract (*xbubija*). The mimated noun can exemplify a place (*mansab*), a group (*masġar*), a tool (*moħriet*), time (*Milied*), quality (*miġnun*) and can be abstract (*mħabba*).

Case

The noun can have a nominative, genitive, accusative, dative, ablative or vocative case (1967).

Following the noun description found in Grech (1960;1967) as an example of the traditional approach to illustrate this part of speech, I will give an overview of the way the noun is treated in the state school syllabus.

The Maltese language syllabus for state schools

The national Maltese language syllabus for secondary level is divided into two. For the upper forms (from Form 3 to 5) at the moment there is a syllabus which is being phased out (Education Division, 2001). This type of syllabus has been criticised over the years on the way it treats the teaching of Maltese (Camilleri, 1988; Cilia & Giordano, 2006; Borg, 2002) for a number of reasons:

i.   It is built on the traditional method which, as Rutherford (1987) explains, considers the teacher and the book as having a central role in the lesson.
ii. Grammatical structures are analysed independently from the language and out of context.
iii. It has a linear approach (Pit Corder, 1981), because items are presented as a list. This presentation gives the impression that one part may be more important than the next or should come before another one, without having been tested for level of difficulty.
iv. The syllabus treats all students as having the same learning abilities.
v.   The grammar section of the syllabus is based on traditional descriptions of the language that are diachronic in approach (that is, historically, over time) and ignore completely components of Maltese that are of non-Semitic origin when in fact Maltese has been greatly influenced by Romance languages and more recently by English (Camilleri, 1988).
vi. The syllabus doesn't mention aspects of recent linguistic studies such as topicalisation (Borg, 1988), and the distinction between the object and the subject in the sentence.

On similar grounds the same comments apply to the new version of the syllabus for Forms 1 and 2 (Education Division, 2013). Other difficulties can

be easily observed, for instance grammar is sometimes integrated with other curriculum areas of the Maltese language like literature and writing without reasonable justification or explanation and it is not presented on the basis of scientific studies of the language.

The Form 1 syllabus, for example, requires the same level of attainment as is quoted for Levels 6, 7 and 8 with only a minor difference in Level 5 (pg. 6). The levels refer to different learning abilities. Furthermore many hyperlinks are provided in the syllabus for references and examples but some of these are not even related to Maltese language teaching and culture, or are no longer accessible. There is also a repetition of grammatical categories covered in the primary level. The following are direct, translated references to the noun as found in the new Form 1 syllabus:

   i.   What the noun is and how it is divided.
  ii.   How one can recognise the proper and common noun, their difference in sentence use.
 iii.   The noun is consolidated through an interview as a teaching technique (see Figure 0-III) which means that the noun is the name of a person, animal, thing and abstract entities. It can be in the singular, dual and plural forms and can be in the feminine and masculine.Nouns can be concrete or abstract and the origin of the noun (Semitic, Romance and English).

L-intervistatur jagħmel dawn l-osservazzjonijiet biex jara jekk fehemx dak li jkun qal il-kelliemi.

L-Intervistatur: Mela, ħa nara fhimtekx sewwa:

1. In-nom jirreferi għal oġġetti, annimali, persuni kif ukoll, fost ħwejjeġ oħra, aspetti astratti.
2. Is-singular juri ħaġa waħda. L-għadd imtenni (suppost) juri żewġ ħwejjeġ. Il-plural juri għadd ta' ħwejjeġ.
3. Il-Maskil u l-Femminil mhux bilfors ikun skont is-sess, iżda tista' tkun distinzjoni grammatikali.
4. In-nomi konkreti huma dawk in-nomi li jaqgħu taħt wieħed mis-sensi tagħna. In-nomi astratti huma dawk kunċettwali.
5. Kliem antik, bħala regola, huwa Għarbi. Mis-seklu 15 'il hawn beda dieħel is-Sikulu-Taljan u dan l-aħħar imtlejna bin-nomi Ingliżi.
6. Jistgħu jagħmlu l-famuża *'I Spy with my Little Eye'*, iżda kif ngħidu dejjem jitkellmu dwar dan il-fenomenu billi jsibu artiklu, storja jew xi tip ta' kitba oħra u jitkellmu dwar dawn it-tipi ta' kategoriji grammatikali.

