THE NOMINAL QUANTIFIER XI IN MALTESE

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1 INTRODUCTION

The Maltese particle *xi*, like in many other Arabic varieties, is a grammaticalized cognate of the classical Arabic noun šay- ‘thing’ (lost as a full noun in the Maltese language1). It is highly polyfunctional: it may be an interrogative pronoun, a negative morpheme, a conditional suffix, a complementizer, an associative pronoun and also a nominal quantifier. In the latter function, apart from its role in the formation of the indefinite pronouns subset (Haspelmath and Caruana 1996), *xi* has not given rise to any thorough study. In his dictionary, Aquilina (1987-1990) presents it as the equivalent of English ‘some, any’ and ‘about’. He also indicates a contrastive use, a relation to the ‘unknown’, and a modal value of ‘considerable’. Borg (1996:12), in his overview of the Maltese quantifiers, describes *xi* as an ‘indefinite determiner’ with singular (his translations are either ‘some’ or ‘a’) and plural nouns (translated by ‘some’), and he considers, similarly to Aquilina, that it forms part of the ‘new information’, a quite common analysis, but thrown back into question by some theoretical frameworks (see e.g. Culioli 1982).

In the present study2, I shall only deal with the use of *xi* as a nominal quantifier3, leaving out the indefinite pronouns subset. The different values associated to this function will be analysed in detail within the framework of enunciative theory, on the basis of the analysis that Culioli (1982) made for French *quelque* ‘some’: its combination with a singular noun shows that its use is necessarily linked to the presence of a modal marker of some kind in the utterance and that it is incompatible with strict assertive utterances. The modal markers may express eventuality, calculation, hypothetical existence, interrogation, iteration, indefiniteness. It is important to note that such restrictions do not apply to plural nouns. We shall see to what extent this analysis, which has already proved to be fruitful cross-linguistically (e.g. Moroccan Arabic and Bulgarian, in Caubet (1984) and Guentchéva (1999), respectively) is also applicable to Maltese.

It will be argued that *xi* is a third degree determiner, i.e. it expresses a quantitative extraction and a qualitative operation thus marking an inflected extraction with various modal values. *Xi*, which is invariable, may precede a singular, collective or plural substantive, in both semantic domains of continuous, i.e. discrete (or count) nouns, and discontinuous, i.e. dense (or mass) or compact nouns. It expresses several semantic values: SOME, ANY, CERTAIN, ABOUT, ROUGHLY, and also intensive values associated to the high degree, depending on the semantic category of the determined, its number, as well as on the sentence type, the context and the prosody. Although *xi* is compatible with all aspectual, temporal and modal forms of

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1 In fact, it survives as a negative morpheme *xejn* ‘nothing’. Today, ‘thing’ is expressed by *haqa*.
2 The study is based on 50 hours of oral data that I recorded during several fieldworks in Malta between 1984 and 1990, and various written texts (see References).
3 For a transcategorial analysis of all the functions of *ši* in an Arabic dialect, see Caubet (1983 and 1984).
the verbal predicate, and with all syntactic positions, its occurrence is nevertheless strictly constrained by the syntactic role of the qualified noun, the type of predicate and the assertive modalities.

I shall first study the different uses and values of \( xi \) with singular nouns (and collective nouns with singular agreement rules) for each syntactic position; secondly, I will look at \( xi \) as used with plural nouns (and collective nouns with plural agreement); and thirdly at \( xi \) in combination with other quantifiers. I shall end with an analysis of a particular modal use linked to exclamatory utterances.

2 THE ISSUE OF STRONG AND WEAK DETERMINERS

Before delving further into the subject, it is first necessary to look briefly at the problem of determination in itself, and more specifically to the issue of strong (definite articles, demonstratives, etc.) vs weak determiners (indefinite articles, etc.).

