

statu**S** **Q**uaestionis ●
language **Q** text culture ●

25 (2023)



SAPIENZA
UNIVERSITÀ DI ROMA

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language text culture ●

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INDICE | TABLE OF CONTENTS

SEZIONE MONOGRAFICA

Old Language(s), New Technologies: Corpus Linguistics and European Languages in the Renaissance, 1400s-1600s *a cura di Fabio Ciambella*

Fabio Ciambella, <i>Introduction: Old Language(s), New Technologies: Corpus Linguistics and European Languages in the Renaissance, 1400s-1600s</i>	13
Marco Bagli, Hark, Hark Ye, Harkee: <i>A History of Forms</i>	23
Emma Pasquali, <i>The Corpus of Early Modern English Trials (1650-1700): Building of the Corpus and Hypotheses of Normalization</i>	53
Fabio Ciambella, <i>A Corpus-driven Analysis of the Early Modern English Recipe Manuscripts at the Folger Shakespeare Library: Zooming in on Morphosyntax and Pragmatic Interfaces</i>	71
Benjamin Fagard – José Pinto de Lima, <i>Complex Prepositions in (Medieval) Portuguese: The Question of Language Contact</i>	97
Vittorio Ganfi, <i>Light Verb Constructions in Italian: A Corpus-based Analysis of 15th-17th-century Texts</i>	121

Valentina Piunno, *The Metaphorical/Metonymic Values of 'Hand' in Texts of 1400-1600s. A Corpus-driven Investigation of French, Spanish and Italian* 147

MISCELLANEA

Moufoutaou Adjera – Akissi Béatrice Boutin, *Les langues gbè dans les premiers écrits européens* 179

Alberto Dall'Olio, "Nice Blighty!". *The linguistic representation of the First World War soldier in 'The Trench'* 201

Francesco Diaco, *L'ornitologo visionario. Lo sperimentalismo ecologico di Paolo Volponi* 221

Laura Di Ferrante, *How passive voice gets affected by popularization. A quantitative analysis of scientific research articles and university press releases* 269

Elena Di Giovanni, *The Intersemiotic Journey of André Marie de Chénier, through Umberto Giordano, Mario Martone and Audio Description* 301

Enrico Grazi – Tatiana Kozlova, *Raising young learners' ELF-awareness: An intercultural telecollaboration between Italian and Kyrgyz students* 319

Simone Marsi, *Appunti sulla rappresentazione spaziale. Il Veneto disegnato da Giosetta Fioroni e l'Emilia fotografata da Cuchi White* 355

Guido Scaravilli, *Due umili verghiani. Strategie della soggettivazione in Rosso Malpelo e Jeli il pastore* 385

RECENSIONI

- Elsa Charani Lesourd, *Le roman kaléidoscope. Confessions d'un Italien d'Ippolito Nievo*
(Gianluca Della Corte) 407
- Michela Compagnoni, *I mostri di Shakespeare. Figure del deforme e dell'informe*
(Cristina Paravano) 415
- Luca Marangolo, *La nascita del dramma moderno. In Shakespeare, Calderón, Racine, Lessing*
(Nicola De Rosa) 419
- Giampiero Moretti, *Estetica e comparatistica*
(Gabriele Guerra) 425
- Emanuela Piga Bruni, *La macchina fragile. L'inconscio artificiale fra letteratura, cinema, televisione*
(Asia Battiloro) 429
- Paolo Tortonese, *L'uomo in azione. Letteratura e mimesis da Aristotele a Zola*
(Marco Fontana) 433

SEZIONE MONOGRAFICA

OLD LANGUAGE(S), NEW TECHNOLOGIES:
CORPUS LINGUISTICS
AND EUROPEAN LANGUAGES
IN THE RENAISSANCE, 1400S-1600S

a cura di Fabio Ciambella

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Introduction:
Old Language(s), New Technologies:
Corpus Linguistics and European Languages
in the Renaissance, 1400s-1600s

The Renaissance¹ is universally acknowledged to have been a crucial moment in Europe for the development of vernacular national languages, which begin to establish their prestige alongside Latin. Historical linguists have focused on the many interesting peculiarities of the European vernaculars in this period, such as the high degree of spelling fluctuation, (non-)lexicalisation of words, phonological and morphological adjustments, semantic shifts, etc. To study the diachronic development of languages, historical linguists have always employed the term ‘corpus’ and its plural form ‘corpora’, as aptly suggested by Merja Kytö (2010, 418). Nevertheless, the pre-electronic idea of corpus was that of “a collection of texts or parts of texts upon which some general linguistic analysis can be conducted” (Meyer 2002, xi). Historical corpus linguists generally indicated a collection of texts “intentionally created to represent and investigate past stages of a language and/or to study language change” (Claridge 2008, 242). In this sense, historical linguistics has always been based on corpora, even non-digitised corpora. One of the first examples is surely the Corpus

1 As Alessandra Petrina has pointed out, “[t]he period between the fifteenth and the seventeenth century to which we most commonly apply the label of ‘Renaissance’, given its trans-European validity, poses more problems, and its definition as a turning point has repeatedly been questioned and challenged, with insistent voices proposing its substitution with the locution ‘early modern’” (2019, 146). In this introduction, however, I will use the terms ‘Renaissance’ and ‘early modern’ interchangeably.

Inscriptionum Latinarum (CIL), begun in 1853 under Theodor Mommsen's direction and now held at the research centre at Unter den Linden 8 in Berlin. "The CIL counts 17 volumes in folio format in about 80 parts, containing almost 200,000 inscriptions" (<https://cil.bbaw.de/en/homenavigation/the-cil/history-of-the-cil>) in Latin, belonging to the former area of the Roman empire. The CIL also has a searchable database of carbon copies, photos, printing blocks, and records.

Nonetheless, today linguists tend to call historical corpus linguistics a methodology grounded in the use of computational linguistics applied to historical texts, what Kytö suggested should be called more accurately 'electronic historical corpus linguistics' more than ten years ago (2010), when she triumphantly declared that the methodology "emerged as a vibrant field that [...] significantly added to the appeal felt for the study of language history and change" (418). As is well-known, diachronic corpora and archives must be machine-readable to be accessible and analysable through computational tools, as underlined by McEnery et al. (2022, 394): "Unless those words can be rendered as machine readable text, then the archive remains a source of data only for those linguists who are willing to work directly with the written records using what we might term 'hand and eye' techniques".

Between the 1970s and 1980s, electronic corpora, then available to linguists and historical datasets "which include the time dimension as a design feature" (Tognini Bonelli 2010, 22), began to be compiled. Some experiments, however, had been conducted even before the second half of the last century. Considering Latin once again, McEnery and Hardie (2012, 37) mention the case of the Italian Jesuit Roberto Busa who in 1949 began compiling the *Index Thomisticus*, an electronic corpus of 179 texts dealing with the figure of Thomas Aquinas (118 of which were written by Aquinas himself) in medieval Latin (<https://www.corpusthomisticum.org/it/index.age>). As for Greek, the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae (TLG) project was started in 1971 at the University of California, Irvine, from an idea of then graduate student Marianne McDonald, and on 30 October 1972 the digitisation of Ancient Greek literary texts officially began. At the moment, "[t]he TLG® Digital Library contains virtually all Greek texts surviving from the period between Homer (8 c. B.C.) and the fall of Byzantium in A.D. 1453 and a large number of texts up to the 20th century" (<https://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/history.php>), searchable via an integrated search engine.

As highlighted by Tognini Bonelli, in terms of the English language, “[t]he first diachronic corpus was the Helsinki corpus [HC], which offers exemplars of English texts from c.750 to c.1700” (2010, 22). The HC was begun in the 1980s and launched in 1991. Two years later the first edited collection of essays dedicated to corpus-based and corpus-driven explorations of the HC was issued (*Early English in the Computer Age: Explorations through the Helsinki Corpus*), edited by Matti Rissanen, Merja Kytö and Minna Palander (see Bibliography).

For languages other than English, Kytö suggests that

[t]here is an increasing interest in historical corpora for many other modern languages, among them German and *Mittelhochdeutsche Begriffsdatenbank*, the *Bonner Frühneuhochdeutsches Korpus* and *DeutschDiachronDigital*, French and *Textes de Français Ancien*, Spanish and *Corpus del Español*, and Portuguese and *Corpus do Português*, to name just a few. (2010, 419)²

Of course, as one can see, not all the diachronic corpora contain (only) samples of early modern vernacular languages. What is certain is that in recent years, the interest in Renaissance European languages has risen exponentially, and for a number of reasons. Firstly, more than any other historical dataset, corpora of early modern vernaculars offer privileged observatories for the standardisation of European languages as we know them today, thanks to the invention of the printing press by Gutenberg in c.1436 and the rapid spread of printed books in the period between the 15th and the 17th centuries. Secondly, and connected to the first reason, the printed editions of books which began to circulate from the second half of the 15th century can be digitised more easily than classic/medieval manuscripts with the help of modern optical character recognition (OCR) software (see, among others, Boschetti et al. 2009; Schoen and Saretto 2022 about issues concerning OCR and classical/medieval manuscripts). As Schoen and Saretto pointed out:

Medieval manuscripts pose significant challenges to machine learning and OCR. Unlike printed texts, medieval handwriting often contains non-discrete characters, such as the

2 For other references to digitised corpora of historical varieties of other Germanic, Romance, and Slavic languages see also Claridge 2008; Xiao 2008; McEnery et al. 2022, 394-5. Big historical corpora are also available for Chinese, but accessibility is limited (Zinin and Xu 2020). Very recently, even a small corpus of early modern Sardinian has been created (cf. Puddu and Talamo 2020).

conjoined letters of cursive scripts or the disconnected minims of Gothic script; therefore, machines cannot simply be taught individual letterforms but must learn to transcribe larger segments of text. Compared to modern handwritten documents, medieval manuscripts feature elaborate and often cryptic handwriting systems that vary intensely across period, region, and scribe. (2022, 179)

These are the reasons why such big corpora as EEBO (Early Modern English Books Online), the Early Modern French FreEMmax corpus (Gabay et al. 2022), GerManC (Bennett et al. 2009; Scheible et al. 2011), or the HCD (Historical Corpus of Dutch; see Van De Voorde et al. 2023) are so popular today and keep expanding their number of words.

