

GRAMMATICAL AGREEMENT IN MALTESE

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Abstract

Maltese displays a rich scenario of phenomena related to grammatical agreement between various sources and targets involving the categories of person, number and gender within various syntactic domains. After reviewing various definitions of grammatical agreement found in the literature, this study describes and discusses local agreement phenomena in Maltese in detail, exploring both Noun Phrase internal (e.g., noun adjective agreement) and Noun Phrase external agreement (e.g., verb subject agreement), as well as long distance agreement (pronoun - antecedent) with several illustrative examples. To complete the picture, this study also looks at cases of ‘quirky’ agreement which includes, among others, notional or non-formal agreement.

Fil-Malti hemm għadd ta' fenomeni relatati mal-qbil grammatikali bejn elementi varji li jinvolvu l-kategoriji tal-persuna, l-għadd u l-gens fi ħdan strutturi sintattici varji. Wara harsa fil-qosor lejn diversi definizzjonijiet tal-qbil grammatikali li nsibu fil-letteratura, dan l-istudju jiddeskrivi u jiddiskuti l-fenomeni lokali tal-qbil grammatikali fid-dettall billi jesplora l-qbil fi ħdan il-Frazi Nominali (eż., il-qbil grammatikali bejn l-aġġettiv u n-nom)

u l-qbil barra l-Frazi Nominali (eż., il-qbil grammatikali bejn il-verb u s-sugġett), kif ukoll il-qbil grammatikali mbiegħed bejn il-pronom u l-anteċedent, b’bosta eżempji. Biex l-istampa tkun kompluta, dan l-istudju jiddiskuti wkoll każijiet ta’ qbil ‘mhux tas-soltu’, li jinkludi, fost oħrajn, qbil nozzjonali jew qbil mhux formali.

1. What is grammatical agreement?

Grammatical agreement can be said to pervade the grammar of Maltese. This chapter sets out to describe grammatical agreement in Maltese and related phenomena. Let us start by trying to understand the notion of agreement. The following are four definitions of agreement found in the literature.¹

- Lapointe (1985: 1)
the specific morphological form of a word appearing in a sentence *correlates* with the presence, absence, or form of some other word in the sentence.
- Corbett (2008: 4) quoting Steele (1978: 610)
some systematic covariance between a semantic or formal property of one element and a formal property of another.
- Matasović (2018: 13)
a [grammatical] rule that says...that the presence of the feature A (out of a limited number of features) on the lexical unit X (the *controller*) requires the presence of A on the lexical unit Y (the *target*), within a syntactic domain D.

1 See, in particular, Mel’cuk, Igor (2006) and Corbett (2008) for a detailed discussion of terms and concepts related to agreement. For grammatical agreement in Maltese, see the relevant sections in Borg & Azzopardi-Alexander (1997).

- Moravcsik (1978: 333)

a grammatical constituent A will be said to agree with a grammatical constituent B in properties C in the language L if C is the set of meaning-related properties of A and there is a covariance relationship between C and some phonological properties of a constituent B1 across some subset of the sentences of language L, where constituent B1 is adjacent to constituent B and only meaning-related non-categorical properties of constituent B1 are the properties C.

Chomsky (1981) characterises (rather than defines) agreement as the operation of co-indexing (through superscripts) of elements involved in certain structural relations. In Chomsky's *Minimalist Program* (see Chomsky 2000), agreement is accounted for by the *Agree* operation, where *Agree* is a relation between a probe (e.g., verb inflection) and a goal (e.g., a subject noun phrase), with the probe searching for a category (e.g. noun), which can give value to its unvalued person, number, and gender features (*phi*-features).

Often, agreement (also called *concord*), is specifically distinguished from government (or *rection*), as the following examples show.²

- Robins (1971: 235)

Concord [or agreement] may be defined as the requirement that forms of two or more words of specific word classes that stand in a specific syntactic relationship with one another shall also be characterised by the same paradigmatically marked category (or categories)...

...government or rection may be defined as the requirement that one word of a particular class in a given syntactic construction with another word of a particular class shall exhibit the form of a specific category.

2 Note that, according to Moravcsik herself, her own definition above includes both agreement and government.

- Bach (1983: 70)

If the form of an argument depends on the properties of the functor, then we say that the functor GOVERNS the relevant feature of the argument. If the form of a functor depends on the properties of its argument expression when they are in construction, then we say that the functor *agrees* with the argument with respect to the relevant property (or feature)...

Moreover, another distinction is often made between local agreement, e.g., noun-adjective within a noun phrase (the local domain), and long-distance agreement, e.g. anaphor-antecedent (or pronominal) agreement, in which the agreeing units might be structurally distant from each other. Thus, Chomsky (1993) (and also more recent work) distinguishes between agreement and binding, with the binding relations being represented by means of subscripts and agreement relations by means of superscripts.

Clearly, two basic distinctions are therefore made in the literature, namely, (1) that between agreement (or concord) and government (or rection), on the one hand, and (2) that between agreement ‘proper’ and anaphoric (or pronominal) agreement, on the other.

This chapter deals with agreement phenomena in Maltese, as opposed to government (e.g. case assignment), and adopts an ‘inclusive’ view of agreement, i.e., it includes long distance as well as local agreement. The phenomena discussed in this chapter are based on the following characterisation of agreement by Barlow and Ferguson (1988), which succinctly captures the essence of all of the definitions given above without being too restrictive.

- Barlow & Ferguson (1988: 1)

a grammatical element x matches a grammatical element y in property z within some grammatical configuration w

To illustrate, in (1) below, *x* can be taken to be the adjective ‘tall’ (*twil*, *twila*, *twal*), *y* is the noun ‘child’, *w* is the noun phrase (NP) made up of the head noun and the modifying adjective (e.g., *it-tifel it-twil*), and property *z* is number (singular/plural) and gender (masculine/feminine).

- | | | | | | |
|------|---|--------------------------------|------|---|---------------------------------|
| (1a) | <i>it-tifel</i>
DEF-child.SGM
‘the tall boy’ | <i>it-twil</i>
DEF-tall.SGM | (1b) | <i>it-tiffl-a</i>
DEF-child-SGF
‘the tall girl’ | <i>t-twil-a</i>
DEF-tall-SGF |
| (1c) | <i>it-tfal</i>
DEF-child.PL
‘the tall children’ | <i>it-twial</i>
DEF-tall.PL | | | |

The rest of this chapter is divided into two main sections, reflecting the two broad domains of agreement as suggested by Lehmann (1982), namely, NP-internal agreement, and NP-external agreement, also called ‘nominal concord’ and ‘clausal agreement’ (e.g., Sande 2019: 832 and references therein). The basis for differentiating these domains lies in the fact that, typically, NP-internal agreement generally does not involve the person category, while NP-external agreement does (with the exception of predication; more below).

