The switcher's paradise: nonverbal predication in Maltese

Leon Stassen

The encoding of nonverbal predicates in Maltese turns out to be unusually versatile. In particular, all the types of strategy switching which are cross-linguistically attestable in this encoding are possible in Maltese. Thus, although none of the encoding options in Maltese are unique, the language is remarkable in that it exhibits all known encoding options for nonverbal predication at the same time, and it therefore constitutes a textbook example of the encoding variation in this domain.

1. Introduction

This paper deals with some of the typological characteristics of nonverbal predication in Maltese. Thus, we will discuss the ways in which Maltese encodes sentences in which either property concept predicates (adjectives), or class membership predicates (nominals), or locational predicates (locative adverbials) function as the semantic predicate. In short, we are interested in the Maltese equivalents of English sentences such as those in (1):

(1) *English*:
    a.   Bill is sick/tall/old
    b.   Bill is president/a carpenter/our chairman
    c.   Bill is out/home/in the kitchen

We will examine our Maltese data[1] from the perspective of the general typology of intransitive predication in natural languages. Some of the features of this general typology have been outlined in Stassen (1992); a much more detailed exposition will be given in Stassen (in press). Within the general typology of intransitive predication, Maltese represents a prominent case. I will argue in this paper that Maltese, in its encoding options of nonverbal predicates, exhibits a remarkable versatility. In particular, the language allows all attested types of strategy switching for nonverbal predicates, whereas other languages permit only a few of these types, or no strategy switching at all. Since strategy switching is usually motivated by some semantic factor, we can conclude that nonverbal predication in Maltese is semantically trans-parent to an unusual degree, which makes this language an excellent

all-purpose example for the typology of intransitive predication as a whole.

2. The zero-strategy

A first thing to note about nonverbal predication in Maltese is that this language appears to belong to a class which has sometimes been referred to as radical languages. The defining characteristic of this class of languages is that none of the three predicate categories mentioned above can be treated as verbs. Thus, these languages have a verbal strategy (which may, but does not have to, include such formal features as person-marking, tense-marking, and so on) which is restricted to the encoding of action or state predicates. Predicative adjectives, nominals, and locationals cannot be encoded by the verbal strategy, but instead have to resort to some nonverbal strategy, which may be of several different formal kinds: it may involve a copula, an auxiliary, a zero item, or various combinations of these options.

Since most of the well-known Western languages belong to this class of radical languages, the reader may be somewhat surprised to learn that languages of this type form a minority in the world. In fact, more than half of the languages in my sample allow the verbal strategy to intrude to some extent into the encoding of predicate categories other than verbs. Thus, for instance, we find languages in which predicative adjectives can be encoded on a par with verbs. A random example of such a case is Guajajara, a Brazilian Tupi language:

(2) *Guajajara:*
a. U   -kuza?i
   3PL   -fall
   'They fell'   (Bendor-Samuel 1972:131)
b. H   -urywete
   3SG   -happy
   'He is happy'   (Harrison 1986:411)

Some languages go even further than this, and permit a verbal encoding for predicate nominals as well. An example of such a case would be the Siouan language Biloxi:

(3) *Biloxi:*
a. Nk   -anki
   1SG   -sit
   'I am sitting'   (Dorsey & Swanton 1912:290)

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b. Nk   -anyasahi
   1SG   -black
   'I am black'   (Dorsey & Swanton 1912:179)
c. Nk   -sanki
   1SG   -woman
   'I am a woman'(Dorsey & Swanton 1912:179)

Finally, there are languages which might be called uniformly verbal. Here we find that all predicate categories are, or can be, encoded by the strategy which is used to encode verbs. A case in point is Piro, an Arawakan language of Bolivia:

(4) *Piro:*
a. Ya   -tka   -na
   go   -PERF   -3PL
   'They went'   (Matteson 1965:139)
b. Hitsko -0   -na
   strong -IMPERF   -3PL
   'They are strong'   (Matteson 1965:143)
c. Kapakle   -0   -ru
   hunter   -IMPERF   -3SG
   'He is a hunter'   (Matteson 1965:45)
d. Koko -yma   -0   -na
   uncle-with   -IMPERF   -3PL
   'They are with Uncle'   (Matteson 1965:93)

In order to encode its adjectival, nominal, and locational predicates, Maltese employs a number of different strategies. One of these strategies can be called the neutral strategy, as it encodes the semantically unmarked value of each of these predicate categories. In other words, if some nonverbal predicate category is encoded by some other strategy than the neutral strategy, this strategy switching usually produces some marked effect on the semantic interpretation of the predicate at issue. Examples of these strategy switches, and of the semantic effects which they bring about, will be given in the next three sections.

The neutral strategy in Maltese can be called uniform, in that it has the same characteristics for all three predicate categories involved. Furthermore, this uniform strategy is susceptible to what can be called the Present-Past Parameter: the formal properties of the strategy vary if the tense of the sentence is switched from Present to Non-Present. In the Present Tense, all three categories of nonverbal predicates can be encoded by a zero-strategy; there is juxtaposition of the subject and the predicative element. In tenses other than Present, all three predicate categories must employ a form of the supportive verb *kien* "to be".