After this brief overview of the importance and popularity of historical corpora, with a focus on Renaissance European languages datasets, it is worth examining how linguists work with the large amount of data they are provided with. When it comes to diachronic approaches to corpus linguistics, scholars are sometimes sceptical about the possibilities offered by machine-readable samples of both literary and non-literary texts belonging to the Renaissance. This scepticism mainly derives from the debated issue of normalising/modernising corpora, thus eliminating, for instance, questions of variant spelling and part-of-speech (POS) tagging. Although such manipulations make examinations easier and more robust, at least from a quantitative point of view, at the same time they rule out the possibility of investigating the potentials that such variations may offer for the understanding of intra- and interlinguistic phenomena. The Hamletian (paraphrased) question ‘To modernise or not to modernise’ has always been a hot topic and is far beyond the scope of this introduction. Without delving into philological, almost ethical debates about the advantages and disadvantages of modernising Renaissance corpora,³ I can only say that some attempts have been made to automatise the process of modernisation of the spelling or the morphological inflections in corpora of Renaissance texts (e.g., the VARD2 software for early modern English or the FreEM_{norm} for early modern French),⁴ and yet a linguistically and methodologically meaningful rationale must be developed by researchers to achieve satisfying results.

3 Moreover, not all the European languages exhibit the same degree of spelling variation in the period under consideration here.

4 Cf. Archer et al. 2015 and Bawden et al. 2022, respectively.

It goes without saying that fluctuation concerns not only spelling, but any other level of linguistic analysis, as shown in the articles in this volume. Drawing on the potentials offered by this variability, instead of considering it an obstacle, historical linguists exploit the tools offered by corpus linguistics to accelerate and broaden (both quantitatively and qualitatively) their research. The six articles included in this monographic section of *Status Quaestionis* 25 offer interesting perspectives on various levels of linguistic analysis, such as spelling fluctuation, textual pragmatics, morphosyntax, figurative language, etc., and their numerous intersections, using different corpus linguistics tools. Far from being a comprehensive overview of the state of the art on ‘old languages and new technologies’ (which is not the aim of this publication), the case studies presented here provide a glimpse into the potentials offered by corpus linguistics tools when dealing with Renaissance English and Romance languages such as French, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish.

* * *

The section dealing with early modern English begins with Marco Bagli, who explores the connection between spelling variation and grammaticalization in the Renaissance by examining the development of the pragmatic marker *har-kee*. This marker originated from an imperative matrix clause with the verb *hearken/hark*. Focusing especially on the phenomenon of spelling fluctuation, Bagli demonstrates that it is evident at multiple levels in the data and the process he examined. Firstly, the matrix clause verbs exhibit alternative spelling forms, including variations with or without the digraph <ea> and with or without a final <e>. Secondly, the scholar’s in-depth examination of the grammaticalization of *hearkee/harkee* reveals its emergence from a constellation of alternative spellings in the late 17th century. Bagli’s essay provides a quantitative analysis of the various spelling forms of the matrix clause verbs that contributed to the pragmatic marker’s development. Additionally, it offers empirical data to inform models of syntactic evolution for pragmatic markers, mapping the frequency of distinct syntactic contexts in early modern English.

Emma Pasquali discusses the creation of the *Corpus of Early Modern English Trials* (1650-1700), referred to as *EMET*, a specialised historical corpus containing 1.8 million words of trial proceedings. The primary goal of this corpus is to highlight the pragmatic aspects of early modern spoken English, as

trial proceedings offer authentic dialogues. Pasquali's *EMET* was established to investigate the influence on the choice of second-person pronouns, *thou* and *you*, as well as their various inflected forms, during the Restoration period. She begins by discussing the consultation of archives, criteria for selecting trials, and the technical process of uploading the corpus to #LancsBox for study. Her essay provides details about the *EMET*, including the number of documents, total tokens, and average tokens per text, along with the types of charges involved. She also delves into the editing, normalization, and POS tagging of trials, emphasizing the importance of proper editing for corpus linguistic analysis and comparing different normalisation methods for the *EMET*.

Closing the section dedicated to early modern English, Fabio Ciambella analyses a corpus of early modern English manuscript recipe books, denoted as *FEMER* (Folger Early Modern English Recipes), which were digitised by volunteers at the Folger Shakespeare Library. He outlines the chronological and content-based criteria for selecting the manuscripts, along with the modernization of the texts using VARD2 software, before offering a detailed corpus-driven investigation using #LancsBox and The Voyant Tools, focusing on the morphosyntactic structures found in culinary recipe texts of early modern English and their interactions with pragmatics.

Romance languages are the subject of the second section of this monographic volume. Examining late medieval Portuguese, Benjamin Fagard and José Pinto de Lima begin by affirming that a significant question in current research on adpositions is the emergence of complex prepositions in the diachronic development of Portuguese. Their essay addresses this question, concentrating on the initial centuries of available texts, to determine whether complex prepositions developed independently in Portuguese or were influenced by other European languages. Using a usage-based approach and examining texts from the 13th century, Fagard and Pinto de Lima document the presence of several complex prepositions. These findings suggest the possibility of the independent emergence of complex prepositions in early and late modern Portuguese.

Vittorio Ganfi's essay, on the other hand, analyses the structural and functional aspects of Light Verb Constructions in Italian. He focuses on texts from 1376 to 1691 extracted from the MIDIA corpus (Morfologia dell'Italiano in DI-Acronia, i.e., diachronic morphology of Italian) and examines these constructions, which consist of a light verb and a noun, shedding light on their struc-

tural and functional characteristics. Ganfi also categorises these constructions based on the light verbs and nouns they use and their argument structures, while considering the semantic shifts within the constructions over time.

Lastly, adopting a comparative linguistic approach, Valentina Piunno's contribution presents a corpus-driven examination of the metaphorical and metonymic usages of the word *band* in Spanish, French, and Italian texts from the 15th to the 17th centuries. It explores how the meaning of *band* shifted from concrete to abstract, considering data from diachronic corpora and dictionaries. The analysis includes both qualitative and quantitative dimensions, identifying commonalities in semantic mapping, syntactic patterns, lexicalization, and functional values across these languages and gauging the level of productivity and conventionalization of each semantic shift.

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Heark, Hark Ye, Harkee: A History of Forms

Abstract

The present paper investigates the relationship between Early Modern English spelling fluctuation and grammaticalisation, by looking at the evolution of the different forms of the pragmatic marker *harkee*, which emerged from an imperative matrix clause headed by the verb *hearken/hark*. The phenomenon of spelling fluctuation intervenes at multiple levels in the data and in the process under scrutiny. Firstly, the verbs that constitute the matrix clause present alternative spelling forms, with or without the digraph <ea>, and with or without final <e>. Secondly, an attentive review of the grammaticalisation process of the pragmatic marker *hearkee/harkee* reveals that this form emerges from a constellation of alternative spelling forms at the end of the 17th century. This paper offers a quantitative analysis of the occurrences of the different spelling forms of the verbs in the matrix clause from which the pragmatic marker emerged. Furthermore, it provides empirical data towards models of the syntactic development of pragmatic markers, by mapping the frequency of evolution of distinct syntactic environments in Early Modern English.

1. *Introduction*

The pragmatic marker *harkee/hearkee* developed in Early Middle English (hence, EME), lived through Late Middle English, and disappeared in Present Day English. The Corpus of Contemporary American English does not contain any occurrence for the sequences *harkee/hearkee*, and the Oxford English Dictionary does not have a separate entry for this form. Yet, the online corpus Early English Books Online (hence, EEBO) contains tokens with both spellings. As a matter of fact, EEBO reports more than ‘just’ these two spellings: variants for this pragmatic marker include *harkey*, *harke’ee*, *heark’ee*, just to name a few.

The form *harkee*/*hearkee* have developed from the auditory verb to *hearken* /hɑ:kən/, which may also be spelled as *to hark* /hɑ:k/ (OED, *hark*, v.). According to the OED, the Early Middle English *berkien* may derive from an Old English type **beorchian*. Corresponding forms of this verb may be found across the spectrum of Germanic languages: e.g., Old Frisian *berkia*, *barkia*, Middle Dutch *borcken*, *borcken*, Middle High German and modern German *horchen*. The relationship with the verb *to hear* is not specified by the OED, yet the Online Etymology Dictionary suggests the form *hark* may be an intensive form based on the verb *hieran*, the Old English form of the verb *to hear*. The usage of the intensifier suffix *-k* may also be observed in English pairs such as *tale/talk*, *steal/stalk*.

EEBO contains yet other spelling variants of the verb forms in the imperative (1-4):

- (1) **Harke** vnto me good syster, I say that we should lament theyr deth (1545)
- (2) But **Hearke** what tragedies he makes. (1561)
- (3) **Heark!** I hear his voice (1664)
- (4) **Hark** ye, sir, what have you been doing all this while (1699)

The OED reports two separate entries for the two forms of the verb, which are glossed as follows (5-6):

- (5) *hearken*, v.
 1. *intransitive*. To apply the ears to hear; to listen, give ear.
 - †2. To listen privily; to play the eavesdropper; to eavesdrop.
 3. *intransitive*. To apply the mind to what is said; to attend, have regard; to listen with sympathy or docility.
 4. *transitive*. To hear with attention, give ear to (a thing); to listen to; to have regard to, heed.
- (6) *hark*, v.
 1. *transitive*. To give hear or listen to; to hearken to, hear with active attention.
 2. a. *intransitive*. To give hear, hearken, listen.
 2. b. *absol.* Chiefly in *imperative*.
 2. c. In the imperative the nominative *ye* is often added (also written *hark'ee*, *harkee*); less commonly *hark you*, and by confusion *hark thee* (cf. *fare thee well*).

The two forms show perfectly assimilable meanings, despite their confusion in spelling. According to the OED, the form *hark* followed by second person pronouns has coalesced into the pragmatic marker *harkee*.

At a closer look at the EME data, the pragmatic marker emerged from a clause matrix consisting of verbal forms presenting different spellings. A usage-based account of the history of these forms and of their linguistic development is at the core of the present paper. The process that has led to the formation of the pragmatic marker started in EME, as observed by Brinton (2008; 2010), a period of the history of English that has witnessed many changes and subsequent instability of linguistic forms and their spelling (Nevalainen 2006, 31-6). Example (7) illustrates the meaning of the pragmatic marker:

(7) This is more intricate still, i can't understand either of 'em: **harkee**, come hither, did not you bring me a letter lately for which i gave you money, sir? (EEBO 1698)

Although traces of the literal, perceptual meaning glossed by the OED (*hark*, v., 3c) remain in (7), the context of the utterance suggests that the item *harkee* is not used referentially, but interpersonally, i.e., to convey an interpersonal and pragmatic meaning. I understand the main pragmatic function of the discourse marker in (7) as to attract the attention of the addressee of the utterance. Thus, the item *harkee* in (7) conveys a different meaning than the other occurrences of the verb *harken* (8), which retains the literal meaning of the verb, i.e., its perceptual and auditory meaning.

