# Domains of the dual, in Maltese and in general

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The dual in Maltese does not extend beyond nouns and is in fact limited to a small subset of them, comprising traditional counting and measuring units and a few familiar objects frequently counted. This is a domain which is unusual. In order to put Maltese in perspective, the possible domains of duals are surveyed across languages, in terms of the word classes of nouns and personal pronouns and their subclasses, and the typological potential of this taxonomy is explored.

1.  Maltese has a dual in reasonably good grammatical standing, expressed by the suffix *-ejn* / *-ajn* – or at any rate Standard Maltese has, while today's loose talk and journalistic sloth has almost let it lapse, favouring the numeral 'two' in combination with the plural instead.

This is not too unusual a possession but one shared by up to half, and not less than a third, of the world's languages, according to a recent census (Schellinger 1995a). Indeed, there are only a very few linguistic families and areas unacquainted with this category of number, now or in their known past. As in Maltese, a dual is retained in about half of the Semitic branch of the Afroasiatic family, which in its entirety is somewhat less hospitable to it, though; and the European neighbourhood and tenantry of Malta has not, for a while, been the most fertile soil for duals either.

2.  What is fairly unusual about the Maltese dual is its domain. While (count) nouns as well as personal pronouns inflect for singular and plural, disregarding agreement,[1] only nouns inflect for the dual.

On the evidence of a survey of 205 languages plus dialects of some 200 languages with a dual, or actually some 200 languages plus dialects of a few of them with dual patterns of their own,[2] it is more common for nouns to be refused a dual than to be granted one (see Table 1), while for personal pronouns it is vastly more common to have than to lack a dual (Table 2). As to the relationship between these two domains (Table 3), it is most common for the dual to be in fact limited to personal pronouns, and second-most common for it to extend to both personal pronouns and nouns; its limitation to nouns is exceedingly rare – and, apart from Maltese, is only attested in Önge (Andamanese), Gadsup, Awa (both Papuan), Pintupi (Australian), Hopi

(Uto-Aztecan), Biblical Aramaic, Israeli Hebrew, Akkadian, Daragözü Arabic, and Eastern Libyan Arabic in the present 205-sample, with Semitic thus the most prolific supplier.

**Table 1.**

| dual with nouns | number of languages | per cent |
|---|---|---|
| + | 87 | 42.4% |
| – | 118 | 57.6% |

**Table 2.**

| dual with independent personal pronouns | number of languages | per cent |
|---|---|---|
| + | 182 | 89.2% |
| – | 22 | 10.8% |

Note to Table 2: One of the 205 languages in the sample lacks independent pronouns, hence the sum total of only 204.

**Table 3.**

| pronominal dual | nominal dual | number of languages | per cent |
|---|---|---|---|
| + | + | 75 | 36.8% |
| + | – | 107 | 52.4% |
| – | + | 12 | 5.9% |
| – | – | 10 | 4.9% |

Note to Table 3: Ten languages in the sample have their duals elsewhere.

The minority pattern of an exclusively nominal dual would seem to be without a plural analogue: plurals show more restraint, and apparently never prefer nouns and shun personal pronouns entirely. And this presumably goes for such rarer numbers as trials and quattrals too, although not necessarily for paucals and multals.

3. Not only does the Maltese dual not extend beyond nouns, but it is even further limited within this single domain. This is not unheard of elsewhere, although it is not standard practice either. Most of the 86 languages in the 205-sample with nouns

as a domain of the dual, possibly among other domains, do not categorically withhold it from any noun susceptible to number marking, although they do not necessarily employ it obligatorily at any time that reference is being made to two (see §9). Less than a third of nominal duals are subject to further limitations (Table 4), among them that of Maltese. Since the productiveness of duals is prone to be exaggerated, and too little information is sometimes given in our sources to be sure which nominal subsets they are really at home in, these figures may err on the side of generosity towards all-nouns duals.

**Table 4.**

| dual with nouns (regardless of other domains) | number of languages | per cent |
|---|---|---|
| all nouns | 57 | 65.5% |
| some nouns | 26 | 29.9% |
| no information | 4 | 4.6% |

Taking a differential look at the languages where a nominal dual coexists with a pronominal dual (Table 5) and where it does not (Table 6), we see that it is only in the former case, with the dual domain more comprehensive, that the all-nouns option predominates. In the minority pattern of an exclusively nominal dual it is more common[3] for the dual to be limited to a subset of nouns – and this is where Maltese belongs, standing out less when in its proper company, then.