(5) *Maltese:*

a. Albert marid
   A.   sick
   'Albert is sick'

b. Albert tabib
   A.   doctor
   'Albert is a doctor'

c. Albert id   -dar
   A.   the -house
   'Albert is at home'

(6) *Maltese:*

a. Albert kien   marid
   A.   be-3SG.MASC.PAST sick
   'Albert was sick'

b. Albert kien   tabib
   A.   be-3SG.MASC.PAST doctor
   'Albert was a doctor'

c. Albert kien   id -dar
   A.   be-3SG.MASC.PRES the -house
   'Albert was at home'

The pattern of strategy switching exemplified by the sentences in (5) and (6) is of course not unique to Maltese; in fact, it appears to be a general Northern Semitic feature, and can be found both in (most of the modern variants of) Arabic and in Hebrew. However, seen from a broad typological perspective the occurrence of this uniform zero-full switching under the Present-Past Parameter is relatively rare. Its main representants outside the Semitic family can be located in what might be called the Eurasian area: examples include Baltic and Northern Slavonic languages (Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, Russian), a number of Eastern Uralic languages (Mordvin, Xanty, Cheremis, Komi, Votic), and nearly all Altaic languages, be they Turkic (Tatar, Uzbek, Yakut), or Mongolian (Classical Mongolian, Khalka, Buryat), or Tungus (Nenets, Evenki, Manchu). Apart from this area, the type of uniform strategy switching at issue here is permitted in a few isolated cases, such as a number of New Guinean languages (Daga, Marind, Kapauku, Asmat) and various dialects of Quechua.

In non-Present tenses, nonverbal predication in Maltese shows no further variation. That is, in these tenses the selection of the full verb *kien* is obligatory for all three predicate categories. In the Present tense, however, all three predicate categories allow two or more alternative encoding strategies in addition to the zero-strategy. In the following sections, I will review these cases of Present tense strategy switching for each predicate category in turn.

3. Strategies for locational predicates

In addition to the zero-strategy, predicate locationals in Present Tense sentences in Maltese permit encoding by means of a full lexical item. As a matter of fact, the language appears to have two of such items. One of these is the item *qiegħed*. From a synchronic point of view, this item must be regarded as a non-verbal particle. However, Borg (1987) traces its etymological origin to a participial form of the verb *qagħad* "to stay, to remain". Like all participles (and adjectives in general), the item *qiegħed* shows gender-number marking: it has a Singular Feminine form *qiegħda* and a Plural form *qegħdin*. The other item which is employed in the encoding of predicate locationals is *jinsab*. This is a passive causative form of the verb *sab* "to find"; literally, the form *jinsab* could be translated as "is caused to be found". Examples of all three possible strategies in the Present Tense encoding of locational predicates are given in (7):

(7) *Maltese:*

a. Ganni l   -habs
   G.   ART -prison
   'John is in prison'

b. Il   -vapur qiegħed   il   -port
   ART -ship   be-SG.MASC ART harbour
   'The ship is in the harbour'

c. It   -tifel jinsab id   -dar
   ART -boy   be   ART -house
   'The boy is at home'

All the sources which I have consulted state that there is no semantic difference between these three options. In other words, the encoding switch from a zero-encoding to a full encoding with either *qiegħed* or *jinsab* is optional. This fact of Maltese is completely in line with general typological characteristics of locational predicate encoding. As the large majority of languages in the world prefer a single full encoding for their locational predicates, zero-full switching in locational encoding is not a very wide-spread phenomenon. Its occurrence appears to be limited to certain specific language areas, the most conspicuous of which is formed by Eastern Indonesia (Wolio, Banggai, Buli), Melanesia (Manam, Pala, Arosi, Tolai, Tigak, Kwaio), New Guinea (Awtuw, Imonda, Sentani, Koita, Yareba) and Australia (Pitjantjatjara, Gumbainggir). Furthermore, this particular form of switching can be found in several Altaic languages (Yakut, Uzbek, Tatar, Khalka, Buryat), as well as in a number of African languages, which belong to the Nilo-Saharan phylum.

(Kanuri, Bongo, Moru) or to the Ubangian branch of the Niger-Kordofanian phylum (Zande, Ngbandi). In none of these cases any semantic differentiation between the zero-option and the full option has been attested. Thus, it seems to be a general rule of locational predicate encoding that languages favour a full strategy; in a limited number of cases, this full strategy may be supplemented by a zero-strategy, by which the uniformity of nonverbal predicate encoding is kept intact.