(8) If thou think that Baptisme can not be taken for geuing of the holy ghost, **harken** what Iohn the baptist sayth of our Sauour Christ, math and him self. (1560)

The present paper aims at describing the evolution of the different forms of the pragmatic marker *harkee/hearkee*, starting from the distinct spellings of the verb that are present in EEBO, and how these forms relate to the pragmatic marker spelling alternation. The data were retrieved by means of a corpus analysis of the occurrences of the distinct forms in EEBO, and they were processed through the software R, using the packages *dplyr* and *ggplot2* (Wickham 2016). The script and the data analysed are available at the following link: github.com/marbagli/harke. The objective of the study is to support with quantitative data the theoretical description of the development of the forms *harkee/hearkee* proposed by Brinton (2008; 2010), in analogy to the forms *lookee, lookey, looky*.

The paper is structured as follows. After the introduction, I offer a theoretical assessment of discourse markers in grammar and of relevant theoretical

models of their semantic and syntactic evolution. Following a detailed methodology of the coding of the data retrieved, I present the results of the analyses, before offering some concluding remarks. The paper aims at answering the following research questions: what is the difference in the syntactic behaviour, if any, between the different forms of the verb? What can spelling variation tell us about the grammaticalisation pattern of the discourse marker? Furthermore, when did the phonologically reduced form *harkee* appear, and how did it develop in EME? The results of this investigation will shed light on a phenomenon of spelling alternation in EME and contribute to future research in standardisation processes.

2. *Pragmatic Markers, Interjections, Inserts*

Pragmatic markers are a controversial group of lexical items. They are often not considered a separate word-class, rather a group of lexical items that constitute a function class (Hansen 1998, 357-8; Bazzanella 2006, 451), whose members may belong to distinct word-classes, such as adverbs, prepositions, or conjunctions. Interjections share some formal and pragmatic features with pragmatic markers, and recent historical pragmatic accounts have argued for a prototypical approach to the descriptions of the two categories (Jucker and Taavitsainen 2013; Bagli 2023). Only recently have interjections and pragmatic markers exerted an interest in formal linguistic accounts: both are mainly found in oral registers, are typically thought of as a sign of poor style and have been considered an idiosyncratic expression of subjectivity (Brinton 1996, 2). These characteristics have hampered the development of formal descriptions of these phenomena. Contemporary linguistic accounts instead recognise the centrality of conversation and of the oral medium in linguistic theories (see for instance Dingemanse 2023), and technological advances in the digitalisation of historical texts has fostered the development of historical approaches to pragmatics. Central to this renewed interest in a diachronic account of conversational practices is the digitalisation of large quantities of historical linguistic data. EEBO is perhaps the most notable example of this joint effort towards digitalisation of historical texts.

Biber et al. (1999) group interjections and pragmatic markers under the label of ‘inserts’, that is, a class of words which are characterised by their inability to entertain syntactic relations with other structures in the sentence (Ibid.: 1082).

The more central members of the class of inserts typically display six defining features: “a) they may appear on their own, i.e., not as part of a larger grammatical structure; b) on the other hand, they may appear attached (prosodically, or, in the transcription, by absence of punctuation) to a larger structure, which may be a clausal unit or a non-clausal unit; c) they rarely occur medially in a syntactic structure; d) they are morphologically simple; e) they are not homonyms of words in other word classes; f) semantically, they have no denotative meaning: their use is defined rather by their pragmatic function” (Ibid.). Together with interjections and discourse markers, the class of inserts includes items such as greetings and farewells, attention signals, response elicitors and response forms.

In a diachronic perspective, pragmatic markers may develop from an array of different forms and functions, such as adverbs, conjunctions, Noun Phrases, verbs, and even entire clauses (Brinton 1996; 2001; 2008).

According to Bazzanella (2006), pragmatic markers perform three main functions: cognitive (e.g., procedural/inferential, epistemic, illocutionary meanings); interactional (e.g., attention-getting, hedging, turn-taking, agreement-disagreement), and metatextual (e.g., text marking, reformulation). The three different functions may be performed by the same item, and the different functions need not exclude each other. The item *harkee/hearkee* is analysed in the present contribution as an attention getting device, which is used by a speaker to attract the attention of the addressee to what is being said, or to some other contextual cues. Thus, the meaning of the pragmatic marker, despite maintaining some traces of referentiality, performs a more generic pragmatic function. This is evidenced by the absence in many contexts of a direct auditory referent¹, which would be expected in a more literal and perceptual interpretation of the verb form *hearken*.

2.1 *Semantic development of pragmatic markers*

The process that leads to the emergence of pragmatic markers has traditionally been seen as a process of ‘bleaching’ of semantic content. Traugott

1 For instance, in the sequence “hark, mother, harke” (EEBO 1590) the noun “mother” may be understood as a direct auditory referent, i.e., someone who could interpret the imperative form *harke* in its perceptual meaning.

(1982) instead argued that lexical items including pragmatic markers follow a general semantic-pragmatic path that allows them to develop their pragmatic meaning. Three tendencies were identified by Traugott and König (1991, 208-9), namely a) a shift in meaning from externally-based to internally-based, b) a shift from externally-based or internally-based meanings to textual meanings, c) a progression towards subjective meanings based in the speaker's belief or attitude. These tendencies have been further modified to include more complex scenarios and paths of development (see, for instance, Traugott and Dasher 2002). Brinton (2008, 26) unifies different lines of research in a simple and effective formulation of semantic change that goes from referential (propositional) meaning to non-referential meaning (pragmatic, metalinguistic, procedural). The semantic development of new meanings is driven by a wide array of processes, such as metaphorisation and metonymisation. For instance, Heine et al. (1991, 45-61) discuss how more abstract concepts are understood in terms of more concrete ones through metaphor, while Brinton (1996) observes that pragmatic markers emerge in contexts that allow a metonymic shift from one conceptual domain to another. In the case of the verb *hearken*, the path that leads from the propositional, perceptual meaning to the pragmatic, non-referential meaning of *harkee* may be accounted for as a conceptual metaphor. The metaphorical shift from the merely perceptual level to the heedfulness level had already occurred in the roots of both forms of the verb before entering EME, and had already become part of their semantic construal, as testified by the two glosses of the OED. The metaphor that had driven this process may be formalised as HEARING IS HEEDING. This metaphor instantiates a common path of semantic change in Indo-European languages, which was identified and discussed by Sweetser (1990, 37-8). This trajectory of meaning expansion connects verbs referring to audition to meanings referring to heedfulness, as in English expressions such as *I hear you* (meaning 'I understand you') or *listen to me!* (meaning 'do as I tell you') (Sweetser 1990, 41). This metaphorical meaning has crystallised in a form meaning 'pay attention' used in the imperative form, and it came to refer to a general call for attentiveness, not only referring to the immediate conversational context. The development of this pragmatic meaning may be characterised also as a conceptual metonymy, following the model PARTICULAR STANDS FOR GENERAL.

2.2 *The Syntactic Development of Pragmatic Markers*

Pragmatic markers may evolve from a wide range of distinct syntactic sources: word-classes as varied as nouns, adverbs, verbs, conjunctions may develop new pragmatic meanings, but even phrases and clauses, as in the case of comment clauses (Brinton 2008). Brinton (2010, 299-301) recognises several distinct paths of development of pragmatic markers that have been identified by scholars in the last decades. The evolution of the discourse marker *why* (see Traugott 1982) exemplifies the path from adverb or preposition to conjunction to discourse marker. Lexical items such as *indeed*, *in fact*, *besides* were analysed by Traugott (1995) as instantiating a path from predicate adverb to sentential adverb to discourse marker. Some pragmatic markers may evolve from matrix clauses, typically following a cline from first-person matrix clause to indeterminate matrix-clause/parenthetical matrix clause (e.g., *I think*, Thompson and Mulac 1991; *pray/prithee*, Akimoto 2000, see also Brinton 2008); and from relative/adverbial clause to parenthetical discourse marker (e.g., *what's more*, Brinton 2008). The path of development that is most relevant for the present discussion, however, is that from imperative matrix clause to indeterminate structure to parenthetical discourse marker, exemplified by the development of *mind (you)*, *say*, *see*, *look/lookee*, and *harkee/harkey* (Brinton 2001; 2008; 2010). This path of development involves an initial stage in which the imperative form of the verb is typically followed by a subordinate clause introduced by a subordinating conjunction, such as *that*, *how*, or *what* (in the case of *look*, Brinton 2001, 182). A following stage is represented by the loss of the subordinating conjunction, thus giving rise to syntactic configurations in which the subordinated clause follows the verb with a zero subordinator, in sentences such as “[*Look*] [*you be not late*]”, which in turn fosters the third stage of the grammaticalisation cline, namely rebracketing of the construction to “[*Look you*] [*be not late*]” (Ibid.: 187). Crucially, the author suggests that the pragmatic marker *harkee* follows the same path of development (see also Brinton 2008, 199-200). Thus, the appearance of the attention-getter pragmatic marker *harkee* is analysed as a phonologically reduced form of previous sequences in which the imperative form of the verb is followed by one of the forms of the second person pronoun *ye*, *ye*, *you*, or *thee*.

In the case of the verb *look*, the pragmatic and non-referential meaning had already developed before EME. As a result, the evolution of the different syntactic scenarios proposed by Brinton (2001; 2008) are to be found across

a wider temporal frame. The present paper however exclusively concentrates on EME, thus hampering the possibility of verifying Brinton’s claim. Nonetheless, the corpus analysis of EME occurrences provides empirical and usage-based support to the theoretical description proposed by the author.

3. Methodology

The research consisted of two subsequent and independent phases. In the first stage, I retrieved the different forms of the verbs from which *hearkee/harkee* emerged, and I analysed the occurrences of imperative forms in all their spelling variation. These forms were retrieved by interrogating the corpus using wildcards in the following sequence: *b*rk**. The aim of this initial stage was to capture the different forms in which the imperative matrix clause could be encoded. This yielded four different spelling variants of the root, exemplified in (1-4). Table 1 illustrates the numerical details of Frequency of the forms. The first column reports the form of the verb, the second column reports the rough number of occurrences displayed by EEBO, while the third column reports the actual number of occurrences retrieved. The two figures are not equal because some occurrences are missing from the ‘Context’ tab on englishcorpora.org, thus making it unequal to the total number of occurrences displayed in the ‘Frequency’ section.² Despite having analysed the imperative forms of the verb, some of the occurrences retrieved were not used as imperative, but as either infinitive or indicative. The number of these cases is displayed in the fourth column, while the fifth column reports the number of occurrences after cleaning.