2. NP-internal agreement

Within the NP in Maltese, a number of elements are involved in agreement with the head noun involving number, and gender in the singular. These are the demonstrative adjective, the modifying (attributive) adjective, the numeral and the indefinite marker *wiehed*. We discuss each of these in the following with examples.

2.1 Demonstrative adjective – noun

- | | | | |
|---|--|--|---|
| <p>(2a) <i>dan</i>
this.SGM
'this book'</p> | <p><i>il-ktieb</i>
DEF-book.SGM</p> | <p>(2b) <i>dan</i>
this.SGM
'this man'</p> | <p><i>ir-raġel</i>
DEF-man.SGM</p> |
| <p>(3a) <i>din</i>
this.SGF
'this system'</p> | <p><i>is-sistem-a</i>
DEF-system-SGF</p> | <p>(3b) <i>din</i>
this.SGF
'this woman'</p> | <p><i>il-mara</i>
DEF-woman.SGF</p> |
| <p>(4a) <i>dawn</i>
this.PL
'these books/systems'</p> | <p><i>il-kotba/is-sistem-i</i>
DEF-book.PL/DEF-system-PL</p> | | |
| <p>(4b) <i>dawn</i>
this.PL
'these men/women'</p> | <p><i>l-irġiel/in-nisa</i>
DEF-man.PL/DEF-woman.PL</p> | | |

In spoken Maltese, the demonstrative adjective and the article are often blended into *dal-* [dɛl] (and corresponding assimilated article forms, e.g. *das-*) for masculine singular and for plural, and *dil-* [dɪl] (and corresponding assimilated article forms, e.g. *dis-*) for feminine singular, thus *dal-ktieb*, *dar-raġel*, *dis-sistema*, *dil-mara*, *dal-kotba*, *das-sistemi*, *dal-irġiel*, *dan-nisa*. In writing, it seems that plural *dal-* tends to be avoided. In spoken Maltese, the plural demonstrative *dawn* can also be reduced to [dɐv] and blended with the article as [dɐvɪl] or [dɐvɪ].

2.2 Numeral and indefinite w-ħ-d 'one/a certain'

The word *wieħed/waħda* can function either as the numeral one or an indefinite (perhaps better non-specific: 'a certain') marker; in the latter case, it appears pre-nominally (6), while, in the former case, it appears post-nominally in the unmarked case (5a,b) but can also occur in other positions, given the right intonation (e.g., 5c). In both cases, *w-ħ-d* agrees in gender with the noun in the singular that it occurs with, thus *wieħed* for masculine and *waħda*

for feminine. Note, moreover, that indefinite *w-ħ-d* only occurs with (governs) nouns with human referents. Interestingly this is also what happens with the *lil* case marker, which generally marks a human(ised) specific nominal object.

Numeral w-ħ-d ‘one’

(5a) *Raġel* *wiehed* *biss* *gie.*
 man.SGM one.SGM ONLY come.SGM.PFV
 ‘Only one man came.’

(5b) *Mara* *wahd-a* *biss* *gie-t.*
 woman.SGF one-SGF only come.SGF.PFV
 ‘Only one woman came.’

(5c) *Wahd-a* *biss* *gie-t* *mara.*
 one-SGF only come.SGF.PFV woman.SGF
 ‘Only one woman came’

(5d) *Irgjel* *ħamsa* *ġe-w* *biss.*
 man.PL five come-3PL.PFV only
 ‘Only five men came’
Indefinite w-ħ-d ‘a certain one’

(6a) *Wiehed* *raġel* *qal-li...*
 one.SGM man.SGM tell.3SGM.PFV-1 SG.DO
 ‘A (certain) man told me...’

(6b) *Wahd-a* *mara* *qal-t-li...*
 one-SGF woman.SGF tell.SGF.PFV-1 SG.DO
 ‘A (certain) woman told me...’

(6c) *Hames* *nisa* *qal-u-li...*
 five woman.PL tell-3PL.PFV-1 SG.DO
 ‘Five women told me...’

In terms of distribution, the indefinite marker patterns with the set of cardinal numbers which Fabri calls C2 or intransitive numerals, such as *ħamsa* ‘five’ (5d), while, the numeral patterns with the C1 or transitive numerals, such as *ħames* ‘five’ (6c). Note

that, assuming Fabri's (1994) analysis, C2 numerals are strictly speaking not inside the NP but are free to occur anywhere within the sentence, e.g. *Irgiel ġew tnejn biss* 'Only two men came' (literally: 'men came two only' and *Raġel ġie wieħed biss* 'Only one man came' (literally: 'man came one only').

Another form of *w-ħ-d* is the plural form *uħud* 'a few/some', which combines with the preposition *minn* 'from' (cmp. English 'of') and agrees with a plural noun within the *minn* PP.

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|------|----------------------------|---------------------|----------------|
| (7a) | <i>Uħud</i> | <i>mil-l-irġiel</i> | <i>wasl-u.</i> |
| | one.PL | from-DEF-man.PL | arrive.3PL.PFV |
| | 'Some of the men arrived.' | | |
| | | | |
| (b) | * <i>Uħud</i> | <i>mi-r-raġel</i> | <i>wasal.</i> |
| | one.PL | from-DEF-man.SGM | arrive.3SG.PFV |

The rest of the numerals do not show any gender variation in form but, in terms of number, the C1 (transitive) numerals from *żewġ* (or *ġiex*) 'two' to *għaxra* 'ten' occur with a plural noun (6c), while the rest, i.e., from *ħdax* 'eleven' onwards, occur with a singular noun (8). If the number is over a hundred and ends in a digit from two to ten, then the noun is plural (8c).

- | | | | | | |
|------|-----------------------------|--------------|--------------|-------------------|-------------|
| (8a) | <i>ħdax-il</i> | <i>raġel</i> | (8b) | <i>mitt</i> | <i>mara</i> |
| | eleven | man.SGM | | hundred | woman.SGF |
| | 'eleven men' | | | 'a hundred women' | |
| | | | | | |
| (8c) | <i>mija</i> | <i>u</i> | <i>tliet</i> | <i>irġiel</i> | |
| | hundred | and | three | man.PL | |
| | 'one hundred and three men' | | | | |

It seems correct to conclude that, in this case, while gender is a matter of agreement (a symmetrical relation), number is a matter of government (an asymmetrical relation), i.e. the numeral selects the form of the noun it governs, rather than co-varies with it. Note, however, that one can argue that *w-ħ-d* as an indefinite marker is different from the other transitive numerals (*żewġ*, *tliet*,

etc.) because, in fact, it is not a numeral and, therefore, cannot be assumed to govern its noun in terms of number rather than agree with it. This issue remains open for now.