Figure 0-IIII Syllabus Form 1 p.95

The noun features in the Form 2 syllabus in terms of use of the noun in various contexts such as in writing; the singular, collective, dual and plural; recognising the noun from other parts of speech; and verbal nouns.

I will now explain the main issues that arise from the updated linguistic description of Maltese in comparison with what is presented in the current syllabus.

Updated linguistic description of the noun

My description of the noun is based on Borg (1988) and Borg & Alexander-Azzopardi (1997).

Definition of the noun

The noun is that part of speech that inflects for gender and number, and that syntactically has the role of the argument and can also be a predicate. With the adjective it is defined by the article which is a sytactical category. The noun can occur as one word in the sentence but can project itself in a phrase in the following circumstances:

i.   As a noun defined by the article for example *in-nanna* which is the subject of the sentence.
ii. As a lexical collective like *platt ħobż,* where the first noun defines quantity and the second noun defines the type and is the direct object.
iii. And as the indirect object *lit-tifel* where the phrase is marked with *lil* joined with the article.

Types of nouns

The collective always takes grammatical agreement in the masculine except rarely as in *qara', xama'*, and *għana*. The 'material' noun is not a category in itself but is defined as a collective, because syntactically it takes agreement in the singular and thus fits in as a number category. The verbal noun is a derived noun, and so it is not considered with other inflection categories. Apart from the noun that is derived from the verb, there are other nouns derived from adjectives and others derived from other nouns.

Borg (1996) explains the different noun forms as in the distinction between proper and common nouns. Both of these can occur in phrases such as when defined by the article, for example *ir-raħal, Iż-Żejtun*. The definiteness of the common noun depends on the context, but the same cannot be said about proper nouns, for example *Pawlu xtara ħmar*, or *Pawlu ħareġ bil-ħmar*. Collective nouns that do not have their quantity defined need to have a modification prior or after the word like in the case of *ħafna ross,* or *ross tajjeb.* This happens as well in the case of *merħla mogħoż,* or *riġment suldati.*

Grammatical Agreement

Maltese distinguishes between feminine and masculine (Farrugia, 2003) when it comes to gender with particular suffixes in some of the feminine cases. Farrugia indicates the masculine as the unmarked gender form but there are some exceptions like *Alla* and *sema* which end in an *-a* and still are in the masculine gender. The masculine is also default as a generic term such as *il-kelb huwa l-aqwa ħabib tal-bniedem*. Some exceptions like *psikjatra* do not make a difference in gender. This is one of the important permutations to the grammar of the noun following recent accretions to the language. Hence, the neuter has been introduced which is, nevertheless, marked by verb and/or adjective agreement as feminine or plural depending on knowledge of the context.

At times the gender is classified with a parallel description of a noun and its masculine and feminine such as *raġel-mara; bodbod-mogħża; prinċep-prinċipessa*. It is not clearly explained that in order to understand the gender of the noun there has to be an observation of the syntactical agreement of the sentence such as *il-barri ġera fl-għalqa; il-kittieb famuż kiteb ittra*. Apart from the masculine and feminine, there is also a neutral gender like *psikjatra*, where the gender would be understood from the syntactical construction or from the content.

Derivation

In the Semitic noun the root derivation remains intact and other parts of speech will have the same root derivatives with a change of the vowels (Borg & Azzopardi-Alexander, 1997). For example from the root *q-t-l* one can derive *qatel* (verb), *qtil, qatla* (noun), *maqtul* (passive participle, adjective), *qattiel* (noun, adjective, active participle). Semitic nouns can be classified in two separate classes: simple (not derived from other lexemes like *qalb, xahar, sema*) or derived (Borg, 1981). The latter can be derived from nouns and other verbs (Mifsud, 2002). The Semitic noun derived from a noun can be:

    i.   Abstract nouns or nouns denoting quality, physical or moral state for example *rġulija, ġlieda* (Mifsud, 2002).