**Table 5.**

| dual with nouns (and with personal pronouns) | number of languages | per cent |
|---|---|---|
| all nouns | 52 | 69.3% |
| some nouns | 19 | 25.3% |
| no information | 4 | 5.3% |

**Table 6.**

| dual with nouns (and not with personal pronouns) | number of languages | per cent |
|---|---|---|
| all nouns | 5 | 41.7% |
| some nouns | 7 | 58.3% |
| no information | 0 | 0.0% |

4.    Minimally, only nouns for common time periods (such as 'day' and 'week') and round numbers (such as 'hundred' and 'thousand') retain the genuine dual in the most advanced, Anglo-Italified varieties of Maltese. In the more conservative language these are joined by nouns for traditional weights, measures, and coins and for familiar small objects, especially foodstuff – things that tend to come in small quantities and are frequently counted, especially in everyday commercial transactions (pseudo-duals have dual form but plural meaning, and are therefore ignored here; their domain is twin body-parts).[4]

This is a highly unusual subset indeed to be singled out for a nominal dual, although not an entirely implausible one. When duals are limited to subsets of nouns, these are not normally chosen at random. There are essentially only three parameters involved here, one doubly, and they divide up (count) nouns by their meaning. The first is to do with individuality or animacy, with nouns for persons and perhaps animals most eligible for dual marking, ignoring subtler partitions of this by now familiar continuum. A second potentially privileged subset are nouns denoting natural pairs – especially paired body-parts (such as eyes, hands, horns, or lungs) and kin dyads (such as parents), but perhaps also artifactual couples (such as door posts). Less commonly, natural pairs may also receive the opposite special treatment of being denied the dual marking that other count nouns are getting. Lastly, nouns denoting standard counting or measuring units or familiar objects frequently counted in small quantities – subsequently referred to summarily as 'countees' – may also distinguish themselves as recipients of the dual.

Table 7 summarizes how popular these four subsets are among the 25 languages, out of 205, that have a dual on nouns but not on all of them. As the sum total of languages suggests (and we also lack reliable information in several cases, not included here), it is possible for a single language to have more than one dual preference among nouns. Thus, some permit the dual to both animates and natural pairs; and while the dual is restricted to countees in Maltese, it also covers natural pairs in Akkadian and Israeli Hebrew.

**Table 7.**

| limited nominal dual (regardless of other domains) | number of languages | per cent |
|---|---|---|
| animates | 16 | 51.6% |
| pairs | 10 | 32.3% |
| non-pairs | 2 | 6.4% |
| countees | 3 | 9.7% |

Although absolute numbers are getting precariously small, it is instructive again to differentiate between languages where a dual on some (but not all) nouns is accompanied by a pronominal dual (18 languages; Table 8) and ones where it is not (seven languages; Table 9). The coexistence with a pronominal dual favours an animacy preference and disfavours a preference for natural pairs, while with a purely nominal dual it is the other way round. The overall minority patterns are also distributed inversely, with non-pairs standing out only when personal pronouns also inflect for dual, and with countees only when they do not.

**Table 8.**

| limited nominal dual (dual also with personal pronouns) | number of languages | per cent |
|---|---|---|
| animates | 14 | 66.7% |
| pairs | 5 | 23.8% |
| non-pairs | 2 | 9.5% |
| countees | 0 | 0.0% |

**Table 9.**

| limited nominal dual (no dual with personal pronouns) | number of languages | per cent |
|---|---|---|
| animates | 2 | 20.0% |
| pairs | 5 | 50.0% |
| non-pairs | 0 | 0.0% |
| countees | 3 | 30.0% |

Dual preferences in terms of animacy are reminiscent of how singular and plural are wont to stake out their domain.[5] Although the dual may thus follow in the footsteps of these two major numbers, it may also go its own ways, demonstrating superior versatility, and perhaps a certain lack of homogeneity vis-à-vis other numbers. Since Humboldt (1830) natural pairs have been recognized as an archetypical domain of the dual, and one not shared with other numbers. It was only pointed out by Jespersen (1924: 205) about a century later that pair nouns may alternatively be taken for the ones most undeserving of dual marking, owing to its predictability. In the present sample a dual preference for nouns other than those denoting natural pairs is only exemplified twice, by Nama Hottentot (Khoisan) and Selkup (or Ostyak Samoyed, Uralic);

languages it is hard to say whether it is any particular subsets of dualworthy nouns that are responsible for such statistical implications. Only binary demonstrative systems are ever found, in the 205-sample, when the dual preference is for countee nouns – but this only happens in three languages, all of them Semitic. The tendency towards VSO is most marked when only natural pairs get a dual – but this may again be a genetic link rather than a typological one, holding above all within Semitic.