The existential / locative constructions are often used as a test in order to distinguish between these two categories (see Guentchéva 1999:48): the quantifiers *SOME* are considered to belong to the weak category because they are compatible with this sentence type, while the definite articles and demonstratives are considered to belong to the strong category because they are incompatible with it. In Maltese, such a test cannot apply because, although marginally, both the definite article *il-* (ex. 1) and the demonstratives (ex. 2), traditionally considered as strong determiners, are compatible with *hemm* ‘there is’, just as \( xi \) (Vanhove 1993:397 ff.), with both singular and plural nouns:

\[
\begin{align*}
(1) & \quad Jifîrdû min-naha fejn hemm iż-żbul\\
yîfîrdû-h mi-n-naha feyn ġemm iż-zbûl
\end{align*}
\]

‘They separate it from the side where there is the corn ear’

\[
\begin{align*}
(2) & \quad U \text{ kumbinazzjoni kien hemm dawk iż-żewg (sic.) ihbieb ghand Fajjenzu}\\
& \quad \text{u kuminaccỵnî kin-emm dawk iz-żewg iḥbiḥḅ }^4 \text{and fayyencu}\\
& \quad \langle \text{and / by chance / he was-there is / those / the-two / friends / at / Fajjenzu} \rangle
\end{align*}
\]

‘And by chance, there were those two friends at Fajjenzu’

It would thus be more accurate to consider that another dichotomy is at stake between the category of the so-called “existential” definites, which includes the definite article and the demonstratives, but not \( xi \), and the category of the “existential” indefinites, to which \( xi \) belongs, as does Moroccan Arabic *şi* for instance (Caubet 1993:270-1). Hereafter are two examples of \( xi \) in narrative contexts, with the locative / existential constructions with *hemm* and *hawn* ‘there is’:

\[
\begin{align*}
(3) & \quad U \text{ kien jurihom meta jkun hemm xi submarine}
\end{align*}
\]

\(^4\) Excerpts of oral texts are given in both the Maltese orthography and in a morphonological transcription, in this order. Excerpts of written texts are only given in the Maltese orthography.
u kiòn yurì-°m meta ikùn ěmm ši sòbìorrìn
<and / he was / he shows-them / when / it is / there is / some / submarine>
‘And he used to show them when there was a submarine’

(4) Issa fil-każ ikun hawn xi danger ta´ epidemja …
issa fi-l-kāz ikun-aw ši danġör ta” epidēmya …
<now / in-the-case / it is-here / some / danger / of / epidemic>
‘So, in the case there is some danger of epidemic …’

3 XI + SINGULAR NOUN

Quite like in the case of Moroccan Arabic (Caubet 1993:270), the use of the nominal quantifier xi with a singular noun marks both a quantitative operation, i.e. the extraction of a single element, already marked in the nominal singular form, and a qualitative operation, by attributing a certain number of differential properties, whatever their vagueness, to the qualified noun.

3.1 Subject position

Contrary to the indefinite pronouns subsets, it is well known, cross-linguistically, that the distribution and the interpretation of indefinite nouns in a subject position depend on the predicate type, i.e. the aspectual, temporal or modal values associated with the predicative relation (Guentchéva 1999:50). In Maltese, the use of xi with a singular noun in this position is quite rare, and limited to utterances in which some type of epistemic or appreciative modality is expressed, like a hypothesis (ex. 5) or a possibility (ex. 6). In this case, xi is incompatible with the domain of achieved certainty, because, as Guentchéva (1999:51) explains for French quel­que ‘some’ and Bulgar­ian njakoj ‘some’, xi does not refer to a particular entity to which the predicate is applied, but to one of the possible entities of the class. With discrete nouns such as in the two examples hereunder, xi means that all the entities of the class to which the predicate applies are scanned and that the element extracted is left unidentified, and cannot be identified. My data does not have a single example of xi + a continuous singular noun in this position.