    ii.   Diminutives for example *ġbejna* and *tfajla* meaning small in size and cuteness. Mifsud (2002) limits this class to words of Arabic origin with the exception of some words like *kmajra*. Borg and Azzopardi-Alexander (1997) relate the diminutive to the insertion of –ejje- -ejja-, -ajje-, and –ajja- between the second and the third radical of the root.

iii. Nouns in the singular derived from the collective by adding –a, or noun of unity or verbal noun of unity for example: *dubbiena, nemusa, taħrika, serqa.*

iv. Relative adjectives (only mentioned by Mifsud 2002). This is formed by the suffix –i and is still very productive for example *kburi, samrani.*

The Semitic noun derived from a verb can be:

i. A noun of action or verbal noun, *nsib/nasba, rqad/raqda.*
ii. A mimated noun or noun referring to a place or tool mansab, *mħadda.*
iii. An active participle, *rieqed.*
iv. A passive participle, *mnassab.*
v. A noun of the agent (noun of the worker), *nassab.*

In the case of a noun derived from an adjective there are two nominal models (numbers referring to the radicals): 12u:3a, *ħmura* and 12u:3ija, *tjubija* (Borg & Alexander-Azzopardi, 1997).

The Semitic verbal noun can be described as the name given to particualar circumstances that lead an action or a person doing the action, explained in Table *0. I* and Ungaro (2007).

Circumstances that give a meaning to the verbal noun	Mifsud (2002) and Borg & Azzopardi-Alexander (1997)	Examples
Name of action	Noun of the action	*nsib/nasba rqad/raqda*
The person in process of doing the action	Active participle	*rieqed*
The person who receives the action	Passive participle	*mnassab*
Who does the action	Noun of the agent (Name of the worker)	*nassab*
The place where the action is done or the tool used in the action	Noun of place or tool / mimated noun	*mansab*

Table 0. II The Semitic Verbal Noun

In the case of the derivation of nouns of Romance or English origin the base will not be the root but the stem. Suffixes and prefixes will be added to the stem to be able to form new words. There are some exceptions like *pejjep* and *fajjar* which integrated in the language in the beginning of the influence of the foreign languages on Arabic thus adapting to the root system as well.

There are a number of suffixes that indicate that a noun is not of Semitic origin (see Borg & Azzopardi -Alexander, 1997; Mifsud, 2002; Ungaro, 2007) for example: abstract nouns, *-ite, tonsillite; -itu`, skjavitu`; -azzjoni, obligazzjoni;* nouns associated with the agent, *-ar, arluġġar; -ier, teżorier; pejorative, -azz, pupazz;* augmentative, *-un, berittun;* diminutive, *-in, berittin; -ina, biskuttina, - etta, fuljetta;* feminine or masculine, *-essa, prinċipessa; -iċi, attriċi;* relative adjective, *-i, qastni; -iż, slimiż, –uż, gustuż; -iku, demokratiku, -ali, personali.*

The verbal noun can be of foreign origin (Borg u Azzopardi-Alexander (1997:285-286) and may have suffixes such as: *-ar, imbuttar; -jar, editjar; -orju, interrogatorju; -ier, passiġġier; -ur, difensur; -tur, kaċċatur; -iera, passiġġiera; -ata, passiġġata; -atura, sparatura; -anza, speranza.* There is as well the noun of the agent as mentioned by Mifsud (1995), such as: *-ar, tapizzar; -atur, irkantatur; - ur, awtur; -ant, kantant; -ista, kitarrista; -er, plamer;* and others that remain unchanged, such as *mekkanik, ners.*

Borg & Azzopardi-Alexander (1997), and Mifsud (1995) also mention that instead of the mimated noun one can indicate the tool by using a suffix from the Romance such as *furmatur, lampier, gandlier,* or from English like *chaser, driller, cooler* and to indicate the place from Romance such as *librerija, pastizzerija, pizzerija,.*

Borg and Azzopardi-Alexander (1997) also list a number of suffixes that indicate the derivation of the noun from an adjective of non-Semitic origin (p.287), that are: *-erija, stramberija; -erja, kattiverja; -ura, bravura; -ata, brikkunata; -aġni, guffaġni; -azzjoni, fissazzjoni; -ist, attivist; -ezza, ċertezza; -età, varjetà; - iżmu, xettiċiżmu.*

Case

Maltese does not have a case system but instead has 'lil' as an object marker.