Another interesting feature of the predicative locational construction in Maltese involves the form of the locational predicate itself. As the sentences in (7) demonstrate, locational predicates in Maltese can have the surface form of noun phrases; no overt markers of oblique case, such as prepositions, seem to be necessary. Apparently, this "bare NP"-construction of locational predicates is independent of the use of a particular encoding strategy: bare locational NP's occur both with the zero-strategy and with the two full strategies. The bare-NP construction contrasts with another structural option for locational predicates, in which the NP which designates the location is overtly marked by a locative preposition. Thus, we have the following minimal pair:

(8) *Maltese:*
a. It -tifel (qieghed) id -dar
   ART -boy (be-SG.MASC) ART -house
   'The boy is at home'
b. It -tifel (qieghed) f -id -dar
   ART -boy (be-SG.MASC) in -ART -house
   'The boy is in the house'

The formal contrast illustrated in (8) correlates with a semantic difference which is hard to pin down exactly, and which, in all probability, involves a clustering of various factors. First, there is an animacy factor at work here. If the subject of the sentence is inanimate, the use of a bare NP-locational is usually excluded:

(9) *Maltese:*
a. *Ic -cavetta (qieghda) il -kexxun
    ART -key (be-SG.FEM) ART -drawer
b. Ic -cavetta (qieghda) f -il -kexxun
    ART -key (be-SG.FEM) in -ART -drawer
    'The key is in the drawer'

However, as is shown by sentence (7b), this animacy condition is not very strict, and can be overcome by "contextual factors" (Borg 1987:60). One of these factors might be phrased in terms of the cognitive notion of stereotype: the use of a bare-NP locational is accepted more readily if the

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location is, in some way, the "habitual haunt" (Borg 1987:59) of the subject. Thus, since doctors can be expected to be in hospitals, as boys can be expected to be in school and ships in harbours, the sentences in (10) may be acceptable to more speakers than those who also accept the non-stereotypical sentences in (11):

(10) *Maltese:*
a. It -tabib l -isptar
    ART -doctor ART -hospital
    'The doctor is in the hospital'
b. It -tifel l -iskola
    ART -boy ART -school
    'The boy is in school'
c. Il -vapur il -port
    ART -ship ART -harbour
    'The ship is in the harbour'

(11) *Maltese:*
a. ? Il -qassis il -gnien
    ART -priest ART -garden
    'The priest is in the garden'
b. ? L -istudent l -hanut
    ART -student ART -shop
    'The student is in the shop'

It should be noted that the encoding of predicate locationals by means of bare NP's is not an unique characteristic of Maltese. Similar constructions can be found in a number of East Asian languages (Cambodian, Vietnamese, Lahu), Melanesian languages (Keiese, Tumleo, Mokilese, Jabem) and West African languages (Bambara, Wolof, Yoruba, Igbo). Examples include:

(12) *Cambodian:*
Khngom neeuh pteeh
1SG be-at house
'I am at home' (Jacob 1968:16)

(13) *Vietnamese:*
Toi o Dalat
1SG be-at D.
'I am in Dalat' (Thompson 1965:273)

(14) *Keiese:*
I en -dir strat
3SG 3SG -be street
'He is in the street' (Geurtjens 1921:58)

(15) *Mokilese:*
Ih mine Hawaii
3SG be H.
'He is in Hawaii' (Harrison 1976:209)

(16) *Jabem:*
Andu ke -ko malac
house 3SG -be village
'The house is in the village' (Dempwolff 1939:70)

(17) *Bambara:*
An be Bamako
1PL be B.
'We are in Bamako' (Bird et al. 1977:84)

(18) *Wolof:*
Neke na ker
be-at INDIC house
'He is at home'(Rambaud 1903:73)

Languages which allow locational predication by means of bare NP's tend to share two other characteristics. First, they tend to allow bare NP's in other locative functions as well. Thus, in many languages of this type the locative complements of verbs such as 'come' or 'go' are constructed without an overt locative marker. Cf.:

(19) *Cambodian:*
Kee maok Pnum-Pin
3PL come P.
'They come to Pnom-Penh' (Huffman 1967:228)

(20) *Vietnamese:*
Toi di Hue
1SG go H.
'I go/went to Hue' (Van Chinh 1970:225)

(21) *Lahu:*
Ci-qo qay
market go
'He went to market' (Matisoff 1973:308)

(22) *Keiese:*
Er -ba rahan
3PL -go home
'They go/went home' (Geurtjens 1921:58)

(23) *Mokilese:*
Ngoahin-la sidowa
1SG go-PERF store
'I went to the store' (Harrison 1976:260)

(24) *Jabem:*
Ja -na Tami
1SG.IRREAL -go T.
'I will go to Tami' (Zahn 1940:130)

(25) *Bambara:*
A tena so
3SG NEG.FUT go house
'He will not go home' (Bird et al. 1977:155)

(26) *Igbo:*
Anyi lara Aba
1PL go-PRET A.
'We went to Aba' (Welmers 1973:369)

A second characteristic of these languages is that they all seem to exhibit some form of verb serialization. The specific conditions under which the formation of serial verb strings is permitted may vary from language to language, and the same goes for the specific formal shape which these serial verb strings may take. However, as the examples in (27)-(34) demonstrate, all these languages allow for constructions in which verbal forms "...occur in sequence, but (...) are not overtly marked for coordination or subordination with respect to each other" (Hyman 1975:136). Cf.:

(27) *Cambodian:*
Ta yok dong-pakka sese sombotr
old man take pen write letter
'The old man took a pen and wrote a letter' (Jacob 1968:80)

(29) *Vietnamese:*
Giap mang quyen sach ve nha
G. carry book return house
'Giap carried the book home' (Van Chinh 1970:222)

(30) *Keiese:*
Oe -doek oe -an afa
1SG -sit 1SG -eat food
'I sit eating' (Geurtjens 1921:45)