2.3 Noun and adjective

Generally, the adjective in Maltese is post-nominal and it agrees with the noun in gender and number, as can be seen in (9).

- (9a) *it-tifel* *it-twil*
 DEF-child.SGM DEF-tall.SGM
 ‘the tall boy’
- (9b) *it-tift-a* *t-twil-a*
 DEF-child-SGF DEF-tall-SGF
 ‘the tall girl’
- (9c) *it-tfal* *it-twal*
 DEF-child.PL DEF-tall.PL
 ‘the tall children’
- (9d) *il-karozz-a* *l-hamr-a* *l-modern-a*
 DEF-car-SGF DEF-red-SGF DEF-modern-SGF
 ‘the modern red car’

This is also the case when the adjective occurs post-nominally in a comparative or superlative construction together with the prenominal comparative marker *aktar* (or *iżjed*) ‘more/most’ (10).

- (10a) *l-aktar* *ktieb* *ġdid*
 DEF-more book.SGM new.SGM
 ‘the newest book’
- (10b) *l-aktar* *storj-a* *ġdid-a*
 DEF-more story-SGF new-SGF
 ‘the newest story’

A number of gradable adjectives are inflected for comparison, in which case they do not require *aktar* and they are found pre-

nominally. Such adjectives do not change form for gender and number, and so do not display agreement. Note that not all gradable adjectives have a comparative form, e.g., *għajjen* ‘tired’, *marid* ‘sick’, *antik* ‘old’, *intelligenti* ‘intelligent’, among others (cmp. English ‘nicer’ vs. ‘more interesting’).

- (11) *l-isbaħ* *ktieb/* *storj-a/* *koħba*
 DEF-nice.CMP book.SGM/ story-SGF/ book.PL
 ‘the nicest book, story, books’

Therefore, a number of adjectives display four different word forms, e.g., *sabiħ* ‘nice.SGM’, *sabiħ-a* ‘nice-SGF’, *sbieħ* ‘nice.PL’ and *isbaħ* ‘nice.CMP’, while others display three forms, namely, *marid* ‘sick.SGM’, *marid-a* ‘sick-SGF’ and *morda* ‘sick.PL’. Moreover, another set of adjectives, such as *interessanti* ‘interesting’ and *speċjali* ‘special’, only occur in one form and, therefore, are not specified for either gender or number, or comparison.³

- (12) *ktieb/* *storj-a/* *koħba* *interessanti/* *speċjali*
 book.SGM/ story-SGF/ book.PL interesting/ special
 ‘interesting/special book, story, books’

Note that a small number of adjectives that do occur pre-nominally, such as *povru* ‘poor’, *uniku* ‘unique’ and *allegat* ‘alleged’, also generally agree with the noun in gender and number, which means that agreement, at least in these cases, is not tied to a specific syntactic position (pre- or post-nominal). However, interestingly, in pre-nominal position agreement in gender can be suspended sometimes, for example, with masculine *l-uniku* also occurring with a feminine noun (3d).⁴ This is not possible with every pre-nominal adjective, so that *povru/a*,

3 These are mostly adjectives of Romance origin ending in *-i*. Note also the *ċuċ* ‘stupid’, which has a plural form *ċwieċ* but no ‘standard’ feminine form *ċuċa*, although one can occasionally hear this form being used.

4 See Amaira and Borg (2020) for a discussion of such ‘mismatches’.

for example, has to agree in gender with the noun it modifies. Finally, it is also possible to have an adjective like *l-unika* occur with a plural noun instead of *l-uniċi* (3e); this, however, is also the case with a number of post-nominal adjectives discussed below (see (14)).

(13a) *l-unik-u* *ktieb*
 DEF-only-SGM book.SGM
 ‘the only book’

(13b) *l-unik-a* *ittr-a*
 DEF-only-SGF letter-SGF
 ‘the only letter’

(13c) *l-uniċ-i* *stejjer*
 DEF-only-PL story.PL
 ‘the only stories’

(13d) *l-unik-u* *ħaġ-a*
 DEF-only-SGM thing-SGF
 ‘the only thing’

A number of feminine singular adjectives which end in *-a* and have a plural in *-in*, including passive participles (*magħmul* ‘made.SGM’, *magħmul-a* ‘made-SGF’, *magħmul-in* ‘made-PL’), can also co-occur with a plural noun in free variation with the plural *-in* form. Thus, for example, the singular feminine form *għajjiena* ‘tired’ can occur with a plural noun (14a,b), while the same is not possible with the adjective *xih* ‘old’ (14c).

(14a) *nisa* *għajjien-a* / *għajjen-in*
 women.PL tired-PL / tired-PL
 ‘tired women’

(14b) *irġiel* *għajjien-a* / *għajjen-in*
 man.PL tired-PL / tired-PL
 ‘tired men’

(14c) *nisa* **xih-a* / *xjuħ*
 woman.PL old-SGF / old-PL
 ‘old women’

(14d) *irġiel* **xih-a* / *xjuħ*
 man.PL old-SGF / old-PL
 ‘old men’

- 5 The *-a* is glossed as SGF in the relevant context (e.g., *mara għajjien-a* ‘woman tired-SGF’).

Finally, a marked construction must also be mentioned in which certain adjectives which normally occur post-nominally occur before a possessive noun, such as *missierek* ‘your father’, *ommok* ‘your mother’ or *wiċċek* ‘your face’, with the resulting construction generally carrying a negative (often ironic) meaning, as in (15).

(15a) *dik* *il-ħelw-a* *omm-ok*
 that.SGF DEF-sweet-SGF mother-2SG.POSS
 ‘that sweet mother of yours’

(15b) *dak* *il-ħelu* *missier-ek*
 that.SGM DEF-sweet.SGM father-2SG.POSS
 ‘that sweet father of yours’

(15c) *dak* *is-sabiħ* *wiċċ-ek*
 that.SGM DEF-beautiful.SGM face-2SG.POSS
 ‘that beautiful face of yours’

Note that the final *-a* of the feminine in these constructions tends to be elided when spoken, thus *dik il-ħelw’ommok*.

Maltese also has a set of collective (uncountable or mass) nouns which form part of a tripartite inflectional system consisting of (1) a singulative form which is feminine singular for agreement purposes (16b), (2) a plural form which triggers plural agreement (16c), and (3) a collective form which is masculine singular in terms of agreement (16a).