(5) Għax jekk toqghod isfel malajr tiği xi bhima lejk
‘aš yekkk ta?ombo isfel malayr tiği ši bima ley-k
<because / if / you live / down / quickly / she comes / some / animal.F / towards-you>
‘Because had you to live downstairs, some animal is likely to come towards you’

(6) Għax l-artiklu seta’ jiswa hafna minhabba li ma kinetx fačli li xi ditta tithajjar tippubblika l-ġabra ta’ l-ittri (Zammit Marmara 2003:365)
<because / the-article / it could / it is worth / a lot / because / that / NEG / she was.NEG / easy / that / some / firm.F / she is induced / she publishes / the-collection / of / the-letters>

5 Sic. Standard Maltese should have the relative pronoun li after każ.
‘Because the article could be very significant considering that it was not easy that an editor would be convinced to publish a collection of letters.’

3.2 Direct or indirect object position

Contrary to the subject position, there is no restriction at all on the use of $x_i$ + singular noun when it is in object position, be it direct or indirect (ex. 8). The quantifier is compatible with strict assertion as well as with modal utterances, with all aspects and tenses. Although it is very often the case that some type of modality appears in the utterance, such as habituality (ex. 9) or iteration (ex. 7)*, referring to a situation thought as an open class of events, it is by no means obligatory. $x_i$ + singular noun is compatible with the domain of achieved certainty (ex. 8 and 10) in both main and subordinate clauses, contrary to French *quelque* (Culioli 1982:8-10) or Bulgarian *njakoj* (Guentchéva 1999:52 and 58).

In my opinion, such a difference could be explained, at least partially, by the semantic evolution that $x_i$ might be undergoing towards an indefinite article, a grammatical category missing in Maltese, contrary to French and Bulgarian. The system of determination having an empty slot as far as markers are concerned, there is room for $x_i$ to fill up this category. In other words, $x_i$ could be on the way to become a second degree determiner.

Eventually, it must also be stated that $x_i$ is compatible with both semantic domains of continuous and discontinuous, i.e. discrete nouns (ex. 7-9), and dense or compact nouns (ex. 10), usually classified in Maltese as selectional with singular agreement rules.

(7) \textit{Ħu hsieb illi titlob prezz fiss u toqghodx ittella’ u tniżżel xi prezz se jtuk!}
\textit{hûhsieb illi titlob precc fiss u to\textsuperscript{9}äd-š ittellal xineq se-ytû-k}
\textit{<take / thought / that / you ask / price / fixed / and / you stay-NEG / you make rise / and / you make decrease / some / price / FUT-they give-you>}

‘Be careful to ask for a fixed price and don’t loose time bargaining any price they’ll give you!’

(8) \textit{L-ewwelnett baghat xi tifel biex jixtri t-te minn xi hanut}
\textit{l-ewwelnett ba\textsuperscript{‘}at ši tifel biaš yiʃtri t-tē minn ši hanût}
\textit{<the-first / he sent / some / child / in order to / he buys / the-tea / from / some / shop>}

‘First of all he sent a child to buy tea from a shop’

(9) \textit{Xi tfajla minnhom kien imur jghannilha taht it-tieqa}
\textit{ši tfayla minn-°om kien imûr y\textsuperscript{‘}anni-l-°a taht it-ti\textsuperscript{9}a}
\textit{<some / girl.DIM / from-them / he was / he goes / he sings-to-her / under / the-window>}

‘To some daughter of them, he used to go singing to her under the window’

(10) \textit{Ġahan kien xehet xi ġir ġol-kaldarun}
\textit{ḡaḥan kion šeḥet ši ġir ġo l-kaldaruṇ}
\textit{<Ġahan / he was / he threw / some / lime / inside / the-cauldron>}

* These values are described as aspectual by Guentchéva (1999).
‘Gahan had thrown some lime into the cauldron’

As is usually the case cross-linguistically, the nominal quantifier can also qualify a noun with differential properties, i.e. qualified in some other way (by an adjective, a participial form, a genitive construction, etc.):