7. Where correlations might also be expected, and have indeed been postulated, is between limitations within the two chief domains of the dual, for it is not always all persons which are eligible either.

However, looked at globally, there is actually little one can tell about limited or unlimited nominal duals from the pronominal dual being limited or unlimited, and vice versa. In the 75 languages with duals extending to both domains in the 205-sample it is most common for both the pronominal and the nominal dual to be unlimited, with an unlimited pronominal and limited nominal dual following at some distance, and with simultaneous limitations in both domains an even less frequent constellation than a limited pronominal and unlimited nominal dual (Table 10).

**Table 10.**

| pronominal dual | nominal dual | number of languages | per cent |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| all persons | all nouns | 47 | 62.7% |
| all persons | some nouns | 17 | 22.7% |
| all persons | no information | 4 | 5.3% |
| some persons | all nouns | 5 | 6.7% |
| some persons | some nouns | 1 | 1.3% |
| some persons | no information | 0 | 0.0% |
| no information | all nouns | 0 | 0.0% |
| no information | some nouns | 1 | 1.3% |
| no information | no information | 0 | 0.0% |

Interpreting the figures in Table 10, one can conclude that limitations are more than twice as likely in the nominal than in the pronominal domain, and most unlikely to hit both at the same time – which does not really square with the expectation of some parallelism across domains.

Also, when only some personal pronouns have a dual (as they have in six of these languages), unlimited nominal duals predominate over

but Ancient Greek (Indo-European), questionably classed as all-nouns dual, also shows a marked disinclination to use its dual with natural pairs (other than 'eyes'), normally resorting to the plural here. The dual preference for standard counting units and familiar objects frequently counted was overlooked even in such a comprehensive survey as Plank (1989).[6] Being apparently a family matter, it has not so far been found attested outside Semitic, where exclusively nominal duals are worldwide most popular.

5. The preceding sections have been devoted to outlining a taxonomy of the possible domains of the dual, and to situating the Maltese dual within it. Now, however enlightening in their own light (and the different dual preferences for subsets of nouns, partly coextensive with that holding for singular and plural and partly idiosyncratic, are not really trivial, judging by the time it has taken them to be uncovered), taxonomies are only the starting point of typologies, which are founded upon correlations between taxonomies. What typologists will be interested in, therefore, is whether anything else follows from the way a dual's domain is delimited, or whether dual domains are in turn implied by anything else.

6. One possible lead in this search for implications has already been hinted at twice. Limiting the dual to nouns to the exclusion of personal pronouns favours its further limitation to subsets of nouns (§3) and in particular to that of natural pairs or also that of countees (§4), while pronominal duals feel happiest with unrestricted nominal duals or ones confined to the upper echelons of the animacy hierarchy.

This ties in with previous findings that there is an option for languages selectively to elaborate either pronominal or nominal inflection, with the latter the less common alternative (Plank 1990). Those languages that limit the dual to nouns are less likely than those extending it to personal pronouns, or even limiting it to these, to distinguish inclusive and exclusive 1st person and to expand the system of demonstratives beyond the binary deictic opposition of proximal and distal. The limitation of the dual to nouns also precludes trials and quattrals, which are purely pronominal numbers and imply a pronominal dual. More surprisingly, an exclusively nominal dual favours VSO and disfavours SVO, thus making its influence felt even in the alien area of basic word order.

In all these respects, except its inclination towards SVO, Maltese is thus a good specimen of such a 'nominal' type.

Owing to the small numbers and genetic clustering of the relevant

limited ones even more clearly (83.3% : 16.7%) than when all personal pronouns have a dual (68 languages, with information on nominal limitations missing in four; 73.4% : 26.6%). Equally unpromisingly, when only some nouns have a dual (19 languages, with information on pronominal limitations missing in one of them), unlimited pronominal duals predominate over limited ones even more clearly (94.4% : 5.6%) than when all nouns have a dual (52 languages; 90.4% : 9.6%).

