# A corpus-driven account of indirect object indexing in Maltese

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Verbal indexing of the indirect object (IO) in the presence of a co-referential nominal has received some attention in the literature on Maltese (e.g. in Borg & Azzopardi 2009, Camilleri 2011, Sadler & Camilleri 2012, Souag 2017: 59-60). Of main interest in this regard are the opposition to parallel structures without index, as the latter is not syntactically required, as well as word order alternations, as shown in (1) and (2). The interpretation of the index in examples like these has been that of marking a topic (e.g. Fabri 2020). However, this information-structural category constitutes an umbrella term for a pool of different features relating to attention management or referent activation (Ozerov 2018, 2021). These should be established and accounted for in their own right.

(1)  | *Lil* | *Ġillu* | *qatt* | *m'* | *għidnielu* | *xejn.* |
     | IO | Ġillu | never | NEG | say.PST.1PL=IO.3SGM | nothing |

"To Ġillu, we never said anything to him."

bulbulistan v3 - 2010 John Bonello - It-Tielet Qamar.txt

(2)  | *Dan* | *irridu* | *ngħidulu* | | *lill-* | *poplu.* |
     | this.M | 1PL.IMPF-want-PL | 1PL.IMPF-say-PL=IO.3SGM | | IO-DEF | people |

"This we want to say to them, to the people."

bulbulistan v3 - 20041215_211d_par

This paper sets out to empirically re-evaluate these constructions without any preconceptions as to their function. To do so, we first analyze the distribution of IO constructions in the bulbulistan corpus (Čéplö 2018). This analysis includes a quantitative comparison with direct object constructions, as well as an examination of the semantic criteria involved in the selection of IO indexing and issues of obligatoriness.

Based on this analysis, we then select a suitable dataset to conduct a more detailed analysis. Our hypothesis is that the choice of indexing an overt IO NP is determined by probabilistic rules, induced by an interplay of variables. To test this, we annotate for a number of semantic and syntactic variables, including word order, part of speech of the NP, referent semantics, identifiability, textual givenness, text type etc. These we will then use to perform statistical analysis determining i) which of the variables are most strongly associated with indexing in the presence of an NP, as well as ii) how the variables interrelate.

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