Definiteness

The noun can be marked by the article, sometimes undergoing a process of phonetic assimilation in the case of so-called 'sun' consonants, *il-ħarġa, il-basket, ix-xemx, iz-ziju, Iż-Żejtun, Ix-Xlendi.* This occurs for both proper and common nouns.

Number

In the change of inflection without the change of the lexeme, the noun can inflect itself to make four number distinction (see Table 0.II), that is the singular, dual, plural (also according to Grech, 1967) and the collective (not mentioned by Grech).

singular	*mara*	*raġel*	*warda*	*baqra*	*ħobża*
plural	*nisa*	*rġiel*	*wardiet*	*baqriet/baqar*	*ħobżiet*
collective			*ward*		*ħobż*
dual					*ħbiżtejn*

Table 0.III Number Categories

The singular can be distinguished in two ways: the collective like *ward, tajjar,* and *ful* (masculine) and the *farrad waħdieni* that is a member of the collective like *warda, tajjara* and *fula/fulu* (typically feminine, except in certain cases like in the latter). Mifsud (1996) explains that the collective and the *farrad waħdieni* have different plurals, one being determinate (morphologically whole) and the other being indeterminate (morphologically broken), for example: *dubbien, dubbiena, dubbiniet, dbieben.*

Not all nouns can have this distinction in the singular like *mara, raġel*. There are other nouns like *baqar, tiġieġ, siġar* that although morphologically appear to be in the collective they are not, as the agreement is in the plural such as *kemm hemm baqar kbar fl-għalqa*, as opposed to *qlajt bukkett ward sabiħ*.

The plural can be:

i. Determinate and morphologically whole (*plural sħiħ*) by adding a suffix such as *werqiet, basliet.*
ii. With an indefinite number and morphologically broken plural, such as *weraq, rġiel.*
iii. An exceptional plural such as *mara – nisa* when the plural substitutes completely the singular form with a process of suppletion (Fenech, 1996).

Borg and Azzopardi–Alexander (1997) mention some examples of singular nouns that inflect into the two types of plurals such as *kaxxa, kaxxi, kaxex; bolla, bolli, bolol* and others that also have the collective such as *ċipsa, ċipsiet, ċips; tofija, tofijiet, tofi*. There are also nouns derived from English that still take the suffix *–ijiet*, such as *garaxxijiet*, and *kowtijiet*. One can also find forms that have a broken plural such as *plakek, snieter, ktieli*. Fenech (1966) mentions the rare occurance of the double plural in Maltese such as *uċuh/uċuhijiet; truf/trufijiet.*

A small class of nouns in the singular can inflect into the dual to mark a quantity of two with the suffixes *–ejn* or *–ajn*, for example *sagħtejn, idejn, saqajn, daqqtjen*. In the case of these nouns the plural denotes a quantity of three or more. They may have a broken or whole plural. Semantically this type of number is associated with time, number, weight, measurement, currency, basic food and common objects. In the cases of nouns that do not take the dual form, the quantity of two is denoted by adding *par* or *żewġ* in

front of the word. In some interesting cases the dual can have a singular grammatical agreement such as *widnejja tuġgħani* or plural such as *griżmejja juġgħuni*. This means that the oriġinal function of the dual in Maltese is not effective anymore and according to Mifsud (1995) there is no correlation between the morphology and the semantics of the dual form.

According to Grech (1960; 1967) and Muscat & Saliba (2006) a noun is a name of a tangible object, however nouns like *rġulija* and *ħolma,* which are not tangible would more easily fit the description of a noun given by Borg (1988) and Borg & Alexander-Azzopardi (1997).   For example these nouns still inflect for number; can be defined by the article; and can take the role of arguments and predicates. Another discrepancy is the fact that the school textbooks do not give a description of derived nouns from other nouns and adjectives; do not describe the noun as animate or inanimate; and do not refer to determination. In linguistic description determination is not the same as definiteness. Also, identifying proper and common nouns as concrete nouns is another problem in the grammar textbooks.

In brief this paper recommends the use of syntactic and morphological descriptions because these give a better idea to the students in class of how to identify the noun from other parts of speech (Thomas, 1993).