(31) *Mokilese:*
Woallo kup -la sipw -la eh -n
man fall -PERF break -PERF leg -his
'The man fell and broke his leg' (Harrison 1976:247)

(32) *Jabem:*
Ka -sing i ga -wing teoac
1SG.REAL -catch fish 1SG.REAL -be-with myolderbrother
'I caught fish with my older brother' (Dempwolff 1939:46)

(33) *Wolof:*
Dem na ma a o ko
go INDIC 1SG PRT call him
'I went and called him' (Rambaud 1903:64)

(34) *Yoruba:*
Won se isu je
3PL cook yam eat
'They cooked yam and ate it' (Welmers 1973:377)

Given these facts, we may conclude that the absence of overt locative marking on locational predicates and locational complements tends to cluster with the possibility to form serial verb strings. Now, the interesting point is that Maltese, which, as we have seen, allows bare NP's as locational predicates, appears to exhibit the other two characteristics of this cluster as well. The sentences in (35) illustrate the possibility of unmarked locative complements, while the sentences in (36) show constructions which have all the essential characteristics of serial verb strings:

(35) *Maltese:*
a. Mort Amsterdam
go-1SG.PERF A.
'I went to Amsterdam'
b. Se jmur vaganza
FUT go-3SG.MASC vacation
'He will be going on a vacation'

(36) *Maltese:*
a. Dahlet tibki
enter-3SG.FEM.PERF cry-3SG.FEM.IMPERF
"She came in crying"
b. Gew ighajtu
come-3PL.PERF shout-3PL.IMPERF
'They came shouting'

In short, we might venture the hypothesis that Maltese is moving towards the serializing language type, and that this process is accompanied (or perhaps even fostered) by the ability of the language to encode locational constituents as bare NP's.

4. Strategies for nominal predicates

In addition to the neutral zero-strategy, nominal predicates in Maltese allow for two alternative Present Tense encodings, both of which involve an overt item. In the first of these alternative options, we once more encounter the item *qiegħed*, which, in this case, appears to function as a copula. As the foremost function of this item is to act as a supporting element for locational predicates, we can say that, under this option, nominal predicates in Maltese exhibit locational switching. It should be noted here that this locational switching of nominal predicates is restricted to the item *qiegħed*; the other overt locational item, *jinsab*, is never permitted with nominal predicates.

Locational switching of nominal predicates in Maltese is subject to a condition which is clearly semantic in nature. This semantic factor is identified by Borg (1987:64), who states: "When the form *qiegħed* occurs in such a predication (i.e., predicate nominal constructions, L.S.), it is understood that the identity relation being predicated is a temporary one". In more general typological terms, we can conclude that locational switching of nominal predicates is subject to the Permanency Parameter, which, in its turn, is one of the manifestations of the concept of Time Stability (see Givón 1984). On the basis of the Permanency Parameter, some states of affairs are designated as being "temporary", "contingent", or "accidental": they are viewed as being relatively unstable over time. In contrast, other states of affairs are viewed as relatively stable over time, and can be referred to as "permanent" or "inherent". In the case of predicate nominals, which commonly refer to class membership, the usual interpretation of a time-stable state is that of permanent membership, which in some cases may lead to the assignment of a profession to the subject. Unstable class membership, on the other hand, often is interpreted in terms of temporary function.

Since locational switching of nominal predicates results in a relatively time-unstable interpretation of the predicate, it will be clear that not every nominal predicate will be equally eligible for this type of switching. Thus, it can be understood why a sentence like (37a) is semantically odd: it is hard to see how anything can be an island on a temporary basis. In contrast to this, it is very well imaginable that a person is the examiner for only a limited span of time, which is why

sentence (37c) is acceptable. In between these two extremes we find cases like (37b), which are questionable; their acceptability crucially depends on the degree to which speakers are prepared to view a class membership predicate like "doctor" as temporary.

(37) *Maltese:*

a. * Malta qiegħeda gżira
      M. be-SG.FEM island
b. ? Ganni qiegħed tabib
      G. be-SG.MASC doctor
c. Pietru qiegħed l-eżaminatur
      P. be-SG.MASC ART -examiner
   'Pietru is the examiner'

Zero-locational switching of nominal predicates can be found in several other languages besides Maltese. Clear examples of the phenomenon are attested for the Southern American family of Carib languages (Hixkaryana, Macushi, Apalai), and for most of the Dravidian languages (Tamil, Telugu, Kannada). In all these cases, it is the locational option for predicate nominals which indicates contingency, "nonhabitualness," a temporary state" (Schiffmann 1983:106 on Kannada) or "role' of the subject" (Bhaskararao 1972:172) on Telugu), against the permanency or inherent class membership designated by the zero strategy. Cf.:

(38) *Kannada:*

a. Naan daktaru
    1SG doctor
    'I am a doctor' (Schiffman 1983:106)
b. Naan daaktar -aag -iddini
    1SG doctor -ADV -be-1SG.PRES
    'I am (functioning as) a doctor' (Schiffman 1983:106)
c. Naan Maysur -nall -iddini
    1SG M. -in -be-1SG.PRES
    'I am in Mysore' (Schiffman 1983:106)

(39) *Telugu:*

a. Ramarav podugu vadu
    R. tall man
    'Ramarao is a tall man' (Bhaskararao 1972:194)
b. Ramarav menejaru ga unnadu
    R. manager ADV be-3SG.MASC.PRES
    'Ramarao is (functioning as) a manager'(Bhaskararao 1972:172)
c. Mohan inti -lo unnadu
    M. house -in be-3SG.MASC.PRES
    'Mohan is at home' (Bhaskararao 1972:163)

In sum, we can conclude that locational switching of predicate nominals in Maltese conforms to a universal principle, which states that locational encoding of predicate nominals brings about a time-unstable interpretation of the predicate. Apart from cases of zero-locational switching, this principle manifests itself in various other guises, such as, for example, the *ser-estar* distinction in Spanish, and the *is-ta* distinction in Celtic languages.