(11) *Irrid xi bellus fin*
irrīd šī bellūs fin
<I want / some / velvet / delicate>
‘I want some delicate velvet’

(12) *Meta kien jara xi ghasfura diehla fil-haʃt ...*
meta kiʔən yara ši ’asfūra diʔhła fi-l-ḥayt ...
<when / he was / he sees / some / bird / entering / in-the-wall>
‘Whenever he saw a bird entering the wall …’

(13) *Imbaghad kiemu bdew jiʃtu xi ʃarra tal-fuʃhar*
imba’ad kiənu bdew yiʃtu ši ʃarra ta’-l-fuḥhār
<then / they were / they started / they come / they look for / some / jar / of-the-pottery>
‘Then they had started coming to look for some earthenware jar’

The use of *xi* is even compatible with the so-called absolute object:

(14) *U forsi dghaʃt xi dagħwa wkoll* (Zammit Marmara 2003:156)
<and / perhaps / you blasphemed / some / blasphemy / also>
‘And perhaps you also swore’

and with proper nouns:

(15) *Taʃæb li ssir xi Elizabeth Taylor?* (Sammut 1991:11)
<y you think / that / you become / some / Elizabeth / Taylor>
‘Do you think you’ll become some Elizabeth Taylor?’

### 3.3 Adverbial complements

Apart from the predicate arguments, *xi* can also qualify a noun in the position of adverbial complement. All the examples in my data show the same restriction as in subject position, that is the necessity of a modal element in the utterance. The three examples below present modal values of hypothesis and habituality:

(16) *Kieku qieghda ʃo xi sptar ilha li marret*
kisku ḋa ʃi sptār il-’a li marret
<if / staying /F / inside / some / hospital / since-her / that / she went>
‘Had she stayed in an hospital, she would have passed long ago’
(17) Ghaliex dak b'xi mod jew iehor kien izomm lill-hobż ma-jnawwarx
*aliex dāk b-ši mōd yew iħor kian izomm lil-l-ħobz ma-inawwar-š

‘Because that one, some way or another, it used to prevent the bread from rotting’

(18) Meta nies xjuh kienu jhalluhom ġo xi għar sakemm imutu
meta nis syyuḥ kiunu yhallu-šom weħed-šom ġo ši ‘ār sakemm imūtu

‘When they used to leave old people alone in some cave until they died’

The above sentence can be compared to the following (19), which occurs a few seconds after
the previous one in the tale from which it is extracted:

(19) Meta wiehed xwejjah kellu jinghalaq ġo għar biex imut hemmhekk
meta wiħed sweyyaħ kellu yin*ala? ġo *‘ār bixš imūt ħemmekk

‘When a certain old man had to be locked up in a cave in order to die there’

In the custom described, ex. 18 shows that the cave is qualified as unknown and unspecified.
The class of occurrences of all possible caves is scanned by the enunciator, and xi asserts that
one of them or another is considered as existent but that its precise identity cannot be
specified and is left indistinct. In other words, all possible properties of an entity of the class
CAVE are scanned but none is selected. On the other hand, ex. 19, without xi, appears in a
context of achieved certainty and the absence of any definite or indefinite marker simply
asserts the existence of an unspecified cave. Similarly as Guentchéva (1999:51) states for
French and Bulgarian indefinite articles, indefinite singular nouns in Maltese are compatible
with the domain of achieved certainty because the use of the noun in the singular form refers
to a unique and particular occurrence, which is not ‘indefinite’ for the enunciator (but which
is indefinite for the co-enunciator). In contrast, this means that xi does not isolate by
extraction an individual of a class, but marks out a possible individual of a class. These two
eamples clearly show that the explanation of the value of xi is more complex than the
marking of “new information”.