Apart from the inclusion of the non-semitic element, a different approach and a re-organisation of grammatical description of the noun can be presented gradually in a syllabus with a spiral construction as outlined in the section that follows.

An alternative approach: the spiral syllabus

The 2001 syllabus (Education Directorate, 2001) and the new Form 1 and 2 syllabi (Education Directorate, 2013) are presented in a linear construction. In a linear syllabus, teaching units are arranged in a sequence and they follow a particular order. This type of progression reveals the 'specific content knowledge prescribed for each standard, the distinctions in content knowledge prescribed for different standards and the differences in standardwise objectives' (Joshi & Salunke, 2006, p. 43). The learning points are isolated and presented one after the other and it is only after each item is practiced in great detail that the learners are prepared to move to the next one (Saraswathi, 2004; Kaur, 1990). Pit Corder (1981) suggests that this does not reflect the way language is organized, where no aspect or item is either totally dependent or independent of another item, but is a network of interrelated parts. It also does not reflect the way learning takes place.

On the other hand a spiral syllabus (Figure 0-**IV**), a specific unit occurs repeatedly, but is treated in a different context and at a different level. 'The chief characteristic of this type of syllabus is that all the units of the syllabus are very well related to one another, therefore, the teachers can take a specific note of those interrelationships' (Joshi & Salunke, 2006, pp. 43-44). In school-based learning the students will need repeated opportunities of instruction to not only present new knowledge but also to provide opportunities for assimilation and consolidation (Loster, 2007). Language learning is viewed as a process of evolution where learners should be given opportunities to experience the same features turning up in many different combinations. The spiral constructions have greater pedagogical and psychological advantages, but they are more difficult to organize. That could be the reason why "linear" syllabi are more readily found (Kaur, 1990).
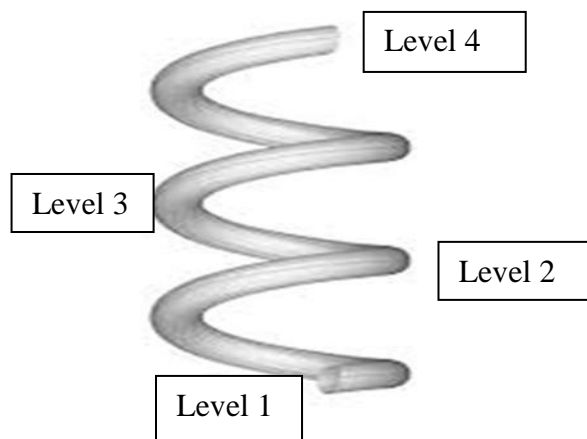
Level 4

Level 3

Level 2

Level 1

Figure 0-IV The Spiral Syllabus Construction

In a grammatical spiral syllabus the parts of speech can be intertwined with their grammatical categories, and they need to be presented in a simple and clear way for students aged between 11 and 14 years according to their cognitive development. The aim of a spiral syllabus is to move from one step to the next according to the complexity and relationship with other parts of speech, and takes in considertion what Nunan (1988) calls the building blocks of the langauge, that is the rules that fix all the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle. The complexity and difficulty of grammatical aspects should not be taken for granted. They may not be necessarily the same, as something complex may not be always difficult. For example the collective is not complex due to its singular agreement in the sentence, but due to its ambiguity in meaning which can make it difficult to understand. The basic principle behind a spiral construction is based on the fact that constructs that are basic and more frequent in the language (like the article) should be in the first level and others less basic and less frequent in the upper levels (Bell, 1981; Thornbury, 1999; Harmer, 2003). Cilia and Giordano (2006) suggest that the decision of

distribution should be based according to which constructs the students mistake more or less.

In this proposal the noun is distributed over four levels (Figure 0.IV), where each level is not necessarily related to a year group. Every learner cannot proceed to a level without completing the one preceeding it. One also needs to consider the notion that the student is a native speaker of the language thus already knows how it functions. The spiral construction needs to take in consideration that the student mainly needs to become conscious of the grammatical system. The teacher needs to consider the aptitude, motivation and learning styles of the students to be able to plan accordingly in class.