(16a) *it-tadam* *sabiħ*
 DEF-tomato.SGM.COLL beautiful.SGM
 ‘the beautiful tomato/es’

(16b) *it-tadam-a* *sabiħ-a*
 DEF-tomato-SGF beautiful-SGF
 ‘the beautiful tomato’

(16c) *it-tliet* *tadam-iet* *sbieħ*
 DEF-three tomato-PL beautiful.PL
 ‘the beautiful tomatoes’

Collective nouns trigger singular masculine agreement on the adjective as well as on any other agreeing elements, such as demonstratives within the NP and verbs NP-externally (see below for verb agreement).

To finish this section, it is worth briefly mentioning the definite article, which, as in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), can appear on both the noun and the adjective. However, unlike MSA, in which the adjective must ‘agree’ with the noun in definiteness (17), in Maltese, an indefinite adjective can co-occur with a definite noun (18), and therefore definiteness must be excluded from agreement in Maltese.

(17a) *qamar-u-n* *kabiir-u-n*
 moon-NOM-INDEF big-NOM-INDEF
 ‘a big moon’

(17b) *'al-qamar-u* *'al-kabiir-u*
 DEF-moon-NOM DEF-big-NOM
 ‘the big moon’

(17c) **'al-qamar-u* *kabiir-u-n*
 moon-NOM-INDEF DEF-big-NOM

(17d) **qamar-u-n* *'al-kabiir-u*
 moon-NOM-INDEF DEF-nom-NOM

(18a) *il-ktieb* *il-gdid*
 DEF-book DEF-new
 ‘the new book’

(18b) *il-ktieb* *gdid*
 DEF-book new
 ‘the new book’

(18c) *ktieb* *gdid*
 DEF-book new
 ‘a new book’

(18d) **ktieb* *il-gdid*
 book DEF-new

The factors that account for the asymmetric cases in (18) are discussed in Fabri (1993, 2001).

3. NP-external agreement

The agreement relation of elements outside of the NP generally involves person (first, second, third) as well as gender and number. We start off with subject verb agreement.

3.1 Subject verb agreement

In Maltese, the verb always agrees with the subject in person (1st, 2nd, 3rd), number (sg, pl) and gender (masculine, feminine) in the 3rd person singular. The following (19) is the verb paradigm for the imperfect and perfect of the so-called sound verb⁶ *ħaseb* ‘think’, followed by some example sentences as illustration of verb subject agreement (20).

(19) Paradigm of the imperfect and perfect of the sound verb *ħaseb* ‘think’.

	ħsb ‘think’			
	PERFECT		IMPERFECT	
	SINGULAR	PLURAL	SINGULAR	PLURAL
1	naħseb	naħsbu	ħsibna	ħsibt
2	taħseb	taħsbu	ħsibt	ħsibtu
3 _M	jaħseb	jaħsbu	<i>ħaseb</i>	ħasbu
3 _F	taħseb		ħasbet	

(20a) *Jien n-aħseb li Marija ħarg-et.*
 I 1SG.IPVF-think that Mary go.out-3SGF.PFV
 ‘I think that Mary went out.’

(20b) *Intom t-af-u li t-ħfal marr-u l-Belt?*
 You.PL 2.IPFV-know-PL that DEF-child.PL go-3PL.PFV DEF-city
 ‘Do you know that the children went to Valletta?’

6 Traditional grammar distinguishes between sound and weak (defective) verbs, with the latter displaying a weak consonant (semi-vowel) *j* or *w* as one of their root consonants (e.g. *wasal* ‘arrive’, *bies* ‘kiss’).

In terms of morphology, the verb in Maltese displays a richness of forms resulting from inflectional classes (e.g., sound/weak verbs), together with morpho-phonological effects (e.g., assimilation, syllabification) involving both stems and affixes. The following table shows the allomorphy in the affixes which are involved in subject verb agreement.

(21) Subject agreement affixes: allomorphy

1 (i)n/m/r/l-	1/2SG -(Vj)t
2 (i)t, s, x, z, ž, ġ, ċ, dʷ	3F -Vt
3M j/i-	1PL -(Vj)na
3F (i)t, s, x, z, ž, ġ, ċ, d	2PL -(Vj)tu
PL -u/-Vw	

Like other Semitic languages, Maltese does not have a specific morphological infinitive verbal form. Every finite verb (i.e., not participles) is always marked for person, number, and gender. As a result, verb sequences are formed which contain verbs agreeing with the subject and, therefore, with each other⁸, as can be seen in the following.

(22a) *t-rid*

3SGF.IPFV-want
'she wants'

(22b) *Marija t-rid t-ohroġ.*

Mary 3SGF.IPFV-want 3SGF.IPFV-go.out
'Mary wants to go out.'

(22c) *Marija t-rid t-ohroġ t-ixtr-i.*

Mary 3SGF.IPFV-want 3SGF.IPFV-go 3F-buy-SG
'Mary wants to go out to buy/to go shopping.'

7 The following are the IPA symbols corresponding to the grapheme [n, m, r, t, s, ʃ, ts, dʒ, tʃ, d, y]. V stands for 'vowel'.

8 See Maas (2009), Stolz (2009), Fabri & Borg (2017) and Azzopardi (2019) for detailed discussions of this construction.

- (22d) **Marija* *t-rid* *j-oħroġ*.⁹
 Mary 3SGF.IPFV-want 3SGM.IPFV-go

Note that, unlike Modern Standard Arabic,¹⁰ in Maltese agreement of the verb with the subject in terms of person, number and gender is obligatory, no matter what the word (constituent) order is, or how many elements intervene in between.

- (23a) *Marija* *marr-et*.
 Mary go-3SGF.PFV
 ‘Mary went.’

- (23b) *Marr-et* *Marija*.
 go-3SGF.PFV Mary
 ‘Mary went.’

- (23c) *Il-mara* *li* *ltqaj-t* *magħ-ha* *lbieraħ*
 DEF-woman.SGF that meet-1SG.PFV with-3SGF yesterday
filgħaxija, *kmieni* *dalgħodu* *siefr-et*.
 evening early this morning go.abroad-3SGF.PFV
 ‘The woman I met yesterday evening went abroad early this morning.’

The verb in a relative clause relativising the subject also agrees in number, gender and person with the subject.¹¹

- (24a) *il-mara* *li* *feth-et* *il-bieb*
 DEF-woman.SGF that open-3SGF.PFV DEF-door
 ‘the woman who opened the door’

- (24b) *ir-raġel* *li* *fetaħ* *il-bieb*
 DEF-man.SGM that open.3SGM.PFV DEF-door
 ‘the man who opened the door’

9 As opposed to *Marija trid li j-oħroġ* ‘Mary wants that he goes out’ and *Marija t-ridu j-oħroġ* ‘Mary wants him to go out’, which are acceptable.

10 In MSA, agreement with the subject differs, depending on word order: SVO involves agreement in person, number and gender, while VSO involves only person and gender.