A second alternative to the zero-strategy for predicate nominals in Maltese involves the use of a so-called pro-copula. This strategy constitutes a common feature of practically all Northern Semitic languages. Under this option, the predicate nominal construction features a copular particle, which can be identified as being derived from the personal pronouns of the third person. The pronominal nature of the particle copula is preserved in the fact that it still shows number-gender agreement with the subject. However, especially in modern Semitic languages like Modern Hebrew, there are reasons to assume that "pronouns are being reanalyzed as copulas" (Li & Thompson 1976:429). It should be noted that the pro-copula strategy seems to be restricted to the encoding of predicate nominals and, to a lesser extent, predicative adjectives: it can not, or not consistently, be employed in the encoding of predicate locationals. Examples of the pro-copula strategy in various Semitic languages include:

(40) *Classical Arabic:*

Al -insan -u huwa hayawan -um
ART- man -DEF 3SG.MASC animal -INDEF
'Man is an animal' (Shehadi 1969:119)

(41) *Biblical Hebrew:*

Dawid hu' melek tob
D. 3SG.MASC king good
'David is a good king' (Lambdin 1971:55)

(42) *Modern Hebrew:*

Moshe hu student
M. 3SG.MASC student
'Moshe is a student' (Li & Thompson 1976:428)

(43) *Maltese:*

a. Malta u Ghawdex huma gżejjen
   M. and G. 3PL island-PL
   'Malta and Gozo are islands'
b. Valletta hija l -belt ta' Malta
   V. 3SG.FEM ART -capital of M.
   "Valletta is the capital of Malta"

c. Gesù Kristu huwa Bin Alla
   G. K. 3SG.MASC son God
   "Jesus Christ is the Son of God"
d. Marija hi mara tajba
   M. 3SG.FEM woman good
   "Maria is a good woman"

The conditions under which this zero/particle switching for predicate nominals may occur vary from language to language. For some of the languages at issue here, the intricacies of this switch have been described in detail (see Shehadi, 1969, for Classical Arabic; Berman & Grosu, 1976, for Modern Hebrew; and Borg, 1987, for Maltese). The general conclusion to be drawn from these studies is that, apparently, the choice of a zero copula versus a particle copula does not seem to be determined by considerations of relative Time Stability. For at least some of these languages, the zero-particle variation appears to be connected with semantic distinctions within the domain of nominal predication itself. Thus, in Classical Arabic the particle copula seems to be preferred in sentences which express a general truth or a definition, and which have a subject with a generic interpretation (see sentence (40)), although it must be added that the particle copula is certainly not restricted to these contexts. Nonetheless, one might interpret this situation in Classical Arabic as a formal reflection of a more general semantic distinction in nominal predication, viz. the distinction between Description and Specification (see Graham, 1965). Thus, a particle copula seems to be the preferred option in sentences which specify their subjects, either by means of an identity relation ("John is my brother"), or by a definition in terms of a hyponimic category ("A rabbit is a rodent"). The particle copula appears to be less eligible in contexts in which the predicate nominal has a descriptive function, by way of naming the class or role of the subject ("John is a scoundrel/good man/tailor"). A reflection of this semantic distinction can also be attested for Modern Hebrew and Maltese. In Modern Hebrew, the particle copula is obligatory if the sentence has a generic subject; a sentence like (44) could not be used without the pro-copula *hu*. In other words, it seems that cases of Specification are a preferred context for the use of the particle copula in this language. Cf.:

(44) *Modern Hebrew:*
Yeled hu yicur mufla
boy 3SG.MASC creature wonderful
'A boy is a wonderful creature' (Li & Thompson 1976:428)

Similar observations can be made for Maltese. Borg (1987) notes that the zero strategy may always be selected for predicate nominals, but that the particle copula appears to be limited to sentences which express Specification or Identification. Thus, in a sentence like (45a) or (45b), which express a characterization in terms of a hyponimic relation between subject and predicate, the particle copula is readily admitted. Likewise, an identity statement like (45c) may feature the particle copula. In contrast to this, for sentences like (45d) and (45e), which designate Class Membership or have a descriptive function, it is dubious whether or not they can permit the particle copula. Cf.:

(45) *Maltese:*
a. Malta hi gżira
   M. 3SG.FEM island
   'Malta is an island'
b. Il -giżimina hi fjura
   ART -jasmine 3SG.FEM flower
   'Jasmines are flowers'
c. Pietru hu l -eżaminatur
   P. 3SG.MASC ART -examiner
   'Peter is the examiner'
d. ?Ganni hu tabib
   G. 3SG.MASC doctor
   'John is a doctor'
e. ?*Ganni hu għazeb
   G. 3SG.MASC bachelor
   'John is a bachelor'

