THE PHRASEOLOGICAL USE OF THE VERBS ‘QIES’, ‘GHADD’ AND ‘DANN’

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As in other languages, particularly in the Semitic languages and their dialects, Maltese verbs, besides their primary meanings, convey some other shades of meaning, either semantically similar, or different meaning.

The development of meaning of certain Maltese verbs may be noticed either in their syntactical construction or in their phraseological context in a sentence. The development of various shades of meaning in nouns is noticeable in their semantic implications because in these the metaphor plays an important share. An example of such metaphorical expressions, common in several languages, is found in the word clove, meaning a spice and the glove-pink, both derived from the Latin clavus, a nail. An equivalent example is the Maltese expression msiemer tal-qrnfl, literally 'the nails of the carnation flower' for 'the clove-scented pink'. Another parallel metaphorical instance may be found in the Maltese word sniem (teeth) which is applied to the cloves of garlic, so called because the bulb cleaves naturally into so many segments that look like teeth.

The verbs qies, jqis; ghadd, jghodd; dann, jdomn meaning respectively 'to measure', 'to reckon', and 'to imagine' may take several shades of meaning according to their context in a sentence, or, in some instances, their syntactical function.

Qies (to measure): In Vassalli’s Lexicon, besides the primary meaning 'to measure' ('metior', 'commetior', 'mensuro', etc.) are included in the secondary meaning 'to beware', 'to take care', 'to ponder'. The following examples may illustrate the various shades of meaning: Qis mitt darba u aga' darba ('Measure twice and cut but once', corresponding to English saying: 'Look before you leap'). Qis li badd ma jkun jaf ('See (i.e. make sure) that nobody will know'). Qis li thun baun fil-hamsa ('Take care (i.e. make it a point) to be here at five o’clock'). Qis li ma tobrox kelma minn fommok minn dak li ghidilek ('Mind not to utter a single word of what I told you').

Such a variety of meaning is given also by some other lexicographers. Other phraseological expressions are to be noticed both in the verb qies and ghadd having in, some particular case, a common equivalence of
meaning.

The Imperative qis of the stem gies affixed to the pronominal suffixes ni, ek, u, ba, and na, kom, bom, is used as an adverbial phrase. Ex: Qisu ghad u tarbija, ghalkemm ghandu xi sentejn ('He looks (behaves etc.) still like a baby though he is about two years old'). Qisek iddum baum Malta ('Presumably you will stop long in Malta'). Huma jitkellmu qisbom bbalna ('They talk practically as we do').

Ghadd (to reckon). Vassalli for ghadd gives only the following Latin and Italian meanings: 'Dispogo, paro, numero, computo; It. 'Contare, numerare, computare'. Secondary meanings: 'Annumero, accenseo, recenseo'. It. 'Annoverare, mettere nel numero'. English equivalents: 'To count, to calculate, to enumerate, to compute', but the verb ghadd. jghadd is also used to mean: (i) 'To depend upon'. Ex: Tista' tghodd 'uqi ('You can rely or depend on me') (ii) 'To suit'. Ex: Dak b-ilbies ma jghoddx ghalik ('That dress is not suitable for you'). (iii) 'To apply'. Ex: Dan il-proverbju jghodd ghalik ('This saying (or proverb) applies to you'). It is used characteristically in the idiomatic expression: Jaf jghodd sal-gbaxra (Lit. 'He can count as far as ten' corresponding to English: 'He knows how many hens make five'). The Imperative ghodd, followed by the word rub annexed to pron. suffixes (rub, rubek, etc.), takes the meaning: 'to consider one self'. Ex: Ghodd rubek bhalal wiehed mill-iktar ixxurtijati ('Consider yourself as on of the luckiest people').

The Impersonal Imperative ghodd, annexed to the pronominal suffixes, and sometimes followed by the word sejjer (participle of the Arabic sa:hir) as mentioned also by Vassalli in his Grammar (Ital. edition. 1827. p. 144. par. 286), is idiomatically used to show that something is about to occur. Ex: Kien ghoddru qalu ('He had nearly killed him'). Kien ghaddu waqt ('He had nearly fallen'). Kien ghoddhom waslu fil-port ('They had almost reached the harbour'). Il-bel ta' fux kien sejjer jirvinah ('His prodigality had almost ruined him'). Ghoddru sejjer jilqaq ('He is about to leave').

Dann. ('to imagine, to think, to suppose, to conjecture').

This verb is used to denote several meanings according to context besides its primary and some of its secondary meanings mentioned above.

G.P.F. Agius De Soldanis in his Nuova Scuola di Grammatica per agevolmente apprendere la Lingua Punica-Maltese, etc. (1750) p. 129. for the word donni gives the meaning of 'I seem, I appear' ('mi pare, mi sembra') and traces it in Plauto's 'Scene in Poenulus 38, as being of Punic origin.