3.4 In equative and qualitative utterances

The use of xi is also possible in an attributive position in equative and qualitative utterances:

(20) Trid tkun xi miqnum bhali thobb iċ-ċinema u tiqba’ tmur
trid tkūn šī miqnum bḥāl-ši thobb iċ-ċinema u tib?à tmūr

‘You have to be some fool like me who likes the movies and keeps going there’
(21) Mhix xi pożija fost l-ahjar
miš ši pożiyya fost l-ahyār
<NEG / some / poem / among / the-best>
‘It is not one of the best poems’

4 XI + PLURAL NOUN

Similarly to French quelques ‘some’, there are no restrictions whatsoever to the use of the nominal quantifier xi when it qualifies plural nouns or collective nouns with plural agreement rules, i.e. discontinuous and continuous nouns. In particular, it is compatible with strict assertion and the domain of achieved certainty. With plurality, the quantifier xi refers to part of a subset of a class and does not pick out the individuals of which it is made up (Guentchéva 1999:53).

Like in Moroccan Arabic (Caubet 1983:236), depending on the context or the extra-linguistic situation, xi may highlight more a value of quantitative determination, meaning ‘some, a certain number’:

(22) Allura niftakar dal-kannestri xi nies kienu jużawhom biex ...
allūra niftakar da-l-kannestri ši nias ki نوع yuzaw-‘om biyas ...
<so / I remember / this-the-baskets / some / people / they were / they use-them / in order to>
‘So, I remember, these baskets, some people would use them to …’

(23) Kieku naf fejn kellha xi flus ... (Calleja 1972:52)
<if / I know / where / she had / some / money>
‘If I knew where she kept some money …’

(24) Ikolli nsib xi eżempji iżjed tajbin
ikolli nsib ši ezempyi izyed tayyb-în
<I have / I find / some / examples / more / good-PL>
‘I’ll have to find some better examples’

(25) Ġo fiha nsibu xi statwi tal-ĝebel li jirrapżentaw il-Madonna
ġo fi-‘a nsibu ši stàtwi ta‘l-ĝebel li yirraprezentaw il-madonna
<inside / in-her / we find / some / statues / of-the-stone / that / represent / the Madonna>
‘Inside it, we find some stone statues representing the Madonna’

Very often xi may also add a qualitative value, with the meaning of ‘certain’, ‘certain types of’:

(26) Xi kitbiet kienu tawh l-impressjoni li ... (Zammit Marmara 2003:311)
<some / writings / they were / they gave.him / the-impression / that>
‘Certain writings had given him the impression that …’
(27) Speċjalment qed nalludi ghal xi poezijji li hemm fil-Limestone
spečyalment ʔet-nallūdi "āl ši poeziiyi li ĝemm fi-l-laymstōwn
<specially / PROG-I allude / for / some / poems / that / there is / in-the-limestone>
‘I am specially referring to certain poems which are in Limestone’

(28) Kien hemm ukoll il-kummenti ta’ xi kittieba fosthom Anton Buttigieg (Zammit Marmara 2003:301)
<he was / there / also / the-comments / of / some / writers / among.them / Anton / Buttigieg>
‘There were also the comments of certain writers, among them Anton Buttigieg’

With this qualitative value, xi may alternate with a borrowing from Italian, ċertu, meaning,
similarly to xi, ‘certain things about which the enunciator thinks, but which he does not reveal for some reason or another’7:

(29) Ċertu tixbihat illi nkun warrabthom fl-ori ġinal tal-Malti jistgu ħu fl-Ingliż
ċertu tišbihāt illi inkūn warrab终身-‘om f-l-origiĦali ta’-l-mālti yist’u yidhlu f-l-inglīż
<certain / images / that / I am / I took off-them  / in-the-original / of-the-Maltese / they can / they enter / in-the-English>
‘Certain images that I would have put aside in the original in Maltese, could fit in the English [version]’