Although the Semitic languages constitute a textbook example of the use of a particle copula, it should not be thought that this strategy is exclusive to these languages. As a matter of fact, zero-particle switching for predicate nominals can be seen to occur in languages as diverse as Polish, Bengali (see Ferguson 1972), Classical Chinese (see Graham 1967), Buryat (Mongolian), Tolai (Melanesian), and Squamish (Salish). In all these cases, the general semantic pattern exhibited by the Semitic languages is adhered to. That is, in all these languages the primary use of the particle copula appears to lie in the encoding of specificational sentences, such as definitions and identity statements. Examples include:

(46) *Polish:*
Warszawa to stolica Polski
W. PROCOP capital Poland-GEN
'Warsaw is the capital of Poland' (Stone 1980:22)

(47) *Buryat:*
Xelen geese oloniitiin uzegdel jum
language SUBJ social phenomenon PROCOP
'Language is a social phenomenon' (Comrie 1981:87)

(48) *Tolai:*
A aqelo ia ra tultul kai Deo
ART angel PROCOP ART messenger GEN God
'An angel is a messenger of God' (Bley 1912:69)

(49) *Squamish:*
Nil n -kupic ti'wa
PROCOP my -elder brother that-one
'That's my elder brother'(Kuipers 1967:144)

5. Strategies for adjectival predicates

In the two preceding sections, we have encountered four different Present Tense strategies of nonverbal predicate encoding in Maltese. To be specific, we have distinguished

a) the zero-strategy, which can be employed without restrictions for predicate nominals and locationals alike;

b) the *jinsab*-strategy, which can be used optionally for predicate locationals, but never for predicate nominals;

c) the *qieghed*-strategy, which can be used optionally for predicate locationals, and can be employed for predicate nominals under the Permanency Parameter;

d) the particle-strategy, which can never be used for predicate locationals, and which encodes predicate nominals under the Specification Parameter.

Thus, schematically these four strategies and their employment conditions can be represented by the following chart:

(50) NON-VERBAL STRATEGIES IN MALTESE

	Zero	Jinsab	Qieghed	Particle
Nominal	+	-	+ (Perm)	+ (Spec)
Locational	+	+	+	-

Turning now to the encoding of predicate adjectives (i.e., predicates which ascribe a property to their subjects), we can observe that all these

four strategies are applicable to at least some subset of adjectival items. Again, the zero-strategy has the most extensive range of application here. As is shown by the sentences in (51), all sorts of adjectival items can occur with a zero copula in the Present Tense:

(51) *Maltese:*
a. Mart is -sultan marida
wife-CONSTR ART -sultan ill-SG.FEM
'The sultan's wife is ill'
b. It -tifel kwiet
ART -boy quiet
'The boy is quiet'
c. Ix -xadin ghajjur
ART -monkey jealous
'The monkey is jealous'
d. It -Taljan hafif
ART -Italian easy
'Italian is easy'
e. Il -hall qares
ART -vinegar sour
'The vinegar is sour'
f. L -istudent bravu
ART -student clever
'The student is clever'
g. L -arblu qasir
ART -pole short
'The pole is short'
h. Dit -triq usa'
DEM -road wide-FEM.SG
'This road is wide'
i. Is-silg abjad
ART-snow white
'The snow is white'
j. Il-bieb maqful
ART-door locked
'The door is locked'

Now, while predicative adjectives show homogeneous behaviour with respect to the zero-strategy, the category can be seen to fall apart into sub-classes once other encoding strategies are considered. First, there is a subclass in which all three other encoding strategies are equally permitted. To this class belong items like *kwiet* 'quiet' and *ghajjur* 'jealous'. Thus, the three sentences are all acceptable:

(52) *Maltese*:

a. It   -tifel   hu   kwiet
   ART   -boy   3SG.MASC   quiet
   'The boy is quiet'

b. It   -tifel   qieghed   kwiet
   ART   -boy   be-MASC.SG   quiet
   'The boy is quiet'

c. It   -tifel   jinsab   kwiet
   ART   -boy   be-3SG.MASC   quiet
   'The boy is quiet'

There is, however, a marked semantic difference between the three options in (52). This difference can be stated in terms of a principle which we have encountered in Section 3, viz., the Permanency Parameter. Thus, sentence (52a), which exhibits the particle copula, implies a permanent or time-stable reading of the predicative adjective: the sentence means that the boy is quiet in general, i.e., that he has a quiet disposition. In contrast, the other two sentences, which contain a locational support item, both convey a temporary or contingent meaning. The difference between these two locational encodings is hard to state exactly, but it seems that sentence (52b), which contains the item *qieghed*, carries with it the connotation that "the boy is playing at being quiet" (Borg, 1987:69). This semantic nuance is absent from the *jinsab*-sentence (52c), which merely implies that "the boy happens to be in a quiet state but it could very well have been otherwise" (Borg, ibid.).