11 See and Camilleri (2014), and Camilleri and Sadler (2011) and (2016) on relative clauses in Maltese.

In so-called Exceptional Case Marking (ECM) constructions with object control (25), the verb in an embedded clause, i.e. the second verb (here *jilgħab*), agrees with its (understood) subject, which appears as the direct object in the matrix clause (in (25) *jien rajt lil Pawlu*).

(25) ECM: object control

Jien raj-t lil Pawlu j-ilgħab.
 I saw-1SG.PFV CS Paul.3SGM 3SGM.IPFV-play
 'I saw Paul play/ing.'

3.2 Object verb agreement

The Maltese verb can also agree with both the direct and indirect object through pronominal clitics, traditionally known as *il-pronomi meħmużin* 'bound pronouns'.¹² The following lists the clitics attached to the verb and their allomorphs. The indirect object clitics are the same as the direct object clitics but preceded by *-l-*, which is related to the case maker *lil*, which marks a specific, human direct object (theme, patient) NP and an indirect object (recipient/benefactive) NP.

(26) The verb clitics

		DIRECT OBJECT	INDIRECT OBJECT
SINGULAR	1	-ni	-li
	2	-k/-Vk	-IVk
	3M	-u/h/hu	-lu
	3F	-ha/hie/hi	-lha/lhie
PLURAL	1	-na/nie	-lna/lnie
	2	-kom	-lkom
	3	-hom	-lhom

12 See Camilleri (2009) for a study on clitics in Maltese, and Fabri (1993) and Camilleri (2011) on pronominal clitics.

One of the functions of the pronominal clitic on the verb is to mark a topic, i.e., given or familiar information, and is typically used as shown in (27), which provides a topic context for the direct object *il-ktieb* ‘the book’, as opposed to (28), which provides a focus context.¹³

(27a) *U dak il-ktieb li xtra-jt ilbieraħ?*
 and that.SGM DEF-book that buy-3SGM.PFV yesterday
 ‘And what about that book you bought yesterday?’

(27b) *Toni digà qra-h il-ktieb.*
 Tony already read.3SGM.PFV-3SGM.DO DEF-book
 ‘Tony has already read the book.’ (The book, Tony already read it.)

(27c) *#Toni qara l-ktieb.*
 Tony read.3SGM.PFV DEF-book
 ‘Tony read the book.’

(28a) *X’ qara Toni?*
 What read.3SGM.PFV Tony
 What did Tony read?

(28b) *Toni qara l-ktieb.*
 Tony read.3SGM.PFV DEF-book
 ‘Tony read the book.’

(28c) *#Toni qra-h il-ktieb.*
 Tony read.3SGM.PFV-3SGM.DO DEF-book
 ‘Tony read the book.’ (‘Tony read it, the book.’)

As can be seen from the example above, the clitic agrees in person (1, 2, 3), number (sg, pl) and gender (m, f) with the object NP. The following are examples with topic indirect object (29b), and with both topic direct and indirect object (29c). Again, agreement guarantees that the topic NP is identified as such.

(29a) *Jien bghat-t il-ktieb lil Pietru.*
 I send-1SG.PFV DEF-book.SGM CS Peter
 ‘I sent the book to Peter.’

13 The symbol ‘#’ stands for infelicitous (unacceptable in the discourse context) as opposed to ungrammatical (unacceptable in any context, marked by ‘*’).

(29b) *Jien bġhat-t-lu l-ktieb lil Pietru.*
 I send-1SG.PFV-3SGM.IO DEF-book.SGM CS Peter
 ‘I sent the book to Peter.’ (‘Peter, I sent him the book’)

(29c) *Jien bġhat-t-hu-lu l-ktieb lil Pietru.*
 I send-1SG.PFV-3SGM.DO-3SGM.IO DEF-book.SGM CS Peter
 ‘I sent the book to Peter.’ (‘Peter, I sent him the book’)

Once a clitic is attached to the verb, word order is totally free without the need for a marked intonation.¹⁴ Note also that the clitic has full pronominal status and, as such, can occur without the explicit object NP, as can be seen in (30).

(30a) *Toni qra-h.*
 Tony read.3SGM.PFV-3SGM.DO
 ‘Tony read it.’

(30b) *Jien bġhat-t-hu-lu.*
 I send-1SG.PFV-3SGM.DO-3SGM.IO
 ‘I sent it to him.’

Clitics can also be attached to prepositions (31) and nouns (32), thus triggering agreement with the object of the preposition and the possessor NP of the possessive noun phrase in construct. Apart from first person singular *-i*, the clitics on nouns and prepositions are the same as those attached to the verb as direct object (26), which is *-ni*, thus, e.g., *seraq-ni* ‘he robbed me’ but *fug-i* ‘on me’.

(31a) *Klara qabż-et fuq il-halliel.*
 Klara jump-3SGF.PFV on DEF-thief.SGM
 ‘Klara jumped on the thief.’

(31b) *Klara qabż-et fuq-u l-halliel.*
 Klara jump.3SGF.PFV on-3SGM.PRPO DEF-thief.SGM
 Klara jumped on the thief.’ (‘Klara jumped on him, the thief’)

14 See Fabri (1993), Fabri and Borg (2002), Čeplö (2018) for detailed discussions of word order. See Fabri (1993) and Čeplö (2014) for studies on so-called ‘clitic doubling’ or ‘object reduplication’ like those discussed here.

- (32a) *Xagħhar* *it-tiġf-a* *twil*.
 hair.SGM DEF-child-SGF long.SGM
 ‘The girl’s hair is long.’
- (32b) *Xagħhar-ha* *t-tiġf-a* *twil*.
 hair.SGM-3SGF.POSS DEF-child-SGF long.SGM
 ‘The girl’s hair is long.’ (‘Her hair is long, the girl.’)

Note that, as in the case of verbs, once the clitic is attached to the preposition and to the possessed noun, the complement NP, i.e. the possessor NP and the object of the preposition, is not required to be strictly adjacent to the preposition or possessed noun but can appear anywhere within the sentence (33).

- (33a) *Il-halliel* *Klara* *qabż-et* *fuq-u*.
 DEF-thief Klara jump.3SGF.PFV on-3SGM.PRPO
 ‘Klara jumped on the thief.’ (‘The thief, Klara jumped on him’)
- (33b) *Klara* *l-halliel* *qabż-et* *fuq-u*.
 Klara DEF-thief.SGM jump-3SGF.PFV on-3SGM.PRPO
 ‘Klara jumped on the thief.’ (‘Klara, the thief, she jumped on him’)
- (34a) *It-tiġf-a* *xagħhar-ha* *twil*.
 DEF-child-SGF hair.SGM-3SGF.POSS long.SGM
 ‘The girl’s hair is long.’ (‘The girl, her hair is long.’)
- (34b) *Xagħhar-ha* *twil* *it-tiġf-a*.
 hair.SGM-3SGF.POSS long.SGM DEF-child-SGF
 ‘The girl’s hair is long.’ (‘Her hair is long, the girl.’)