5 XI + NUMERIC EXPRESSIONS

5.1 The value of approximation

With numerals, as well as with the dual suffix -ejn, xi expresses yet another value, a qualitative and appreciative modal value of approximation, ABOUT, ROUGHLY, also found in Moroccan Arabic (Caubet 1993:287). The noun being counted, it is necessarily of the discontinuous type. In most cases, it refers to a measure, for instance of time (punctual or a duration) or distance. With other semantic domains, a rare case, the numeral has to be superior to two (see ex. 33), otherwise xi does not convey the appreciative value (see § 5.2). XI modifies the precise number, indicating that it is in fact unclear: it could be more or less than the proposed figure, but it could not be any number. The enunciator distinguishes a limited choice in the class of occurrences. In this particular context, xi is the equivalent of madwar and bejn wieħed wieħor ‘roughly, about’.

(30) Xi tliet snin kien editur tagħha Joe Friggieri

7 Ċertu can also be used with a singular noun with a similar value of ‘A CERTAIN, A PARTICULAR’ (which xi + singular noun does not seem to have):
u biex tixtru d-deheb kontu tmorru f’ċertu żmien?
ubiaštistiθru d-deveb ‘kontu tmorru f-ċertu zmien?
<and / in order to / you buy / the-gold / you were / you go / in-certain / time>
‘and to buy gold, you used to go at a certain (particular) time?’
For about three years, Joe Friggieri was its editor.

When I was about twelve years old...

After about two weeks he needed once more to go to Fajjenzu.

There were about two hundred people listening.

Because from Gudja to Ħal-Għaxaq it is not far, something like from here to Żebbuġ.

I have one [poem] which I have just finished writing about a month ago.

Morpho-syntactically, contrary to the previous examples, when the numeral or the word siegha ‘hour’ refers to a particular time of the day, xi is necessarily followed by the definite article il-°. The value is again that of an approximation:

F’ xi l-hamsa ta’ fil-ghodu
f-ši l-ḥamsa ta’ fi-l-°⁵du
<in-some / the-five / of / in-the-morning>

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8 Also in Moroccan Arabic with nouns referring to time (Caubet 1993:287).
9 It is the only exception to the otherwise correct statement of Borg and Azzopardi-Alexander (1997:77): “Xi precedes a singular or plural noun, which however has to be indefinite.”
‘At about five o’clock in the morning’

(37) *F’ xi s-siegha ta’ wara nofs in-nhar dorna*

f-ši s-si’a ta’ wara nofs in-n’ār dorna

<in-some / the-hour / of / after / middle / the-day / we turned>

‘At about one o’clock in the afternoon we turned back’

5.2  **With the dual and the numeral żewġ ‘two’**

It must be noted that with the dual or with the numeral żewġ ‘two’ and a noun referring to anything but a measure, *xi* usually has the indefinite qualitative value of SOME, ANY, and not that of an approximation. The noun can be either discontinuous or continuous, but the latter has to be made discrete by means of a classifier or enumerator (ex. 39). In such cases, the precise and trivial quantity is not questioned by the enunciator, but it is the qualitative properties, the precise identity of the determined noun, which are left unclear:

(38) *Barra t-triq Ġahan iltaqa’ ma’ xi żewġt irgiel illi fil-fatt kienu hallelin*

barra t-trī’ ġahan inti?a ma* ši żewġt irgiel illi fi-l-fatt kienu hallelin

<outside / the-street / Ġahan / he met / with / some / two / men / that / in-the-fact / they were / thieves>

‘Outside in the street, Ġahan met some two men which in fact were thieves’

(39) *Ihallu l-muturi hawn kultant u xi biċċtejn ghodda*

ihallu l-mutūri awn kultant u ši biċċ-teyn ṣoddā

<they leave / the-motors / here / sometimes / and / some / piece-DUAL / tools>

‘They would leave the motors here sometimes, and some tools’

(40) *Iżda xtaqt narak nitfa fiq xi żewġ żellumiet (Zammit Marmara 2003:141)*

<nevertheless / I wished / I see.you / I extinguish / on / some / two / twists>

‘Nevertheless, I would have liked to see you for a short while with regards to some twists’

To sum up, *xi* has two different values when it is used with a numeric expression according to the semantic domain of the qualified noun and the quantity involved: approximation with continuous nouns of measure, or with other nouns quantified by a figure superior to two, indefiniteness (‘some, any’) with other semantic domains + numeral ‘two’ or the dual suffix.