FORM	OCCURRENCES DISPLAYED	ACTUAL OCCURRENCES	INFINITIVE/ OTHER	AFTER CLEANING
hark	2307	2299	24	2275
harke	1764	1761	124	1637
heark	840	836	39	797
hearke	424	424	59	365

Table 1. Spelling variants retrieved from the search *b*rk**.

² The ‘Context’ tab is the section of the corpus in which the concordances are displayed; the ‘Frequency’ section instead reports the overall number of occurrences.

As way of example, (9) and (10) report two occurrences in which *harke* was used in the infinitive or in the indicative, respectively:

(9) [...] they refused t **harke**, &c; pulled away their sholder. (1595)

(10) [...] like hounds, they **harke**, and barke about. (1641)

I assigned the remaining occurrences to distinct categories reflecting four types of syntactic configuration in which the form appeared. The categories are distinguished by letters. These are: S for subordinate clause with subordinator, P for parenthetical/absolute usage, O for direct object and/or zero complementizer, and V for vocative construction, in which the verb root was followed by either a second person pronoun, or a noun expressing the addressee of the imperative form.³

More specifically: occurrences followed by a subordinate clause introduced by a subordinator were categorised as S, as in (11):

(11) **Harke** how the organist most sweetely plaies his Psalmes upon the tone-divided kayes (1640)

The occurrences marked as O are followed either by a subordinate clause with no subordinator or by a direct object, as in (12) and (13) respectively:

(12) [...] **hark** I hear a noise, sure there are more shout within (1670)

(13) [...] **Harke** the poore gentleman, he beginnes his fit (1640)

The occurrences followed by a relative subordinate clause introduced by a relative pronoun, typically *what*, were also counted in this category, as in (14):

(14) [...] of this apostle, **harke** what S. Paule sayth (1580)

The label P instead stands for parenthetical and/or absolute usage, and it mainly contains occurrences in which the lexical forms are severed from the context through punctuation, or in which the imperative is used in absolute terms as an insert as in (15), (see also OED, *bark*, 2b):

3 The letters chosen to represent the four categories were selected arbitrarily, and they do not necessarily correspond to the first letter of the category (ex. P for Absolute usage).

(15) But codrus, **harke**, the world expects to see thy bastard heire rotte there in misery (1590)

Finally, I labelled as V the occurrences followed by a personal pronoun (16), a noun (17), or an NP with a modifier (18). The label V stands for vocative, and it refers to the function of the NPs that occur after the verb. These NPs typically describe the addressee of the imperative form, as the following examples illustrate. This category emerged from observation of the data, which showed a consistent usage of the imperative form not only in combination with a pronoun, but also with other nominal elements that refer to the addressee of the utterance:

(16) **Harke** ye frechmen ye are but yuell men of warr (1520)

(17) **Harke** brother, ha(r)ke, me thinkes i he(a)re on(e) call (1600)

(18) **Harke** my wench, wilt leaue these rusticke fellowes &; stay with me? (1600)

Some of the results displayed multiple configurations of the verb form, such as (19)

(19) **Harke** whore, harke: harke how i do beleeeue (1580)

These occurrences were labelled individually according to the syntactic context in which each appeared. For instance, the first *harke* in (19) was labelled as V, the second as P, the third as S.

The second stage of the research involved the study of the different forms of the newly developed item *harkee* and its spelling variants. These were retrieved with the same wildcard h^*rk^* , to chart the different forms in which the phonologically reduced form *harkee* was encoded during the first stage of its development.

4. Results

A preliminary step in the investigation of the differences between the spelling variants of the imperative form of the verb *bark(en)* was the representation of their frequencies across time. These are mapped in Fig. 1, which was created using the *ggplot2* package on R.

4.1 Distinct Forms of the Verb

The four different forms of the verb display significant variation in spelling. The couple of *heark/hark* is doubled with other two alternative forms that present a final <e> in the initial stages of the Early Modern period. The four forms have different distribution over time, as Fig. 1 shows.

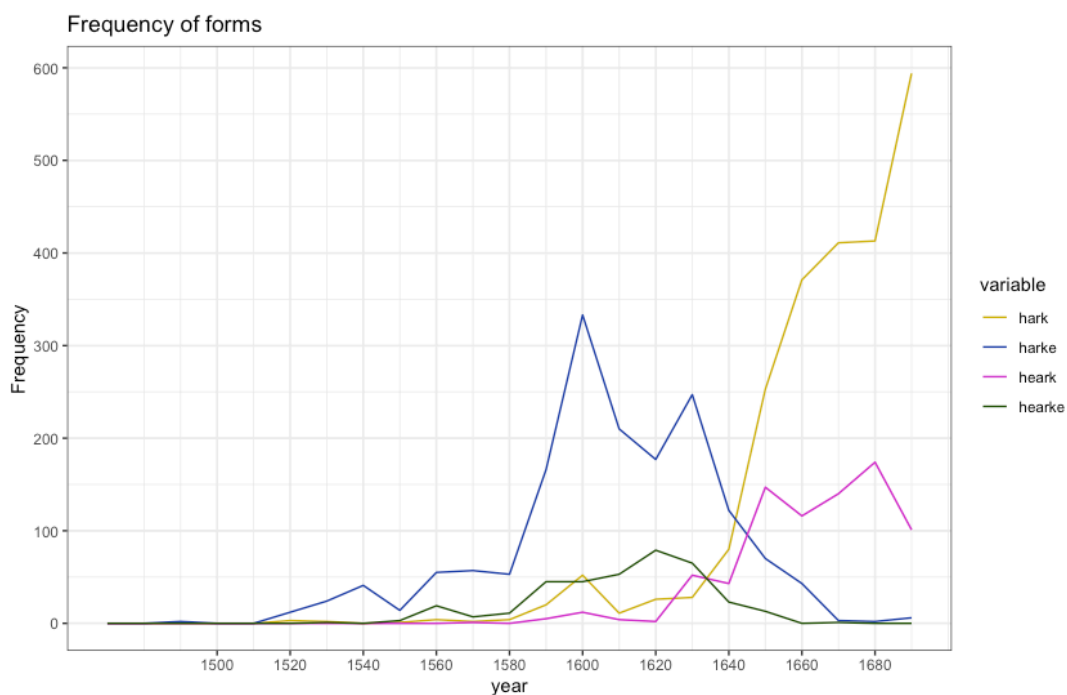


Fig. 1. Frequency of forms over time.

Fig. 1 shows the different distribution over time of the spelling variants. The first form of the verb that appeared more frequently is the variant *harke* in the first decades of the 16th century. It raised in frequency until 1600, when it started to decline until it virtually disappeared in ca. 1670. The variant *hearke* instead appeared more consistently around 1550, and its frequency peaked in 1620, but it never became as frequent as *harke*. The two spelling variants with no final <e> (*hark*, *heark*) developed in the 17th century, and both became more frequent than their respective variants with final <e> between 1630 and 1650. Particularly, the variant *hark* became the most frequent after 1650, and the occurrences with this spelling rise dramatically towards the end of the century, especially if compared to the other variants. The data analysed are consistent

in showing that *bark* is the preferred spelling for this verb in the second half of the 17th century. The dropping of final <e> is a phenomenon that consistently occurs in the first half of the 17th century, as the graphs in Fig. 2-3 show.

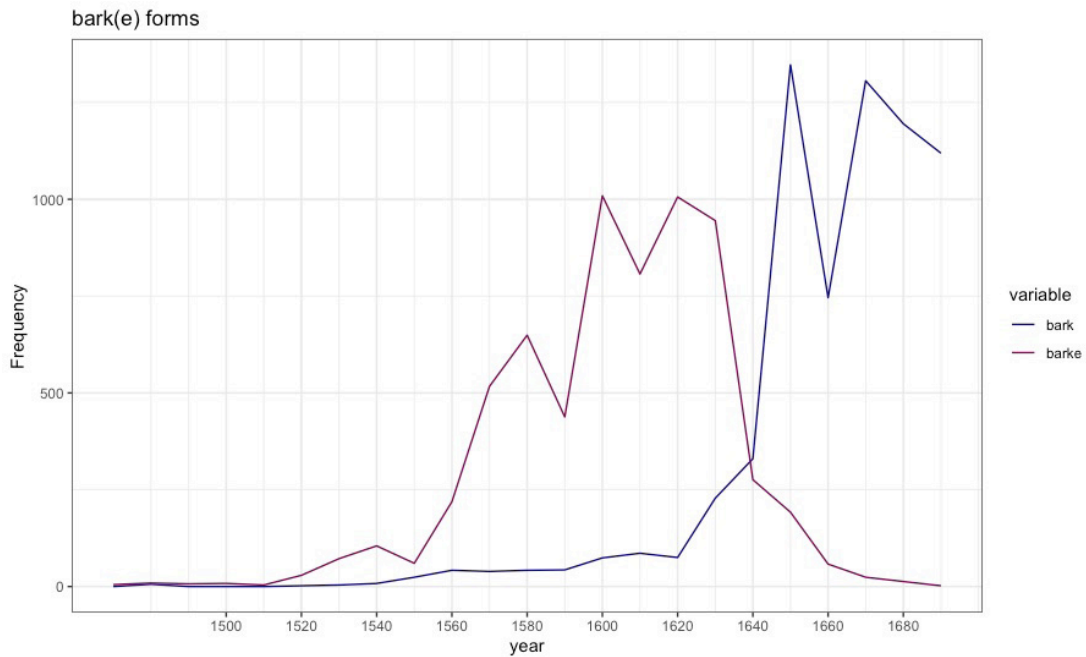


Fig. 2. *Bark(e)* forms.