The sentences in (52) demonstrate that at least some subclass of Maltese adjectives has the possibility to switch between a nominal encoding (with the particle copula) and a locational encoding (with the two locational support items). Furthermore, it has been shown that Maltese conforms to a general principle of adjectival predicate encoding, which can be stated as follows:

(53) GENERAL PRINCIPLE OF ADJECTIVE ENCODING:

If adjectives switch between a nominal encoding and a locational encoding, the nominal option will imply a time-stable reading, while the locational encoding will imply a time-unstable reading.

The principle in (53) is corroborated by data from a great variety of languages. Perhaps the best-known example in this connection is Spanish. In this language, predicative adjectives can be constructed with the support verb *ser*, which is also the copula for predicate nominals.

Alternatively, predicative adjectives occur with the support verb *estar*, which is the unmarked encoding for predicate locationals. Adjectives in *ser*-sentences have a reading of permanency, whereas encoding with *estar* implies a temporary or contingent state. Cf.:

(54) *Spanish*:

a. Antonio   es   loco
   A.   COP-3SG.PRES   crazy
   'Antonio is crazy'   (Hengeveld 1986:396)

b. Antonio   esta   loco
   A.   be-3SG.PRES   crazy
   'Antonio is being silly'   (Hengeveld 1986:396)

Examples of adjectival switching between nominal and locational encoding which parallel Maltese and Spanish in all relevant respects can be found in Modern Irish, Scottish Gaelic, and Southern Basque:

(55) *Modern Irish*:

a. Is   muinteor   é
   COP-PRES   teacher   he
   'He is a teacher'   (Greene 1966:40)

b. Is   breoite   é
   COP-PRES   ill   he
   'He is ill (permanently)'   (Greene 1966:43)

c. Ta   se   sa   tseomra
   be-PRES   he   in-the   room
   'He is in the room'   (Greene 1966:43)

d. Ta   se   breoite
   be-PRES   he   ill
   'He is ill (now)'   (Greene 1966:43)

(56) *Scottish Gaelic*:

a. Is   bean-tighe   i   sin
   COP-PRES   house-wife   she   that
   'She is a house-wife'   (Anderson 1909:441)

b. Is   laidir   é
   COP-PRES   strong   he
   'He is strong (permanently)'   (Anderson 1909:236)

c. Tha   Seonaid   aig   an   taigh
   be-PRES   S.   at   the   house
   'Seonaid is at home'   (Mackinnon 1977:227)

d. Tha   é   laidir
   be-PRES   he   strong
   'He is strong (now)'   (Mackinnon 1977:227)

(56) *Southern Basque:*

a. Hura   gizon   -a   d   3SG.ABS-COP   -a
   3SG.ABS man   -ABS.SG   -PRES
   'He is a man' (Saltarelli 1988:150)

b. Gela hau hotz -a   d   3SG.ABS-COP   -a
   room this hot   -ABS.SG   -PRES
   'This room is hot (permanently)' (Saltarelli 1988:248)

c. Gizon -a   kale -an   d   3SG.ABS-be   -ago
   man -ABS.SG street -LOC   -PRES
   'The man is in the street' (Saltarelli 1988:ii)

d. Gela hau hotz -a   d   3SG.ABS-be   -ago
   room this hot   -ABS.SG   -PRES
   'This room is hot (for now)' (Saltarelli 1988:248)

In this connection, we can also point to languages from the "Baltic Sprachbund", such as Finnish, Estonian, Lithuanian and Polish. In these languages, the support verb for predicative adjectives is invariable: it is a verb which serves both as the copula for predicate nominals and as the support verb for locational predicates. However, when this verb is complemented by a predicative adjective, there are two possibilities. The predicative adjective can be either in the Nominative Case (just like predicate nominals) or in an oblique case (just like predicate locationals). The nominative case for predicative adjectives implies permanency, while the oblique case forces a contingent interpretation. Thus, we can say that these languages conform to principle (53), although the way in which this principle manifests itself in these languages is different from the strategy chosen in Maltese and Spanish. Cf.:

(57) *Polish:*

a. Dom   jest   nowy
   house-SG.NOM be-3SG.PRES   new-MASC.SG.NOM
   'The house is new' (Meckelein 1926:45)

b. Moj brat   jest   chorym
   my brother-SG.NOM be-3SG.PRES   ill-MASC.SG.INSTR
   'My brother is ill (for now)' (Meckelein 1926:125)

(58) *Estonian:*

a. Asad   on   halvad
   thing-PL.NOM   be-3PL.PRES   bad-PL.NOM
   'Things are bad' (Lehiste 1972:224)

b. Asad   on   halvasti
   thing-PL.NOM   be-3PL.PRES   bad-ADV
   'Things are badly (i.e., are going badly, are in a bad state)' (Lehiste 1972:224)

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(59) *Finnish:*

a. Tytto   on   pieni
   girl-SG.NOM be-3SG.PRES   small-SG.NOM
   'The girl is small' (Fromm & Sadeniemi 1956:116)

b. Hän   on   sairaa -nä
   3SG.MASC be-3SG.PRES   sick   -ESSIVE
   'He is (temporarily) sick' (Fromm & Sadeniemi 1956:116)