Thus, limitations of the pronominal and nominal domains as such do not really proceed in parallel. Though disappointing for implications hunters, this negative result is grist to the mills of those who have their doubts about the homogeneity of the dual.

8. Nevertheless, there are certain semantic themes connecting the pronominal and the nominal domain, viz. pairhood and animacy, and comparing dual limitations in such terms rather than globally might still yield interdependencies, as has been conjectured in Fontinoy (1969: 18-19, 201-202) and, less wildly, Plank (1989: 310-312).

One possible preference in the nominal domain is for natural pairs. Since the pronominal domain too hosts what is as natural a pair as any, viz. that of speaker and addressee (which Humboldt 1830 has made so much of), there is a limitation that might easily be shared by the two domains. Accordingly, limitations of the pronominal dual to speaker-and-addressee forms – i.e. to 1st person or, if inclusive is distinguished from exclusive, to 1st person inclusive – should be conducive to limitations of the nominal dual to natural pairs, and vice versa.

As Table 11 shows, the percentage of natural-pair duals is indeed slightly higher when the the speaker-addressee pair alone is eligible for the pronominal dual than when all persons or other subsets are, here considered collectively; but this advantage is due to a single language – Moro (Kordofanian). And it is also true, albeit not very impressively so in numerical terms either, that a pronominal dual limited to 1st person or 1st person inclusive is the only one to prohibit a limitation of the nominal dual to subsets other than natural pairs. The only really substantial outcome of these comparisons, however, is that a pronominal dual limited to 1st person or 1st person inclusive differs from other pronominal duals in the extent to which it disfavours a nominal dual, and especially one not limited to subsets of nouns.

Analogously, as is seen in Table 12, it would indeed be true to say that the pronominal dual is more frequently limited to 1st person (inclusive) when its nominal counterpart prefers natural pairs than when all nouns or other subsets inflect for the dual. Only a natural-pair preference of the nominal dual authorizes a limitation of the pronominal

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dual to 1st person or 1st person inclusive; but again, there is only a single language that does what it is allowed to do – good old Moro. What is numerically less insignificant, as well as less expected from a Humboldtian perspective, is that a dual with a preference for natural pairs, more than any other nominal kind, disfavours a pronominal dual, and especially one extending to all persons.

**Table 11.**

| pronominal dual | nominal dual | number of languages | per cent |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1st person (inclusive) only | no nouns | 26 | 96.3% |
| 1st person (inclusive) only | all nouns | 0 | 0.0% |
| 1st person (inclusive) only | natural pairs | 1 | 3.7% |
| 1st person (inclusive) only | other subsets | 0 | 0.0% |
| all others | no nouns | 81 | 52.3% |
| all others | all nouns | 52 | 33.5% |
| all others | natural pairs | 4 | 2.6% |
| all others | other subsets | 12 | 7.7% |
| all others | no information | 6 | 3.9% |

**Table 12.**

| nominal dual | pronominal dual | number of languages | per cent |
|---|---|---|---|
| natural pairs | no person | 5 | 50.0% |
| natural pairs | all persons | 3 | 30.0% |
| natural pairs | 1st person (inclusive) only | 1 | 10.0% |
| natural pairs | all others | 1 | 10.0% |
| all others | no person | 7 | 9.6% |
| all others | all persons | 58 | 79.4% |
| all others | 1st person (inclusive) only | 0 | 0.0% |
| all others | all others | 8 | 11.0% |
| no information | | 4 | |

The animacy hierarchy ranks 1st and 2nd person pronouns above 3rd person pronouns (and equivalent demonstratives), nouns denoting persons and other living things above inanimate nouns, and personal pronouns above nouns. Grammatical patterns constrained in terms of

animacy are supposed to pick contiguous patches on this hierarchy, and number marking supposedly starts at its top. Now, if nominal duals show a preference for persons and perhaps further animates, this is exactly what the animacy hierarchy requests for this domain when it is not covered exhaustively; and the expectation would then be that number marking can only reach down into the upper ranks of the nominal domain if it covers the pronominal domain completely, without skipping a single person. This, at any rate, is what normally happens with plurals.[7]