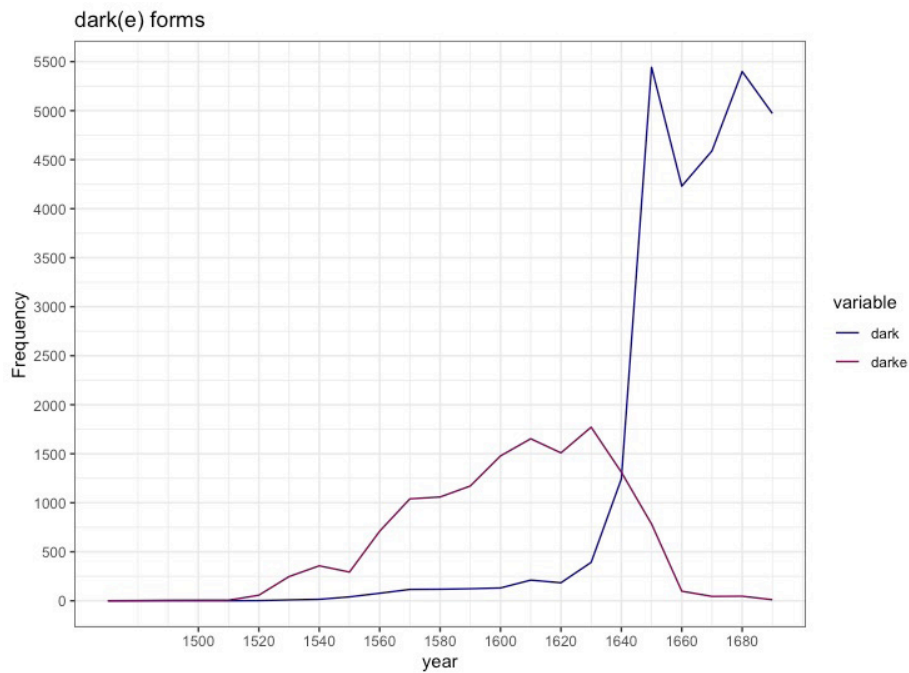


Fig. 3. *Dark(e)* forms.

The graphs in Figg. 2-3 show the Frequency over time of two couples of alternative forms of *bark* and *dark*. In both cases, the variant with final <e> dropped becomes dominant after 1640, in keeping with the dropping of final <e> in the couple *barke/bark* and *hearke/heark* (Fig. 1).

The figures of the distribution of the couple *hark*/*heark* however change completely if we take into consideration the infinitive form of the verb. Fig. 4 reports the Frequency values of the two alternative forms in EEBO. The two alternative forms *hearken* and *harken* show different trends of frequency, thus suggesting that the spelling variant with the digraph <ea> is the preferred form in the infinitive mood, while the form *hark* is the preferred form in the imperative mood (see Fig. 1). The OED notes that:

the spelling *harken*, which agrees with that of *HARK*, v., and is at once more regular and of earlier standing, is the accepted one in American Dictionaries, and is preferred by some good English writers; but in current English use it is much less frequent than *hearken*. The preference for the latter spelling is probably due to association with *HEAR*, v., supported by the analogy of *heart* and *hearth*. (OED, *hearken*, v.)

The data retrieved from EEBO show how this tendency started in EME. The spelling *harken* appears some 40 years earlier than the alternative *hearken*, as reported by the OED.

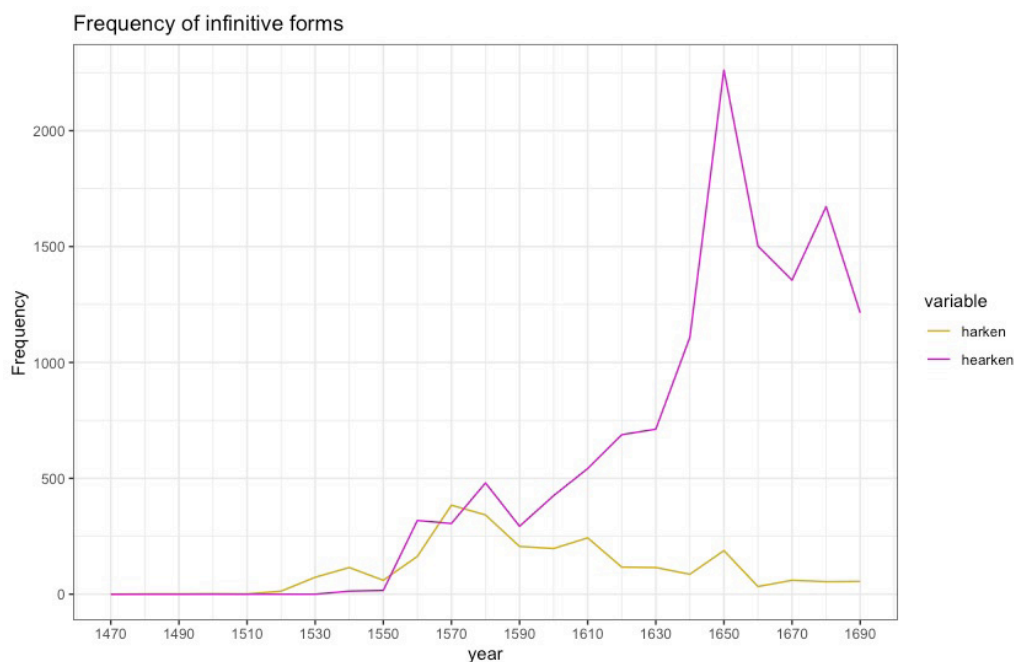


Fig. 4. Infinitive forms in EEBO.

4.2 *Hearke*

The spelling *hearke* is the less frequent form in EEBO. Fig. 5 illustrates the frequency of the four different syntactic configurations retrieved.

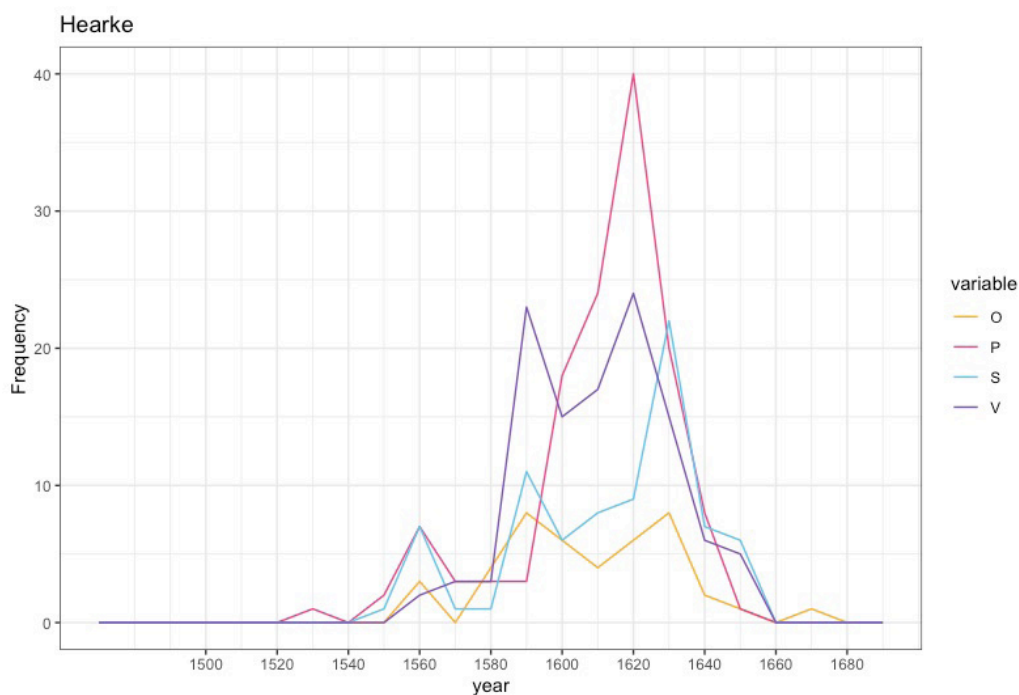


Fig. 5. *Hearke*.

This form is most frequently found in the corpus in the time span 1580-1650. The highest usage is in absolute position (P), followed by the vocative construction. Towards the end of the 16th century (1580-1600) this form was more frequently used in vocative construction than in absolute position. The occurrences in the P and V categories are typical of oral registers of language. Theatrical texts represent one of the privileged registers for the study of spoken interaction in diachrony (Culpeper and Kytö 2010). This is mirrored in the two peaks of 1620 of the collocations in P and V, which are largely due to the appearance in the corpus of Shakespeare's first folio. The O and S conditions are infrequent, although occurrences followed by a subordinate clause peak in 1630s. Examples (20-3) illustrate the different usages.

- (20) **Hearke** what Ecclesiastes saith in the xxix chapter, and Iesus Christ in the Gospell likewise (1591, O)
- (21) **Hearke**, who lyes i' th' second chamber? (1623, P)
- (22) **Hearke** how he blowes his death. (1597, S)
- (23) **Hearke** boy, what noise is that? (1623, V)

Fig. 5 displays the different frequency values of the distinct syntactic environments, and suggests that the four conditions, albeit with different frequencies, were all available at the same time for the form *hearke*.

4.3 *Heark*

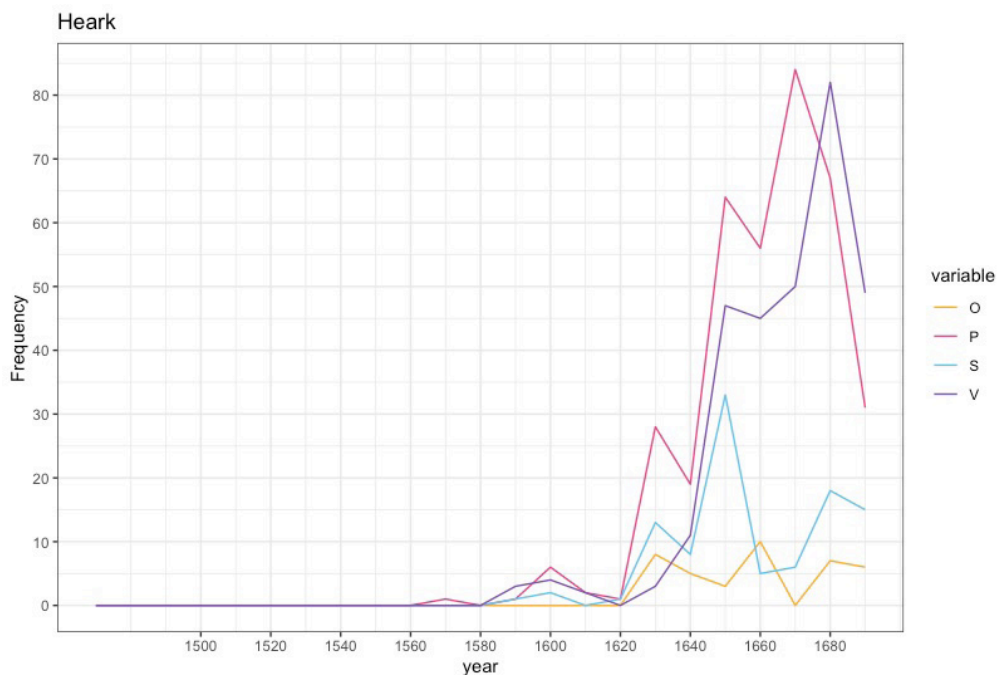


Fig. 6. *Heark*.