(60) *Lithuanian:*

a. Tai buvo   grazu
   that be-3SG.PAST beautiful-MASC.SG.NOM
   'That was beautiful' (Senn 1966:482)

b. Buvo   turtingu
   be-3SG.PAST rich-MASC.SG.INSTR
   'He was rich (for a while)' (Senn 1966:429)

Given that the encoding of predicative adjectives in Maltese is sensitive to the general principle (50), we can make a number of predictions about other subclasses of adjectives in this language. Thus, we would predict that adjectives which, from their lexical meaning, do not lend themselves easily to a contingent interpretation should not be able to be encoded by the locational items *qiegħed* and *jinsab*. Alternatively, predicative adjectives which, from their meaning alone, can hardly be interpreted as indicating a permanent state should not allow an encoding by the nominal particle copula. Both of these predictions are corroborated by the data. As the sentences in (61)-(64) illustrate, predicative adjectives with meanings like "clever", "short", "white" or "wide" allow the particle copula, but are unacceptable when constructed with either of the two locational support items. Clearly, this fact must be connected to the lexical meaning of these items; one can hardly imagine situations in which objects are temporarily short or wide.

(61) *Maltese:*

a. L -istudent   hu   bravu
   ART -student   3SG.MASC clever
   'The student is clever'

b. * L-istudent qiegħed/jinsab bravu

(62) *Maltese:*

a. L -arblu hu   qasir
   ART -pole 3SG.MASC short
   'The pole is short'

b. * L-arblu qiegħed/jinsab qasir

(63) *Maltese:*

a. Is -silġ hu abjad
    ART -snow 3SG.MASC white
    'The snow is white'

b. * Is-silġ qiegħed/jinsab abjad

(64) *Maltese:*

a. Dit -triq hija usa'
    DEM -road 3SG.FEM wide-SG.FEM
    'This road is wide'

b. * Dit-triq qiegħed/jinsab usa'

Opposed to the adjectives in the above sentences, an adjective like *marid* 'ill, sick' is naturally perceived as indicating a temporary situation. Sentences (65a-c) illustrate that this semantic fact is matched by formal restrictions on the predicative encoding of this item. In particular, the particle copula is excluded, while both locational options are admissible. Selection of the *qiegħed*-alternative is somewhat unusual, in that it implies that the subject is not really sick, but just acting:

(65) *Maltese:*

a. * It -tifel hu marid

b. It -tifel jinsab marid
    ART -boy 3SG.MASC-be-PRES sick
    'The boy is sick'

c. It -tifel qiegħed marid
    ART -boy be-SG.MASC sick
    'The boy is playing at being sick'

Finally, there are predicative adjectives which allow both the particle copula and the *jinsab*-locational, but not the *qiegħed*-locational. An instance of such a case is the item *maqful* "locked". The semantics of this item allow both a permanent and a temporary interpretation. However, the specific "make-belief" interpretation associated with *qiegħed* is of course very improbable with an item like this.

(66) *Maltese:*

a. Il -bieb hu maqful
    ART -door 3SG.MASC locked
    "The door is locked (usually)"

b. Il -bieb jinsab maqful
    ART -door 3SG.MASC-be-PRES locked
    "The door is locked (at this moment)"

c. * Il-bieb qiegħed maqful

Summing up, we can say that predicative adjective encoding in Maltese allows for:

a) a general neutral strategy, viz. the zero-strategy, which is permitted for all adjectival predicates, and

b) explicit nominal or locational strategies, which are distributed over the category of adjectives in accordance with the general principle formulated in (50).

As a result of this situation, predicative adjectives in Maltese can be said to allow a zero-nominal switching, a zero-locational switching, or both. Depending on what kind of switching or switchings an item allows, predicative adjectives in Maltese can be divided into a number of subclasses. These subclasses can be shown to be motivated on the basis of a semantic factor, viz., the degree of time-stability which is inherent to the meaning of each separate lexical item. In this way, the subclassification of predicative adjectives in Maltese can be viewed as an illustration of the universal Time-Stability Hierarchy of Adjectival Subclasses, as set up by Dixon (1977) and refined by Pustet (1989). This hierarchy claims, among other things, that Human Propensity predicates like "sick", "jealous", or "angry", are less time-stable than, say, Physical predicates like "strong" and "wide" or Colour predicates like "white", and that they will therefore be less likely to be encoded by a nominal strategy. As the above examples demonstrate, this prediction is borne out fully by the facts of Maltese.

6. Conclusion

The above exposition has looked at nonverbal predication in Maltese from the point of view of linguistic typology. I have tried to make it clear that this language forms a very instructive case for those who seek a general insight in the universal characteristics of nonverbal predicate encoding in natural language. To be sure, none of the features which Maltese nonverbal predication exhibits are completely unique to that language. For every distinction and switching in Maltese, parallels with other languages can be attested. What makes Maltese remarkable in this respect is the semantic transparency manifested by its nonverbal encoding system. I hope to have shown that practically all known parameters which characterize the universal make-up of that system have their explicit formal reflection in Maltese. Clearly, then, for those who like switching, Malta is the place to go.

Address of the author:

Department of General Linguistics and Dialectology, University of Nijmegen, 6525 GG Nijmegen, The Netherlands, l.stassen@iet.kun.nl

Note

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