3.3 Primary & secondary predication

3.3.1 Primary predication

Primary predication includes sentences with a copula or other predicating verbs, such as *baqa* ‘remain’ and *sar* ‘become’, which can have an adjective (AP) or a noun (NP) in predicate position.

Copula constructions can be either predicative (35), or equative (36). In every case, the adjective or noun in predicate position must agree with the subject in gender and number.

- (35a) *L-idea* *kien-et* *tajb-a*.
 DEF-idea.SGF be-SGF.PFV good-SGF
 ‘The idea was good.’
- (35b) *Il-ktieb* *kien* *tajjeb*.
 DEF-book.SGM be.SGM.PFV good.SGM
 ‘The book was good.’
- (35c) *Hi-ja* *kien* *tabib*.
 brother.SGM-1SG.POSS be-SGM.PFV doctor.SGM
 ‘My brother was a doctor.’
- (35d) *Oht-i* *kien-et* *tabib-a*.
 sister.SGF-1SG.POSS be-3SGF.PFV doctor-SGF
 ‘My sister was a doctor.’
- (36a) *It-tabib* *kien* *hi-ja*.
 DEF-doctor.SGM be.3SGM.PFV brother.SGM-1SG.POSS
 ‘The doctor was my brother.’
- (36b) *It-tabib-a* *kien-et* *oht-i*.
 DEF-doctor-SGF be-3SGF.PFV sister.SGF-1SG.POSS
 ‘The doctor was my sister.’

The following are examples with *baqa* ‘remain’.

- (37a) *Il-kejk* *baqa*’ *tajjeb*.
 DEF-cake.SGM remain.3SGM.PFV good.SGM
 ‘The cake remained good.’
- (37b) *Il-pudin-a* *baqqh-at* *tajb-a*.
 DEF-cake-SGF remain.3SGF.PRV good.SGF
 ‘The pudding remained good.’

Note that predication does not include agreement in person since, e.g., the subject can be any person (first, second, third),

while the predicative noun is generally 3rd person for the purposes of agreement, thus, e.g., *jien kont tabib* ‘I was a doctor’. In other words, although external to the NP, predicate agreement functions like NP-internal agreement in not involving the person category. Note that a noun (NP) is considered 3rd person because it triggers 3rd person agreement on the verb.

(38a) *It-tabib* *ċempel.*
 DEF-doctor.SGM phone.3SGM.PFV
 ‘The doctor phoned you.’

(38b) **It-tabib* *ċempil-t.*
 DEF-doctor.SGM phone-1/2SG.PFV

3.3.2 Secondary predication

Agreement in gender and number also takes place in secondary predication, a construction in which an adjective is predicated of the subject or object but is not the primary predicate of the clause. It can obtain a resultative or depictive interpretation. For example, in (39a) the primary predicate is *kilt* ‘I ate’; the secondary predicate is *kiesah* ‘cold’ and it is predicated of the object *soppa* ‘soup’, obtaining a depictive interpretation. In contrast, (40) obtains a resultative interpretation. The adjective *għarwien* ‘naked’ in (41) is predicated of the subject NP, and is depictive.

(39a) *Jien* *kil-t* *is-sopp-a* *kiesh-a.*
 I ate-1SG.PFV DEF-soup-SGF cold-SGF
 ‘I ate the soup cold.’

(39b) *Int* *kil-t* *l-ghagin* *kiesah.*
 you ate-2SG.PFV DEF-pasta.SGM cold.SGM
 ‘You ate the pasta cold.’

(40a) *Harry* *zēba’* *l-kamr-a* *safr-a.*
 Harry painted.3SGM.PFV DEF-room-SGF yellow-SGF
 ‘Harry painted the room yellow.’

(40b) *Harry żeba' l-ħajt isfar.*
 Harry painted.3SGM.PFV DEF-wall.SGM yellow.SGM
 'Harry painted the wall yellow.'

(41a) *Pawlu żifen għarwien.*
 Paul dance.3SGM.PFV naked.SGM
 'Paul danced naked.'

(41b) *Moira żifn-et għarwien-a.*
 Moira dance.3SGF.PFV naked-SGF
 'Moira danced naked.'

Another interesting case is the word *wahdu* 'alone/on his own', which has the same distribution as a secondary predicate, but which obligatorily occurs with an object clitic and, therefore, encodes person as well as number and gender information. Note that adjectives and adverbs are not inflected for person, and yet it seems that *wahdu* functions as an adverb or adjective in these constructions. In any case, it always has to agree in person, number and gender with the NP it modifies.

(42a) *Pawlu żifen wahd-u.*
 Paul dance.3SGM.PFV alone-3SGM
 'Paul danced on his own/alone.'

(42b) *Int żfin-t wahd-ek.*
 you dance.2SG.PFV alone-2SG
 'You danced on your own/alone.'

(43a) *Jien ra-jt lil Pawlu wahd-u.*
 I see-1SG.PFV CS Paul alone-3SGM
 'I saw Paul on his own/alone.'

(43b) *Int ra-jt-ni wahd-i.*
 you see-2SG.PFV-1SG.DO alone-1SG
 'You saw me on my own/alone.'

(44a) *Intom kil-tu l-kejk wahed-kom.*
 YOU.PL eat-2PL.PFV DEF-cake alone-2PL
 'You(pl) ate the cake on your own/alone.'

- (44b) *Int kil-t il-kejk wahd-ek.*
 you eat-2SG.PFV DEF-cake alone-2SG
 ‘You(sg) ate the cake on your own/alone.’

w-ħ-d can also occur in constructions like (45), where, presumably, it modifies the noun within the NP.

- (45) *Ganni wahd-u ma j-ista’ j-aghmel xejn.*
 John alone-3SGM NEG 3SGM.IPFV-can 3SGM.IPFV-make nothing
 ‘On his own, John cannot do anything.’

Other elements that resemble *w-ħ-d* in terms of their agreement patterns are the quantifiers *koll-* ‘all’ and *nofs* ‘half’, which also agree with the NP they quantify through pronominal clitics.

- (46a) *Il-logħb-a koll-ha/nofs-ha kien-et tajb-a.*
 DEF-game-SGF all-3SGF/half-3SGF be.pst-3SGF good-SGF
 ‘The whole game was good.’