Confirming this expectation also for the dual, Table 13 has the highest percentages of all-persons pronominal duals and the lowest of limited pronominal duals – in fact zero – when nouns limit the dual to animates, disregarding those languages where reliable information about the domain of the nominal dual is missing. It is not surprising that all-persons pronominal duals are only slightly less popular in the company of all-nouns nominal duals, because it is also in line with the animacy hierarchy, if vacuously, that the domain of (count) nouns is covered completely. Dual preferences for subsets of nouns other than animates do not abide by the animacy hierarchy in the first place, and nothing can therefore be predicted about pronominal duals on this basis; it is encouraging, though, that all-persons duals do not do very well here.

**Table 13.**

| nominal dual | pronominal dual | number of languages | per cent |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| all nouns | *all persons* | 47 | 82.4% |
| all nouns | subsets of persons | 5 | 8.8% |
| all nouns | no persons | 5 | 8.8% |
| animates | *all persons* | 14 | 87.5% |
| animates | subsets of persons | 0 | 0.0% |
| animates | no persons | 2 | 12.5% |
| other subsets | *all persons* | 2 | 22.2% |
| other subsets | subsets of persons | 1 | 11.1% |
| other subsets | no persons | 5 | 55.6% |
| other subsets | no information | 1 | 11.1% |
| no information | *all persons* | 4 | 100.0% |
| no information | subsets of persons | 0 | 0.0% |
| no information | no persons | 0 | 0.0% |

Note to Table 13: Languages with a nominal dual on animates and other subsets are only included in the 'animates' group.

This account of the correlations between pronominal and nominal domains of duals faces a difficulty, however, when those nominal duals that are in accordance with the animacy hierarchy – especially those limited to animates but also those unlimited – are unaccompanied by any pronominal duals, as they are in five languages with all-nouns duals (Önge, Awa, Gadsup, Daragözü Arabic, Eastern Libyan Arabic) and two with animates duals (Hopi, Akkadian). While the eligibility of nouns for the singular-plural opposition implies that of pronouns, the nominal domain, which comes only after the pronominal one when progressing through the animacy hierarchy top-down, may evidently enjoy some autonomy with respect to the dual, and even such duals as prefer animate nouns.

It is 3rd person which mediates between the pronominal and nominal domains. It is very hard for any nouns to become eligible for dual marking when a pronominal dual does not extend to 3rd person (see Table 14, which confirms a claim made in Plank 1989: 310, (18)). Since, as we have just seen, nouns may even provide a unique home for duals with an animacy preference, it is tempting to assume (with Forchheimer 1953 or Plank 1989: 311) that 3rd person is also the pivot of dual extensions in the opposite, bottom-up direction, enabling a nominal dual to enter the superior pronominal domain. However, there is little cross-linguistic evidence for 3rd person and nouns, animates or all, forming a natural class of dualworthy items.[8] Thus, in the 205-sample only five languages limit their pronominal dual to 3rd person, and in only one of them – Ugaritic (again from the Semitic branch of Afroasiatic) – do nouns have a dual too, while in Melanau, Kelabit (both Austronesian), Zuni (Penutian), and Wappo (Yukian) they do not. Also, of the five languages that have a dual on all nouns but limit their pronominal dual (recorded in Table 13), only one limits it to 3rd person – Ugaritic –, while Aleut (Eskimo-Aleut), Auca, Trumai (both Andean-Equatorial), and Kewa (Papuan) favour other persons.

**Table 14.**

| pronominal dual on 3rd person | nominal dual | number of languages | per cent |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| + | + | 64 | 38.3% |
| + | - | 68 | 40.7% |
| - | + | 2 | 1.2% |
| - | - | 33 | 19.8% |

9. Duals do not necessarily have to be used whenever reference is being made to two; sometimes they are only optional, with plurals or even singulars also capable of performing the same quantificational duties, at least under certain circumstances. This is exemplified by Maltese, where nouns that have a dual are in the plural when accompanied by 'two' (and there in turn is no numeral when such nouns are in the dual). Although reliable information on the obligatoriness or optionality of duals is not always easy to obtain, there is some evidence of a correlation with the domains of the dual.