He further quotes Reinesio's version (In Syntagma Variar, Dissert. 1702) of the Punic words: bavo donni of which De Soldanis gives a far-
fetched corresponding meaning for the Maltese *donni* ('mi pare'). De Soldanis, however, asked the opinion of better authorities as to the true etymology of the word *donni*.

D. Wilhelm Gesenius in his Essay on the Maltese Language *Versuch über die Maltesische Sprache*, etc., (1810) p. 49, in reviewing De Soldanis' Essay and Grammar refers to Hirt's Arabic Grammar and to Calleberg's Dialogues 5,7, and 6,3, wherein for *donni* is given the corresponding Arabic word حَتَّي‌ (Ay thanny) – Yes, I think.

For a complete comparative analysis, it would be now opportune to quote from Vassalli's Lexicon the meanings of the verb *dann*, *iddonn* from the verbal radicals *d-n* vis-a-vis the Arabic root حَتَّي‌.

For *dann*, *iddonn* Vassalli gives accordingly the following meanings: (i) 'Puto illum esse; credo illum rem esse; unde suspicor'; ('To believe to be; to deem, to consider, to suspect') (ii) Secondary meanings: 'Fallor per visu' ('To mistake a person for another'), (iii) (with pron. affixes) *Donnu; Videtur* (impers); ('It appears, it seems'). *Dann* (noun): (i) 'opinio' (Opinion) (ii) Secondary meanings: 'Suspicio', ('suspicion').

The Rev. C.F. Schlienz in his Views on the Improvement of the Maltese Language, etc. for the verb *dann* gives the Arabic meaning of 'to think' and also 'to count' or 'consider oneself' in the following examples: *Donnu ragel gharef* ('I think he is a well informed man'). *Donni minzi* ('I count, or consider myself forgotten'), which evidently shows in Schlienz a lack of thorough knowledge of the various true meanings of the Maltese verb *dann*, *iddonn* and its phraseological use. He considers the verb *dann* as an apocopated form of حَتَّي‌ regarded in Maltese as impersonal, and quotes Agius De Soldanis who describes it as a Punic word meaning 'to appear'. In quoting Vassalli, who translates حَتَّي‌ *iddonn* *mmmm* with 'videtur', (it appears), Schlienz states that 'the difference between his idea and that of Vassalli and Agius (De Soldanis) is that he can trace the Arabic etymology in this word easily both as to the lexicon and grammar, whilst they must be satisfied with its being a Punic word. The tracing of its true meaning Agius leaves to other people.

In the two etymological dissectionaries, C.L. Dessoulay's and G. Barbara's the etymology of the verb *dann*, *iddonn* may be summarized and given as follows: 'to deem, to appear, to seem, to have an opinion, to suspect, to suppose, and to mistake one thing for another'. Such meanings are found however to be based on those originally given in Vassalli's Lexicon, and later in Falzon's Dictionary, which may be considered a 'replica' of Vassalli's Lexicon, in a more concised form.

*Donni*, as a noun of action of the verb *dann*, *iddonn*, meaning 'opinion', 'suspicion', is given in Vassalli's, Falzon's and Caruana's Dictionaries;
quoted and commented upon afterwards by Dessoulavy and Barbera in their etymological dictionaries.

The verb dann, jdonn in Caruana's Vocabolario della Lingua Maltese, is not found, but instead the word donn is given as a noun meaning 'appearance, semblance, aspect'. The noun donn (?) joined to pronominal suffixes, as Caruana explains, would give the equivalent phraseological meaning of the Italian verb parere, sembrare.

Caruana, ignoring altogether the grammatical and idiomatic function of the verb dann in donni, donnok, etc., justifies his explanation by the following example: Donnok marid, which would mean: 'the appearance of your face is of a sick man' or 'you look as a sick man'.

The following examples illustrate the various phraseological uses and meanings of the Maltese verb dann: Dak il-kniedem indomih "I suspect that man or that man gives me the impression that...') Donnejtu xi haddiebor ('I mistook him for somebody else').

Impersonal use of dann, jdonn (Imperative with pronom. affixes): Donnu ilbierab ('It seems to me as if it happened yesterday'). Donnok ma trijs temmen! ('You would hardly believe it!') - lit. 'It would seem quite unbelievable!') Donnu mnux bu ('It does not appear to be the man I mean') This phrase has other meanings as for instance; He is quite calm, impossible. Min donnu? - ('Whom does he look like?') Donnu Fredu, il-babib tieghok. - ('He is (or looks) just like Alfred, your friend'). Donnhom iridu jidbku bina - ('They seem they want to cheat us'). The verb jidbku (prepositional + bi) has in this case the meaning 'to cheat'.