The graph in Fig. 6 shows the distribution across different syntactic configurations of the form *hearke* in EEBO. This form becomes more frequent in the 17th century, but some early occurrences in parenthetic position may be retrieved in the last decades of the 16th century (24):

- (24) [...] but here commeth his lackie, ho lack **hearke**, where is erostato? (1570)

EEBO displays some occurrences for *heark* even in the decade 1560, but at a closer look these are instances of *hearken* that have been spelled with a blank space between the root and the infinitive suffix, as in (25):

(25) [...] but lo, they wil not beleue me, nor **heark** en vnto my voyce (1561)

These occurrences were discarded from further analysis.

The absolute usage rises in frequency almost immediately: it is the most frequent usage of the form *heark* until 1670s, when instead the vocative collocations become the most frequent syntactic pattern in which *heark* is found. After 1680s, this pattern slowly decreases, while the coalesced forms start increasing (see next section). Occurrences followed by a direct object are infrequent, in keeping with the occurrences of the other spelling variants, while 1630s sees the peak of subordinate clauses introduced by a subordinator. However, occurrences in S condition never become the most frequent across the corpus. Examples (26-9) illustrate the four conditions with *heark*.

(26) Servants listen, **heark** there's some body coming. (1664, O)

(27) **Heark! Heark!** The trouble of the day draws neere. (1635, P)

(28) Let me suck out those billows in thy belly, **Heark** how they rore and rumble in the streets (1653, S)

(29) **Heark** ye, ye Curris, keep off from snapping at my heels [...] (1681, V)

The two configurations P and V are the most frequent in the corpus, and they appear at the same time as alternative syntactic patterns such as S and O. This is consistent with the previous form, in which final <e> dropped in the first year of the 17th century.

4.4 *Harke*

Fig. 7 illustrates the distribution of the syntactic configurations of the form *harke*. In keeping with the other forms, the configurations P and V are the most frequent in the 17th century, while S and O are infrequent. Between 1520-1560, *harke* is mainly followed by subordinate clauses, which may be introduced either by a subordinator (condition S), or by nothing (condition O). The subordinators that are frequently found in this environment are *unto*, and *to* (30-1).

- (30) Stande in feare of god, **harke** to the prophecie of the Prophete Hiermy (1540, S)
 (31) **Harke** unto me good sister, I say that we shuld lament theyr death (1540, S)

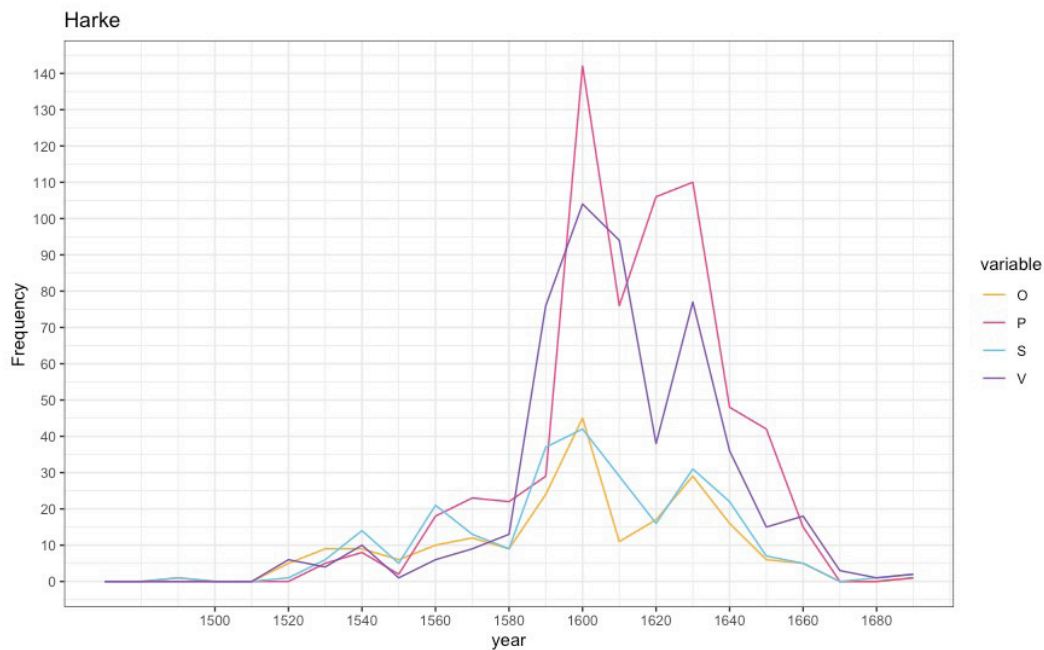


Fig. 7. *Harke*.

In the period 1520-1550 the O configuration is the most frequent, while in the period 1530-1560 the S configuration is the most frequent. This trend resonates with Brinton's observations on the historical development of the syntactic behaviour of these forms, but the figures are so low that they cannot be interpreted as providing support for Brinton's model.

The highest concentration of occurrences is found between 1580-1660. Among these, the most frequent are in either P (32) or V (33) syntactic configuration:

- (32) **Harke**, I will tell thee all: whisper in priuate. (1607)
 (33) **Harke** you sir, looke what I did promise you Ile Ile performe (1590)

The occurrence in (33) reports one of the first examples of the pragmatic meaning of the form, in which the imperative verb *harke* is found in collocation with the second person pronoun and the term *sir*. It does not literally refer to *harken*, rather, it is used metaphorically to mean 'keep attention'. Furthermore, this occurrence also displays a pragmatic usage of the form *looke*.

4.5 *Hark*

Fig. 8 shows the syntactic configurations of the form *hark*. This form develops toward the end of the 16th century, but it becomes predominant in the 17th century. The two syntactic environments in which this form is mainly used are P and V, in keeping with the frequency of the other forms. The absolute usage is the most frequent. Although it appears later than the other forms, this is the form that reaches the highest number of occurrences, as shown in Fig. 8 and 1. In 1680s, this form reaches almost 600 occurrences. Examples (34-7) show its usage across the four syntactic conditions in 1680s.

- (34) **Hark** what the prophet saith, habak (1680, O)
- (35) But **hark**; what noise is that? (1683, P)
- (36) **Hark** how the angry furies howl! (1685, S)
- (37) **Hark** ye sir, a word; how dare you talk of love (1682, V)

The four examples reported show the different usages in the same decade, at a time when this form became more frequent, and the first coalesced forms of the pragmatic marker *harkee* started to appear. The syntactic configurations for the form *hark* suggest that the four syntactic environments are present at the same time, albeit with different frequencies. In the case of the form *hark*, the two configurations S and O are particularly infrequent.

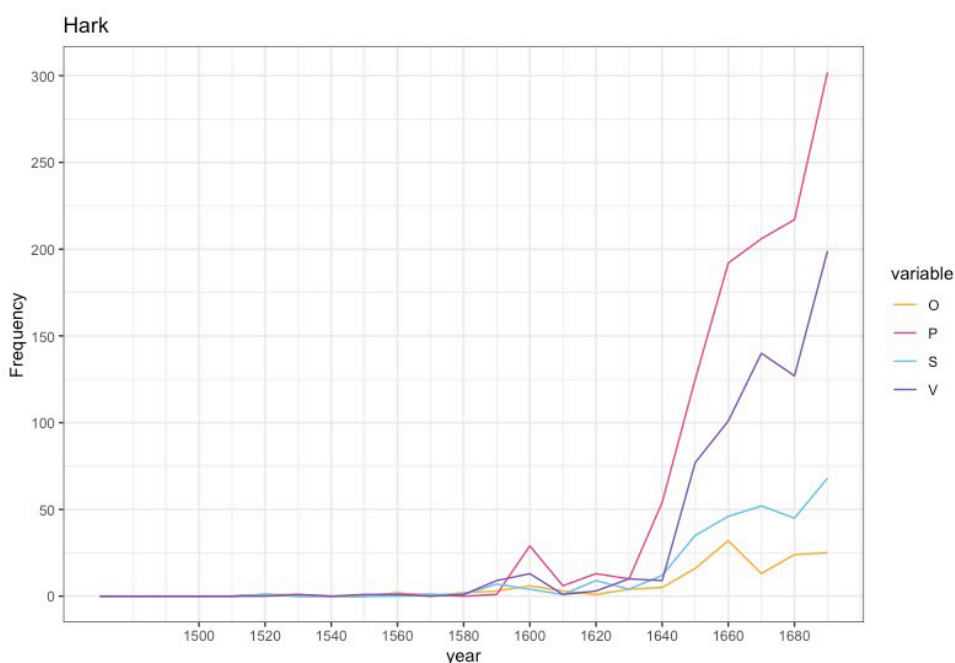


Fig. 8. *Hark*.

4.6 *Interim Discussion of Different Forms*

The detailed study of the syntactic configurations of the different variants suggests that the four alternative forms behave similarly to each other. The two most frequent configurations are those labelled as P and V, in keeping with the imperative mood of the forms. The loss of the final <e> is consistent between the two forms and with other forms in EME. The data retrieved suggest that the different syntactic patterns were available at the same time across the four spelling variants. These data do not support the development of different syntactic environments from a matrix clause described by Brinton (2001; 2008). It must be noted however that the development of distinct syntactic configurations may have happened outside of the period under observation. As a matter of fact, the form *harke* is found in V and P as early as 1520s, thus seemingly having developed this possibility at an earlier stage during the Middle English period, as already showed for other pragmatic markers such as *look* (Brinton 2001).

4.7 *Harkee*

The pragmatic marker *harkee/hearkee* appears in its coalesced form at the end of the 17th century (see Fig. 10). It is a phonologically reduced form of the sequence {*bark/heark*} + {*ye/you/thee*}, and it emerges from a constellation of different spelling sequences, most of which are extremely infrequent and represent isolated, idiosyncratic cases. Fig. 9 reports all the possible forms in EEBO that emerged between 1660s and 1690s.

The most frequent form in EEBO is *harkee*, followed by *bark'e*, *hearkee*, *bark'ee*, *harkey*, and *barki*. The alternation between the two roots *bark/heark* is still present, but the variant *bark* is more frequent in the imperative form, and it represents the form that survives in Late Modern English.