6  **XI + THE QUANTIFIERS FTIT, DAQSXEJN, NAQRA ‘FEW’**

The main function of *xi* used before the quantifier *ftit, naqra* and *daqsxejn* ‘a little, few’ is that of a qualitative and appreciative modal value linked to the high degree, the value of intensity. By using *xi*, the enunciator means that the quantity involved is ‘really’, ‘indeed’, ‘truly’, or ‘very’ little. In my data, *xi ftit, xi naqra* and *xi daqsxejn* are used with this modal sense only with continuous nominals (contrary to the approximation value with numerals), either dense (nouns) or compact (adjectives). The role of the FEW quantifiers is to make them
discrete. Unlike Moroccan Arabic (Caubet 1983:236), the meta-linguistic value of littleness is
directly linked to the use of another quantifier, not to the use of $xi$. The examples in
exclamatory contexts in § 7 (ex. 48-51) will further confirm that what is at stake in Maltese is
simply a matter of high degree, even though $xi$ is incompatible with $hafna$, the adverbial
quantifier meaning ‘a lot’. It must also be noted that, like in the subject position studied in §
3.1, the use of $xi$ in this context is also strongly linked to the presence of some modal marker
in the utterance.

(41) Ġol-lembi dejjem jibqa’ $xi$ ftit ghaġin
ġo l-lembi deyyem yib?a’ $xi$ ftit ‘aġin
<inside / the-bowl / always / it remains / some / a little / dough>
‘Inside the bowl, a little bit of dough always remained’

(42) Bil-fors kien izomm $xi$ ftit artab
bi-l-fors kien izomm $xi$ ftit artab
<with-the-force / it was / it keeps / some / a little / soft>
‘By force, it kept a little bit soft’

(43) Hi ghandek $xi$ daqsxejn zokkor?
ha-‘i andek $xi$ da?šeyn cokkor?
<brother-me / you have / some / a little / sugar>
‘Dear, do you have a little bit of sugar?’

(44) Jekk taqa’ $xi$ naqra ġir mis-saqaf ...
yekk ta’a’ $xi$ naqra ġir mi-s-saqaf ...
<if / she falls / some / a little / lime.F / from-the-roof>
‘If a little bit of lime fell off from the roof ...’

(45) Tmorru l-Belt tixtru $xi$ naqra deheb Lizz hu?
tmorru l-belt tixtru $xi$ naqra deheb Lizz hu?
<you go / the-town / you buy / some / a little / gold / Lizz / he>
‘You used to go to Valetta to buy some gold, Lizz, didn’t you?’

Such examples contrast with the use of the adverbial quantifiers of small quantity together
with continuous nominals, but without $xi$, and where no modality of intensity is expressed:

(46) Naqra deheb nehduha maghna
na’ra de’eb nøḥdû-‘a ma°-na
<a little / gold / we take-her / with-us>
‘We used to take a small quantity of gold with us’

When $xi$ determines the quantifiers FEW used on their own, without a following nominal
expression, it also brings the intensive value:
7 XI IN EXCLAMATORY UTTERANCES

Another aspect of the above appreciative and qualitative modality is found in exclamatory utterances (with the appropriate prosody), in which $xi$ expresses intensity and the high degree, this time for both continuous and discontinuous nominals but, at least in my data, only with the singular:

(48) Dak ikun jaf $xi$ stonku ghandu u m’ghandux!
dak ikūn yaf $xi$ stonku ‘andu u m-‘andū-š!
<that / he is / he knows / some / stomach / he has / and / NEG-he has-NEG>
‘That one would know how courageous he is!’