Comparing the ratios of obligatory and optional duals in the entire 205-sample and in various subsamples defined in terms of dual domains, there emerge some differences. Overall, duals prefer to be used obligatorily (Table 15), and this tendency is strongest when duals are limited to personal pronouns (Table 17).[9] When duals are limited to nouns, however, there is no clear preference one way or the other (Table 18).[10] So far, this would suggest that the pronominal domain favours the obligatory use of the dual, while in the nominal domain duals are more inclined to be employed optionally. It is the figures in Table 16 which are difficult to reconcile with this generalization: here we get the highest percentage of optional dual users, although the dual is not in fact confined to the nominal domain but extends to personal pronouns as well.

It is conceivable that duals are obligatory with pronouns and optional with nouns in one and the same language (or vice versa, although this is unlikely), but currently our database unfortunately lumps these two word-classes for purposes of this question.

**Table 15.**

| usage of dual (total sample) | number of languages | per cent |
|---|---|---|
| obligatory | 99 | 48.3% |
| optional | 48 | 23.4% |
| no information | 58 | 28.3% |

**Table 16.**

| usage of dual (pronominal and nominal dual) | number of languages | per cent |
|---|---|---|
| obligatory | 22 | 29.3% |
| optional | 30 | 40.0% |
| no information | 23 | 30.7% |

**Table 17.**

| usage of dual (only pronominal dual) | number of languages | per cent |
|---|---|---|
| obligatory | 66 | 61.7% |
| optional | 10 | 9.3% |
| no information | 31 | 29.0% |

**Table 18.**

| usage of dual (only nominal dual) | number of languages | per cent |
|---|---|---|
| obligatory | 5 | 41.7% |
| optional | 5 | 41.7% |
| no information | 2 | 16.7% |

When duals are not used obligatorily, plurals or also paucals would generally seem to be the most plausible numbers to fall back on, although there are circumstances, such as the presence of a numeral 'two' or a quantifier 'both', where the singular or a number-neutral basic form appears equally appropriate.[11] The domain of the dual is again an influence on which number is the preferred alternative, insofar as languages that limit the dual to nouns are especially averse to using it interchangeably with the singular; and this aversion is strongest when only subsets of nouns are dualworthy. The evidence currently available is still sketchy, but when our subsamples for non-obligatory nominal and pronominal dual on the one hand and for non-obligatory exclusively nominal dual on the other are compared, the singular does far worse as preferred alternative in the second group (ignoring the all-nouns vs. some-nouns distinction), in general (Tables 19 and 20) and also, and indeed most strikingly, when nouns are in the company of 'two' or 'both' (Tables 21 and 22).

**Table 19.**

| alternatives to non-obligatory dual (in languages with a nominal and pronominal dual) | number of languages | per cent |
|---|---|---|
| plural | 10 | 38.5% |
| singular | 16 | 61.5% |

**Table 20.**

| alternatives to non-obligatory dual (in languages with only a nominal dual) | number of languages | per cent |
|---|---|---|
| plural | 3 | 75.0% |
| singular | 1 | 25.0% |

**Table 21.**

| alternatives to non-obligatory nominal dual in construction with 'two/both' (in languages with a nominal and pronominal dual) | number of languages | per cent |
|---|---|---|
| plural | 4 | 17.4% |
| singular | 19 | 82.6% |

**Table 22.**

| alternatives to non-obligatory nominal dual in construction with 'two/both' (in languages with only a nominal dual) | number of languages | per cent |
|---|---|---|
| plural | 3 | 100.0% |
| singular | 0 | 0.0% |

To return to Maltese, it does what you can thus expect of a well-behaved language with duals limited to (subsets of) nouns – employ them optionally and resort to the plural as the preferred alternative.

10. The expression of dual and plural can be independent of each other, with both numbers adding an exponent of their own to a singular or other basic form of nouns or pronouns – as is the case in Maltese, with the added complexity that one plural allomorph, selected by natural-pair nouns, is identical to the dual suffix. Or one of these non-singular numbers can be based on the other, with the dual exponent added to the full plural form or vice versa.[12] (And the relevant lexical items and their various inflectional forms may also differ from one another in this respect within a language.) Now, when the domain of the dual, is known, the range of these options can be inflected for the dual, or indeed the word-class to be

narrowed down. With pronominal duals independent expression of dual and plural is generally favoured, but duals can also be formed from plurals and plurals from duals, with slightly different preferences depending on the coexistence of a nominal dual (Tables 23 and 24). With nouns, on the other hand, plurals have not been observed so far to be ever formed from duals, regardless of the coexistence or not of a pronominal dual (Tables 25 and 26). Independent expression is here even more unchallenged as the front-runner, and is in fact the only competitor when pronouns do without a dual.