The most frequent forms coexist with a vast number of other alternatives, some of which have less than 10 occurrences. These are *heark'ee*, *harkye*, *hearkey*, *bark'ye*, *harke'e*, *heark'e*, *bark-ye*, *bark'y'*, *bark-you*, *heark'ye*, *heark'y*, *heark'ey*, *harky'*, *bark'ey*. These forms have been discarded from further analyses, considering their low frequencies. Fig. 10 reports the different forms of the pragmatic marker with more than 10 overall occurrences and their development through time.

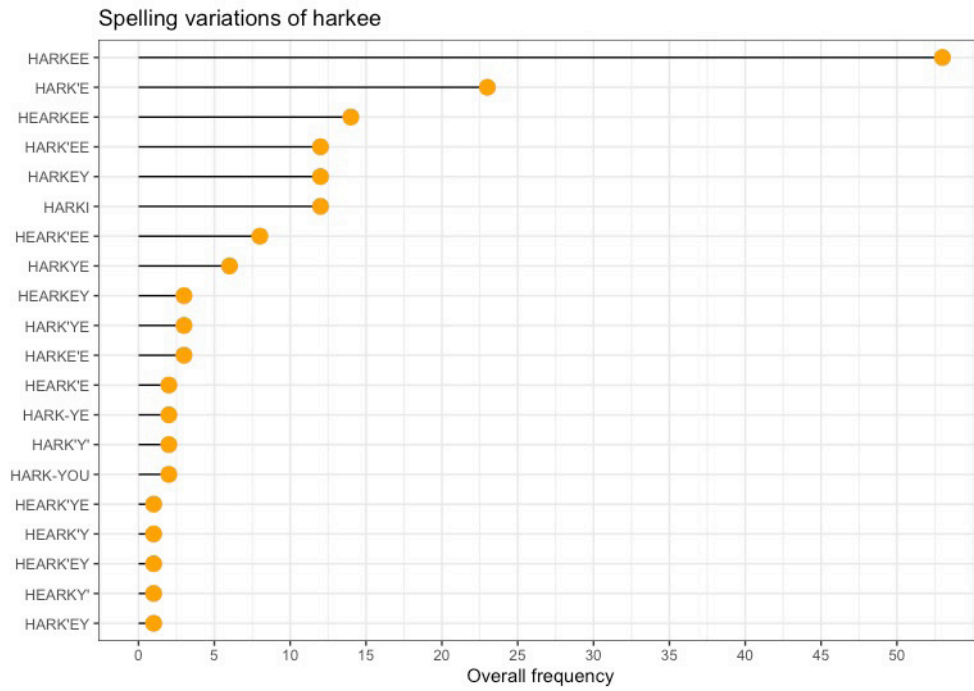


Fig. 9. Spelling variations of *harkee*.

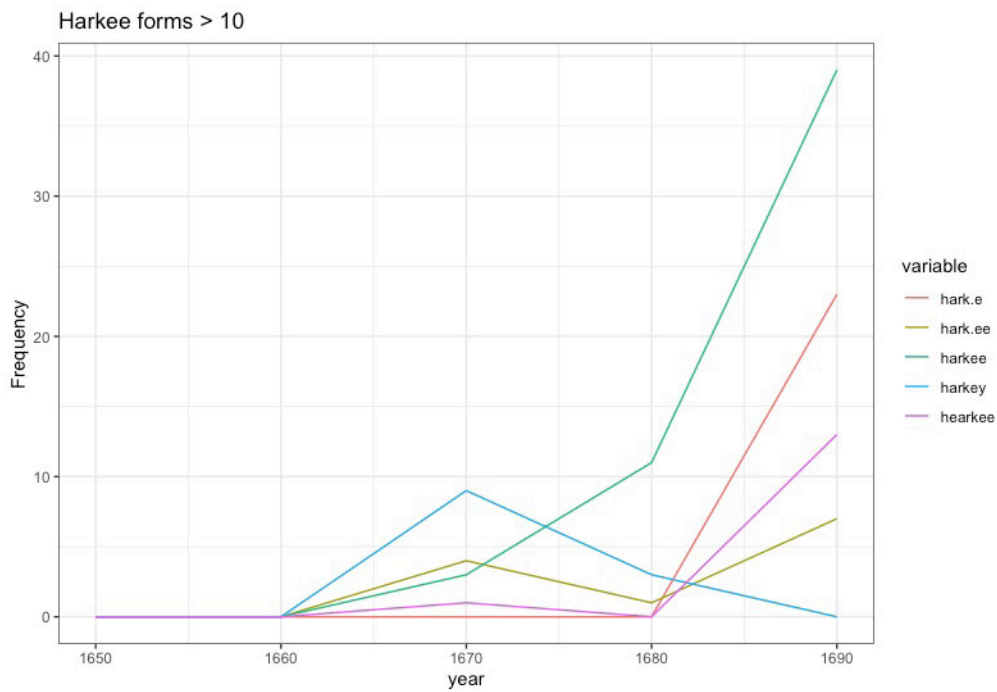


Fig. 10. Forms of *harkee* >10.

The most frequent form is *harkee* since 1680s. The first set of occurrences of the new forms may be retrieved after 1660s, but as Fig. 10 shows, the only form that reaches more than 10 occurrences in one single decade is *harkee* in 1680. The second most productive form is *hark'e*, which reaches more than 10 occurrences in 1690. The form *hearkee* presents the alternative spelling with the digraph <ea>. The form *hark'ee* seems rising towards the end of the century, but it still is extremely infrequent. The interesting aspect of this form is the presence of the apostrophe, which testifies to the omission of the letter *y* of the personal pronoun *ye*.

The proliferation of different forms concentrated in less than 20 years shows that the standardized form arises from a constellation of variants with different spelling, which have coexisted for several years. It must be noted that the forms retrieved and discussed are only limited to those that emerge from EEBO, and do not take into consideration regional or dialectal versions, which may add further forms to this complicated picture emerging from EEBO.

Duly, the occurrences in the V construction of the two roots *hark* and *heark* may convey the same meaning as that of the pragmatic marker, as the following examples illustrate:

- (38) [...] but **hark** you, gentlemen, there's an ill-tasting dose to be swallowed first; there's a covenant to be taken. (1692)
- (39) [...] but, **hark** ye friend, are the women as tame and civil as they were before i left the town? (1696)
- (40) **Heark** you, honest soldiers, pray do me the favour to wash these rascals in the canal, and there's a guinea for your trouble (1696)
- (41) [...] why, **heark** ye, fubbs, prithee how came thy name to be alter'd? (1691)
- (42) [...] **harkee**, goodman swabber, say but half so much again, and i'll call the constable, and lay burglary to your charge (1696)
- (43) [...] but **hearkee**, brother: i have orders to take up every one that i find in this house, officers only excepted

As the examples show, the occurrences of the imperative form *hark* in the vocative construction should be considered as part of the constellation of alternative spellings in which the form *harkee* emerges as the most frequent. Among the occurrences retrieved in EEBO, one of them clearly illustrates an intermediate stage of grammaticalisation, in which the coalesced form of the pragmatic marker has not emerged, but it is followed by the personal pronoun subject *you* (44):

(44) [...] but **hark** y'you will be discreet and secret in this business now [...] (1670)

The example in (44) illustrates a medial stage in the spelling and the incipient stage of grammaticalisation, in which the pronoun *ye* is coalescing with the verb, but it is not completely agglutinated. This form however is not perceived as a subject any longer, to the extent that the pronoun *you* is used as the subject of the subordinate clause following the imperative form *hark*.

If we include the imperative forms of the verb *hark*/*heark* in the vocative construction among the possibilities of the different spelling variants of the pragmatic marker during the grammaticalisation process, what are the lexical items that most frequently enter the vocative construction?

Fig. 11 and 12 illustrate the frequency and the variety of the lexical items found in the Vocative construction in the 17th century for both forms of the verb.

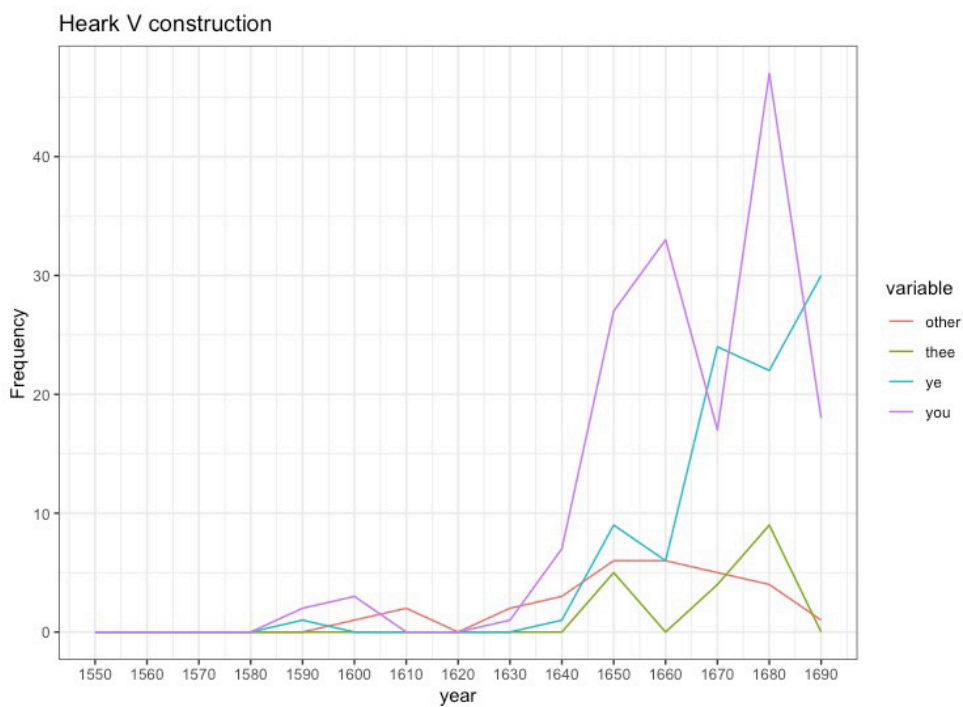


Fig. 11. *Heark* V construction.

Fig. 11 shows the frequency of the different lexical items that collocate with the vocative construction of the form *heark*. The most frequent collocation is with

the pronoun *you*, followed by *ye*. The pronoun *thee* is infrequent, and the least frequent group consists of nominal items such *sir*, *boy*, or personal names, as in (45):

(45) **Hark** Petruchio, shee says shee'll see you hang'd first (1698)

Fig. 12 illustrates the frequency of the lexical items that enter the vocative construction with the form *hark*. This form is most frequently found with *you*, followed by *ye*. The collocation with other forms (46) is more frequent for *hark* than it is for *heark*, while the collocations with *thee* are less frequent.