(49) Il-madoff $xi$ sfuriya ta’ xaghar!
il-madoff $xi$ sfuriyya ta’a ša’ar!
<the-Our Lady / some / yellowness / of / hair>
‘My god! what fair hair!’

(50) X’tewba tani l-konfessur!
š tewba tā’-ni l-konfessūr!
<some / punishment / he gave-me / the-confessor>
‘What an atonement the confessor gave me!’

(51) Xi ġmiel madwari! X’seher hu dan! (Zammit Marmara 2003:159)
<some / beauty / around.me / some / enchantment / he / this>
‘How beautiful it is around me! How enchanting this is!

Semantically related to the above described qualitative value of intensity, is the use of $xi$ in exclamatory utterances to express a big quantity (as opposed to littleness in Moroccan Arabic), as already noticed by Aquilina (1987-90:1568b), who does not mention the necessity of a specific prosodic contour:

(52) W inti ghal $xi$ żmien tghid!
w inti ‘āl $xi$ zmīn t’id!
<and / you / for / some / time / you say>
‘And you’d say [that] for quite some time!’
8 Conclusion

The study has clearly shown that the use of $xi$ as a nominal quantifier brings about, in addition to its value of third degree determiner, a complex set of semantic and modal values which depend on various factors. They can be summed up in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>semantic value</th>
<th>syntax</th>
<th>constraint</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>inflected extraction of a possible element of a class third degree determiner: ‘some’</td>
<td>$xi$ + sg. noun</td>
<td>modality marker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>indefinite article</td>
<td>$xi$ + sg. noun</td>
<td>object position, strict assertion, achieved certainty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>second degree determiner</td>
<td>$xi$ + pl. noun</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inflected extraction of a subset of a class third degree determiner: ‘some’, ‘certain’</td>
<td>$xi$ + pl. noun</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quantitative approximation: ‘about’</td>
<td>$xi$ + numerals</td>
<td>measure, or more than two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>indefiniteness of noun: ‘some’</td>
<td>$xi$ + numerals</td>
<td>number = two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intensity</td>
<td>1. $xi$ + FEW quantifiers 2. $xi$ + sg. noun</td>
<td>1. continuous noun 2. exclamation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

So far, the fact that $xi$ is undergoing an evolutionary process towards the expression of a second degree determiner, i.e. a singular indefinite article, only noticeable in the object position, is only a hypothesis, even if highly probable. Only the future could tell if this new value will extend to other syntactic contexts or not.

Although my purpose was not to carry out a contrastive study, whenever possible some comparisons were made all along with a related language, Moroccan Arabic, as well as with unrelated ones, French and Bulgarian. They showed a certain number of common values and constraints, as well as some which are specific to Maltese. In particular, the modality constraint which, when fading away in Maltese, leads to the emergence of the above mentioned value, that of second degree determiner. This issue would be worth investigating cross-linguistically in a diachronic perspective.

From a general and theoretical viewpoint, it is important to note that the specificity of Maltese regarding the absence of modality constraint in object position does not in fact contradict Culioli’s (1982) analysis mentioned in the introduction. Firstly because the systems of determination on their whole being different, one is entitled to expect some particularities in each of them. Secondly and more importantly, because a language is never a fixed system, it is always submitted to dynamic forces that make it change. The linguist’s task is, among other things, to track the unstable elements and to detect the starting points of the evolutions. The use of $xi$ in object position is possibly one of those starting points.

**Abbreviations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIM</th>
<th>PL</th>
<th>PROG</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>diminutive</td>
<td>plural</td>
<td>progressive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>feminine</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEG</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>negation</td>
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<tr>
<td>sg.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>singular</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
REFERENCES