**Table 23.**

| personal pronouns (in languages with nominal dual too) | number of languages | per cent |
|---|---|---|
| dual and plural independent | 64 | 76.2% |
| dual based on plural | 13 | 15.5% |
| plural based on dual | 7 | 8.3% |

**Table 24.**

| personal pronouns (in languages without nominal dual) | number of languages | per cent |
|---|---|---|
| dual and plural independent | 63 | 57.8% |
| dual based on plural | 20 | 18.3% |
| plural based on dual | 26 | 23.9% |

**Table 25.**

| nouns (in languages with pronominal dual too) | number of languages | per cent |
|---|---|---|
| dual and plural independent | 65 | 90.3% |
| dual based on plural | 7 | 9.7% |
| plural based on dual | 0 | 0.0% |

**Table 26.**

| nouns (in languages without pronominal dual) | number of languages | per cent |
|---|---|---|
| dual and plural independent | 11 | 100.0% |
| dual based on plural | 0 | 0.0% |
| plural based on dual | 0 | 0.0% |

*11.* To sum up, domains of the dual, as charted by the humble taxonomist, do matter to the typologist because there are correlations in which they figure. These are to do with interdependencies among subsets of words inflecting for the dual, with the obligatory or optional use of the dual, with its expression relative to that of the plural, with other inflectional categories, but also with such less likely strands as word order.

There is evidence to suggest that the dual is not such a homogeneous category as its fellow numbers. A distinction of some typological potential presumably is that between a dual centred on pronouns, which is in many respects akin to other numbers, and a nominal dual, with duals limited to natural pairs and countees (standard counting and measuring units and familiar objects handled in small quantities and frequently counted) as its prototypical representatives. There might yet be evidence that this distinction is ramifying even more widely.

*12.* Duals come and go, and their domains are expanding and contracting in time. Virtually none of the correlations suggested above were categorical, and they are therefore not imposing absolute constraints on change. Being only tendencies rather than laws, they may themselves be made sense of diachronically. But that would be another subject. The Maltese lesson, at any rate, is that two subsets of dualworthy nouns – pairs and countees – can easily shrink to one, however unusual.[13]

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*Notes*

[1] See Mifsud, Gil, and Corbett in this volume, and also Borg (1996), for a fuller picture of Maltese numbers.

[2] The dual database has been compiled over the last half a dozen or so years, with the assistance of Willi Geuder, Kateřina Hladká, Stefanie von Mende, and Wolfgang Schellinger. It is currently being overhauled and expanded, although the sample, itemized in Plank (1990) and Schellinger (1995a/b), would seem sufficiently representative, insofar as the generalizations that can be induced from it are so robust as not to have changed a great deal as the size of the sample doubled in the course of the years.

[3] But not as overwhelmingly more common as was conjectured in Plank (1989: 312, implication (24)).

[4] See Fenech (1978b and in this volume) for all about the dual and pseudo-dual in Maltese, and Fenech (1978a) for a general survey of where Maltese is heading.

[5] See Smith-Stark (1974), Plank (1987), and Corbett (this volume).

[6] As is acutely observed by Corbett in this volume.

[7] It is only 2nd person which is occasionally unruly (as for example in Modern English), lacking a singular-plural contrast when items further down the hierarchy have one. The reason is that plurals are prone to be pressed into service as 'polite' forms of singular address.

[8] It is probably only in Semitic (cf. Fontinoy 1969) that this class is finding favour with duals.

[9] And there are no subsets of persons with noticeable affinities for obligatory or optional dual.

[10] And obligatoriness and optionality do not correlate with particular preferences of duals for subsets of nouns either.

[11] Moravcsik (1978) is too strict in ruling out the singular as a possible replacement of the dual, although she is aware of odd agreement patterns where agreeing words that lack the dual are in the singular when their controller is in the dual.

[12] Again, Moravcsik (1978) underestimates the extent of possible variation when she states that duals are (often) based on plurals or (less frequently) on singulars.

[13] And see Blanc (1970) for a wider Arabic perspective on this type of curtailment, not practised a lot elsewhere.

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