- (46b) *Il-film koll-u/nofs-u kien tajjeb.*
 DEF-film.SGM all-3SGM/half-3SGM be.pst-3SGM good.SGM
 ‘The whole film was good.’

- (46c) *Il-logħb-iet koll-ha kien-u tajb-in.*
 DEF-game-PL all-3PL be.pst-3PL good-PL
 ‘All the games are good.’

- (46d) *Intom/aħna koll-ha tajb-in.*
 you.PL/we all-3PL good-PL
 ‘All of you/us are good.’

There are a number of anomalies in these cases. The agreement marker is not the one typical of adjectives (consonant for masculine, *-a* for feminine, *-in* or *-a* for plural) but the object clitic, as is suggested by the orthography but also by the fact that masculine singular is *-u*, which is never the case with adjectives, although it can be a masculine marker for nouns (e.g., *ziju* ‘uncle’). What appears to be the third person feminine marker as a clitic (*-ha*)

here marks plural for first (*aħna*), second (*intom*) and third person, as well as for feminine singular.

One will also need to distinguish between the use of *koll-* and *nofs* as quantifiers, on the one hand, and as pseudo-predicates (see 3.5.1 below), on the other. The latter agree also in person, as in *Int kollok problemi* ‘You are all (full of) problems’. However, this distinction requires careful study and I will not go into any further here.

3.4 Pronoun – antecedent

Maltese is a pro-drop language, i.e., generally does not overtly express (therefore ‘drops’) the pronominal subject, which is, therefore, ‘understood’ through the gender, number and person features on the verb (e.g., *ħareġ* ‘he went out’ in the second sentence in (47a)). The verb, therefore, agrees with the antecedent of the unexpressed pronoun (the subject of the first sentence Ġanni), which can be located anywhere within the discourse context outside of the sentence or clause containing the relevant verb.

(47a) Ġanni m-hu-x hawn. Ħareġ j-ixtri.
 John NEG-be.3SGM-NEG here go.out.3SGM.PFV 3SGM.IPFV-buy
 ‘John is not here. He went shopping.’

(47b) *Iltaqj-t* *ma’* *Marija.* *Ħarġ-et* *t-ixtri.*
 meet-1SG with Mary go.out-3SGF.PFV 3SGF.IPFV-buy
 ‘I met Mary. She went shopping.’

(47c) *Mor-na* *l-Belt.*
 go-1PL.PFV DEF-city
 ‘We went to Valletta.’

The same applies to objects, with the pronominal function borne by the object clitics (*-u* in (48a) and *-hie* in (48b)).

- (48a) Ġanni m-hu-x hawn?
 John NEG-be.3SGM-NEG here
Le, ma ra-ġt-u-x.
 no NEG see-1SG.PFV-3SGM.DO-NEG
 ‘Isn’t John here? No, I haven’t seen him.’

- (48b) *Marija* *m-hi-x* *hawn?*
 Mary NEG-be.3SGF-NEG here
Le, ma ra-ġt-hie-x.
 no NEG see-1SG.PFV-3SGF.DO-NEG
 ‘Isn’t Mary here? No, I haven’t seen her.’

The verb can also agree with any of a set of emphatic pronouns shown in (49) and exemplified in (50).

- (49) emphatic pronouns

SUBJECT	OBJECT (direct and indirect)
ġien/a ‘I’	lili ‘me’
int/i ‘you’(sg)	lilek ‘you(sg)’
hu/wa ‘he’	lilu ‘him’
hi/ja ‘she’	liha ‘her’
ahna ‘we’	lilna ‘us’
intom ‘you(pl)’	lilkom ‘you(pl)’
huma ‘they’	lilhom ‘them’

- (50) *Jien ma ra-ġt-x lilu; ra-ġt lilha.*
 I NEG see-1SG.PFV him see-1SG.PFV her
 ‘I didn’t see him; I saw her.’

Here we should also mention the preposition *ta’* ‘of’, which, added to a clitic, is interpreted as possessive adjective (51) and possessive pronoun (52). The following is the relevant paradigm.

- (51a) *Pawlu bieġh id-dar tiegħ-u.*
 Paul sell.3SGM.PFV DEF-house of-3SGM
 ‘Paul sold his house.’

- (51b) *Marija* *biegh-et* *id-dar* *tagh-ha*.
 Mary sell-3SGF.PFV DEF-house of-3SGF
 ‘Mary sold her house.’
- (52a) *Tiegh-i* *isbah* *minn* *tiegh-ek*.
 of-1SG nice.CMP from of-2SG
 ‘Mine are/is nicer than yours.’
- (52b) *Tagh-na* *ghad-hom* *ma* *wasl-u-x*.
 of-1PL still.3PL NEG arrive-3PL.PFV-NEG
 ‘Ours haven’t arrived yet.’

The following is the paradigm for the possessive pronoun/adjective *ta* ‘+clitic

- (53) Paradigm for *ta* ‘of’¹⁵

SINGULAR	1	<i>tiegh-i</i> ‘my/mine’
	2	<i>tiegh-ek</i> ‘your/s’
	3M	<i>tiegh-u</i> ‘him/his’
	3F	<i>tagh-ha</i> ‘her/s’
PLURAL	1	<i>tagh-na</i> ‘our/s’
	2	<i>tagh-kom</i> ‘your/s’
	3	<i>tagh-hom</i> ‘their/s’

Finally, reflexivity in Maltese can be expressed in three ways: (1) through the combination of *lil* with a pronominal clitic, together with *nifs* ‘breath’ with an attached pronominal clitic (54), (2) through the combination of *ruh* ‘soul’ with a pronominal clitic (55), and (3) by means of the derivational prefixes *n-* (the 7th form; see (56)), *t-* (the 5th form), and at least one case of the 6th form (*t*+3rd form).¹⁶ In types (2) and (3) reflexives agree through

- 15 This means that, e.g., *tieghi* ‘of-me, my/mine’ is a preposition or prepositional phrase which functions as a possessive adjective/pronoun. Compare to other [preposition + clitic] combinations, such as *ma’+i* = *mieghi* ‘with-me’, *magh-kom* ‘with-you(pl)’.
- 16 I will not go into a discussion of the relation between reflexive, passive, and middle constructions, which belongs to the sphere of meaning (semantics)

the pronominal clitic with their antecedents in gender, number and person within the clause while type (3) involves ‘normal’ subject-verb agreement. The following are examples.