This proposal is a model for the teacher to be able to cover all grammatical aspects related to the noun. The attainment targets are presented as behavioural objectives and are numbered with three digits. The first digit refers to grammar to be able to distinguish it from other areas of learning of the language such as writing and literature following the model used by Portelli & Camilleri-Grima, 2002). The second digit refers to the level, and the third digit refers to the scale within the level.

By completing the first level the students should be able to:
1.1.1   Choose the noun from other parts of speech and define it as a name given to people, objects, places, animals and abstract entities.
1.1.2   Use the article as a syntactic element that can identify the noun from the verb. Proper nouns and nouns with attached pronouns are also definite.
1.1.3   Distinguish between masculine and feminine nouns.
1.1.4   Distinguish nouns that inflect for the singular and the plural.

By completing the second level the students should be able to:
1.2.1   Identify a nominal phrase in a sentence.
1.2.2   Analyse the grammatical agreement in terms of gender between the subject and the verb in a sentence.
1.2.3   Analyse the grammatical agreement in terms of number between the subject and the verb in a sentence.

By completing the third level the students should be able to:
1.3.1   Demonstrate the difference between a nominal and a verbal sentence.
1.3.2   Identify the dual morphologically and syntactically.
1.3.3   Distinguish between the whole and the broken plural and the determinate and the indeterminate plural.
1.3.4   Distinguish morphologically, syntactically and semantically between the *farrad waħdieni* and the collective.
1.3.5   Explain the syntactical roles of the nouns: the subject and the object of the sentence, and the semantical roles of the agent and the patient and the grammatical agreement of the verb.

1.3.6 Recognise the syntactical role of the noun as the direct and the indirect object.

1.3.7 Analyse the pronoun as the syntactical element that can be connected to the verb, and noun and can substitute the direct and the indirect object.

1.3.8 Notice the difference between the transitive, intransitive and ditransitive verb and the syntactical roles of the noun.

1.3.9 Discuss the processes of topicalisation.

By completing the fourth level the students should be able to:

1.4.1 Explain the derivation of the noun from a semitic noun and distinguish the four categories that is, the abstract, the diminutive, the collective and the relative adjective.

1.4.2 Explain the derived noun from a verb of Semitic origin, that is, the Semitic verbal noun that indicates an action; that indicates the name of the agent doing the action, active and passive participle; and the noun referring to the place and the tool.

4.6.9 Analyse different morphological models of the noun derived from the Semitic adjective.

4.7.10 Identify the nouns that are derived from nouns, verbs and adjectives of Romance and English origin.

Conclusion

This paper set off by describing how one grammatical item, the noun, is treated in the state school syllabi and textbooks. It then gave an explanation of the ways in which updated linguistic analyses of the noun have gone further by using morphological and syntactical methods in addition to semantic ones, as had been the case in the past. These modern linguistic approaches require a revision of the syllabus and an exemplary has been given of how this can be done with reference to the noun.

Apart from the significant changes in the linguistic content proposed, two other important elements have been taken account of. The first one relates to the structure of the syllabus. The linear construction which is relatively easy to formulate lacks features of fundamental importance, such as, the isolation of linguistic elements which does not reflect the way language is organised; and the random presentation of items in a list without specification of level of difficulty or learning differentiation. As an alternative, the spiral syllabus, as shown here, presents linguistic items in relation to each other (e.g. attainment targets 1.1.2 and 1.3.7), and level of difficulty increases as learners advance from one level of attainment to another. Furthermore, rather than grammar points, the syllabus presented here describes what the learners should achieve in terms of behavioural objectives which are tangible and measurable.

The second characteristic that emanates from this updated view of pedagogical grammar is its link to teaching methodology. In the introduction reference was made to the significant developments as part of the language awareness movement. The learner in this case is a native speaker of the language and therefore rather than 'acquiring' grammatical structures he or she needs to become 'aware' of how structures function. Hence, the attainment targets are drafter in appropriate terms using verbs like 'distinguish', 'identify', 'analyse', and 'explain' which are totally respectful of native speaker competence and their linguistic maturity.

It is our hope that the issues highlighted in this contribution will stimulate thought and generate the motivation required to conceptualize the Maltese grammar syllabus.

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