

Lexical and Surface Geminates in Maltese

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Abstract

This study investigates the acoustic realization of word initial lexical and surface geminates in Maltese. Word initial gemination in Maltese occurs through a morphological process in both Semitic and non-Semitic verbs. Surface geminates arise through the assimilation of the definite article before coronal sounds (*il* → *it* in ‘*it-tama*’ (the hope)). In these surface geminates a bona fide vowel always precedes. In terms of duration, the singleton to geminate ratio is 1:1.6. Surface geminates are on average 7ms shorter than lexical geminates. Lexical geminates are consistently preceded by a vocalic element, also of an /i/ quality, when the preceding word ends in a consonant. When the preceding word ends in a vowel, this vocalic element was also found (contrary to predictions from Maltese grammars), but is subject to within and across speaker variation.