- (54a) *Jien ra-jt lil-i nnifis-i.*
 I see-1SG.PFV CS-1SG breath-1SG
 ‘I saw myself’
- (54b) *Hi ra-t lil-ha nnifis-ha.*
 I see-3SGF.PFV CS-3SGF breath-3SGF
 ‘She saw herself’
- (54c) *Huma ra-w lil-hom infus-hom.*
 they see-3PL.PFV CS-3PL breath-3PL
 ‘They saw themselves’
- (55a) *Jien sib-t ruh-i m-aqful ġo kamra.*
 I find-1SG.PFV soul-1SG PART-lock.SGM inside room
 ‘I found myself locked up in a room.’
- (55b) *Hi sab-et ruh-ha m-aqful-a ġo kamra.*
 She find-3SGF.PFV soul-3SGF PART-lock-SGF inside room
 ‘She found herself locked up in a room.’
- (55c) *Huma sab-u ruh-hom m-aqful-in ġo kamra.*
 they find-3PL.PFV soul-3PL PART-lock.PL inside room
 ‘They found themselves locked up in a room.’
- (56a) *Jien n-in-hasel kuljum.*
 I 1SG.IPFV-REFL-wash every day
 ‘I wash myself/get washed every day.’
- (56b) *Hi t-in-hasel kuljum.*
 she 3SGF.IPFV-REFL-wash every day
 ‘She washes herself/gets washed every day.’
- (56c) *Huma j-in-hasl-u kuljum.*
 they 3.IPFV-REFL-wash-PL every day
 ‘They wash themselves every day.’

and not morpho-syntax strictly speaking. See Spagnol (2011) for a detailed discussion.

3.5 Quirky agreement

In this section, we look briefly at a number of cases of agreement which, for various reasons, do not follow the general pattern described up to now, starting with pseudo-predicates.

3.5.1 *Pseudo-predicates*

Pseudo-predicates are predicates which obligatorily obtain object clitics which, however, do not agree with the object but what appears to be the subject. Some of these predicates behave like verbs, for example, in being circumfixed with *ma...x* for negation (e.g. *għand* ‘have’ (57)), while others are not (e.g. *il-* ‘be since’ (58b)). Just like verbs, some pseudo-predicates take the *-ni* clitic for first person singular while others take *-i*, which is attached to prepositions and nouns (see 3.2 above). The classic example is *għand* ‘have’ (57), which is clearly historically derived from ‘at’.¹⁷ The following illustrates *għand*, which is negated by *ma...x* but takes the *-i* clitic.¹⁸

(57a) *Jien għand-i/ ma għand-i-x ktieb.*
 I have-1SG/ NEG have-1SG-NEG book.SGM
 ‘I have/do not have a book.’

(57b) *Susan għand-ha/ ma għand-hie-x ktieb.*
 Susan have-3SGF/ NEG have-3SGF-NEG book.SGM
 ‘Susan has/doesn’t have a book.’

Other examples are *għad-* ‘be still’, *il-* ‘be since’ and *qis* ‘be like’.

(58a) *Jien għad-ni d-dar.*
 I still.be-1SG DEF-house
 ‘I am still at home.’

17 See Comrie (2019), chapter 10, section 10.4.

18 For detailed discussions and analyses of pseudo-predicates, see Fabri (1993) and Peterson (2009).

(58b) *Int* *il-ek* *id-dar.*
 you be.still-2SG DEF-house
 ‘You have been home for a long time.’

(58c) *Dawk* *qis-hom* *dundjan-i.*
 that.PL be.like-3PL turkey-PL
 ‘Those are like turkeys.’

3.5.2 *Non-formal agreement*

Non-formal agreement occurs when the semantics takes over the terms of agreement, overwriting the morphology (see Fabri (1993), (2009) and Borg & Amaira (2020) for a detailed discussion). There are a number of different types of non-formal agreement. Here I briefly discuss two examples.

Example (59b), as opposed to (59a), involves a shift in the conceptualisation from a unit perspective to an aggregate perspective forcing plural marking on the verb and, therefore, (dis)agreement in number.

(59a) *Sandra* *wasl-et.*
 Sandra.3SGF arrive-3SGF
 ‘Sandra has arrived.’

(59b) *Sandra* *wasl-u.*
 Sandra.3SGF arrive-3PL
 ‘Sandra (and her family/friends) have arrived.’

Note that the subject *Sandra* is third person feminine singular. This agrees with the verb *waslet* in (59a) but disagrees with the verb *waslu* in (59b), which is third person plural. The plural verb forces a reinterpretation of the subject as referring not to one individual but to a group. This phenomenon is generally restricted to spoken discourse.

Examples (60b) and (60c) involve a metonymic interpretation of the noun *buzzięqa* ‘balloon’.

- (60a) *Dik* *il-bużżieq-a* *nfah-t-ha*.
 that.SGF DEF-balloon-SGF blow-1SG.PFV-3SGF.DO
 ‘I blew that balloon.’
- (60b) *Dak* *il-bużżieq-a* *beda* *j-ibk-i*.
 that.SGM DEF-balloon-SGF start.3SGM.PFV 3M.IPFV-cry-SG
 ‘That touchy male started crying.’
- (60c) *Dik* *il-bużżieq-a* *bd-iet* *t-ibk-i*.
 that.SGF DEF-balloon-SGF start.3SGF.PFV 3F.IPFV-cry-SG
 ‘That touchy female started crying.’

In (60b), the head noun *bużżieqa* ‘balloon’ in the subject noun phrase is formally feminine singular, as can be seen from (60a); however, unlike (60a), the demonstrative (and the two verbs) in (60b) are masculine singular. This forces a reinterpretation of the noun *bużżieqa*, which is made to refer to a male entity, and thus take on the meaning ‘touchy person’ instead of ‘balloon’. Note that, if the demonstrative and verb are feminine singular, there can still be a shift in the meaning of *bużżieqa*, but this shift comes from the meaning of the verb *tibki*, which requires an animate/human subject. This shows that in (60a) verb meaning and agreement ‘conspire’ to force a reinterpretation of *bużżieqa*.

4. Conclusion

Grammatical agreement is a phenomenon that involves several core areas of the grammar, in particular morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics (discourse). This chapter illustrates the various instances of agreement within various structural domains, and involving gender, number and person distinctions in Maltese. We also explore the various ramifications of this phenomenon within the grammar and discuss cases of ‘irregular’ agreement, which help to better understand the core phenomena and shed light on the nature of the agreement phenomenon. The next step

is to develop a theory or model of agreement in Maltese, which specifies the role and function of agreement within the grammar, and which can then be incorporated into a general theory of agreement in natural language.

Abbreviations

1, 2, 3	first, second, third person	M	masculine
COLL	collective	NEG	negative
CMP	comparative	NOM	nominative
CS	object case marker	PART	participle
DEF	definite article	PL	plural
DO	direct object	POSS	possessive
F	feminine	PFV	perfective
INDEF	indefinite article	PRPO	prepositional object
IO	indirect object	REFL	reflexive
IPFV	imperfective	SG	singular

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