(46) **Hark** Arnoldus! Don't you hear the bells? (1694)

The two preferred items that enter the construction are *ye* and *you*, in keeping with other pragmatic markers such as *lookee*. However, for more than 40 years the preferred form of the personal pronoun was *you*, thus confirming the theoretical model proposed by Brinton (2001; 2008), which characterises the emergence of the pragmatic marker *harkee* as a phonologically reduced form of the sequence *hark you*.

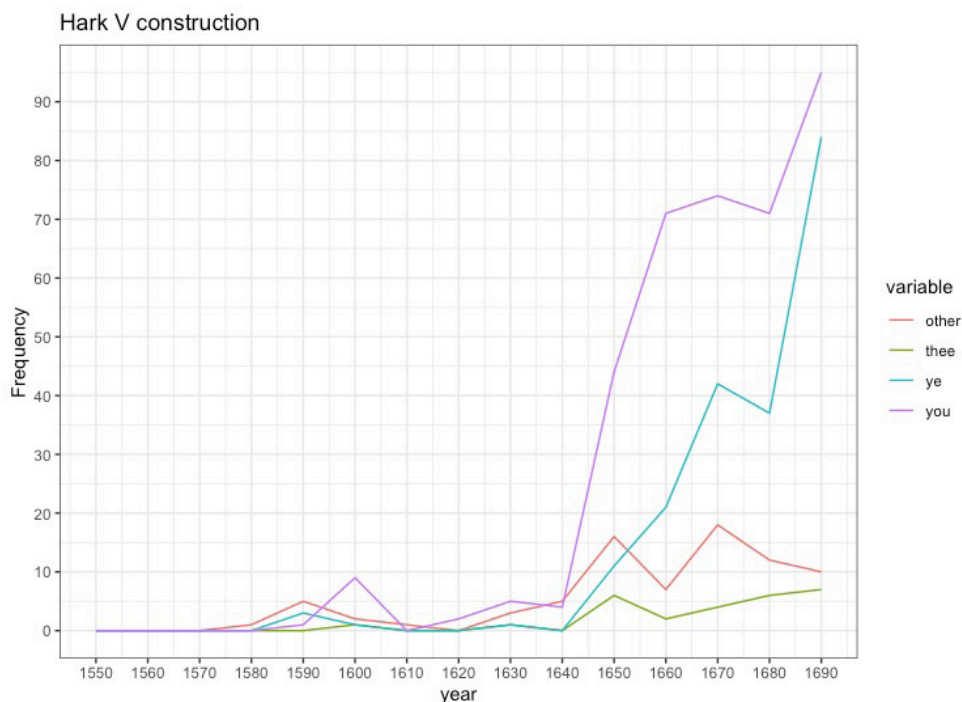


Fig. 12. *Hark* V construction.

Finally, a comparison between the array of possible forms identified is offered in Fig. 13. This graph illustrates the coexistence of the different forms identified at the end of the 17th century.

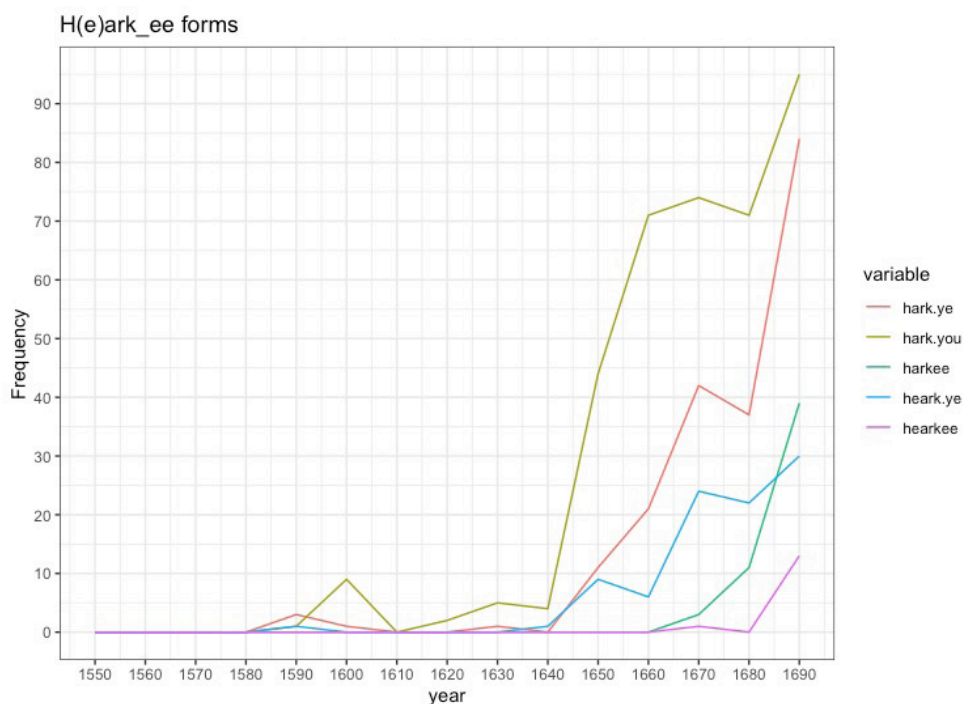


Fig. 13. *H(e)ark_ee* forms.

Among these forms *hark you* appears earlier than the others, and it continues to be the most frequent for the rest of the century. The form *hark ye* is less frequent, but it increases in frequency in the last decades of the 17th century. Similarly, the coalesced forms *harkee* and *hearkee* surge in frequency in 1680, and presumably keep growing in Late Modern English, outside of the corpus under scrutiny and beyond the scope of the present paper.

The development of the lines in the graph suggests that the form *harkee* is not the most frequent in the corpus under analysis, however its development as a separate form started in the 1640s. The syntactic environment from which the form *harkee* emerged consists of different forms with idiosyncratic spellings. The data reviewed in this paper show how new forms emerge from a cloud of similar forms, distinguished from each other by spelling. The data

reviewed in this paper suggest that grammaticalisation should not be considered as a linear phenomenon bridging two distinct forms, rather it should be conceptualised as an evolutionary process in which a constellation of different and competing forms appears. Only the ‘fittest’ and most ‘satisfactory’ form survives.⁴ An accurate discussion of the complex dynamics that shape linguistic change, standardisation, and entrenchment of different linguistic items exceeds the scope of this paper, which is mainly devoted to the investigation of the evolution of a single form. The forces that intervened in the standardisation of *harkee* are not different from the forces that intervene in any linguistic change and emergence of forms, and they may be distinguished in *internal* and *external*. External forces are exerted by grammarians and lexicographers who have the authority to decide and propose the ‘correct’ form, and in the period under investigation there are some figures who start building up this authority through the publication of grammars and dictionaries (Dons 2004). The internal forces instead may be glimpsed from the data presented in this paper: continuous linguistic exchanges between speakers inevitably lead to a multitude of contexts of usage, some of which recur and become entrenched in the speaker’s memory, ultimately becoming part of the linguistic repertoire of a speaking community.

5. Conclusion

The present paper has investigated the intricacies of the relationship between grammaticalisation and spelling fluctuation in Early Modern English. The existence of two alternative forms in Present Day English testified by the OED for the verb *hark(en)* has served as a case-study. From a semantic point of view, both forms originally have a perceptual meaning referring to auditory perception, which expands metaphorically to the meaning of the verb *to heed*. This process of semantic expansion predates the appearance of the pragmatic marker displaying two alternative reduced forms *hearkee/harkee*. The two alternative forms of the verb were retrieved in EEBO, and show further spelling vari-

⁴ As one of the reviewers noted, the definition of a ‘satisfactory’ form is ambiguous and needs clarification. I understand this term in reference to the evolutionary metaphor, according to which the most satisfactory form is the one that survives.

ations among the possible forms that may have functioned as matrix clause for the pragmatic marker. I verified the frequency and syntactic behaviour of the four forms through corpus analysis and manual annotation of the data. The results of the analysis suggest an intricate picture and reflect general tendencies in the history of English and in the study of grammaticalisation.

Firstly, the two couples with alternative spellings *bearke/harke* and *beark/hark* show different distribution and frequency. Both forms presenting the digraph <ea> are less frequent than their alternative form with only one <a> in medial position. The picture is reversed for the forms in the infinitive, where the form presenting the digraph <ea> is more frequent since the second half of the 17th century, as testified by the OED. The main difference between the two forms lies in their preference of encoding different moods: the form with the medial digraph is preferred for the indicative/infinitive, while the form with a single <a> is more frequent in the imperative.

Secondly, the two forms presenting final <e> decrease dramatically in the first half of the 17th century, following a cline of extinction that is observed also for other, unrelated forms. This change of paradigm in spelling is interpreted as the result of an external pressure in EME towards a simplification of forms operated by grammarians and linguists (Nevalainen 2006, 31), which is realised by dropping a final, silent <e>. Consequently, the forms without the final <e> arise in frequency, and substitute almost entirely the previous forms. Further research should assess the diffusion and the exact reasons of this phenomenon.

Thirdly, the syntactic configurations in which the forms are used show that they originally were spelling variants of the same verb form. The four forms, albeit with different frequencies, present a similar distribution among four categories of syntactic environment. They are most frequently used in P (absolute position), followed by the Vocative construction, the S condition (subordinate clause), and finally O (direct object and/or zero subordinator). The high frequency of P and V conditions is related to the initial choice of retrieving imperative forms. The low frequency of the other syntactic environments, namely S and O, suggests that the rebracketing of the sequence suggested by Brinton (2001; 2008) had already appeared before EME, as testified also by early occurrences of the verb in the V construction.

The data discussed contribute to the debate on spelling variation in EME. On the one hand, the data demonstrate that the four forms under analysis share similar syntactic behaviour, and that both late forms may be consid-

ered as antecedent of the pragmatic marker. On the other hand, an analysis of the different forms in isolation reveals that the difference between the two alternative forms interfaces with the mood in which the two appear. The data presented in this paper contribute to the debate on grammaticalisation, albeit less extensively. They illustrate how possible forms rise during the process of grammaticalisation of the pragmatic marker under review. Future research will assess to what extent the appearance of new forms correlates with grammaticalisation, and whether this phenomenon is generalisable across word-classes, languages, and historical periods.

The data investigated and the results offered in the paper posit new questions and directions. An attentive and usage-based review of the developmental path of the verb *hark(en)* from its origins in Old English to Present Day English may shed further light on the phenomenon of grammaticalisation, and on the dynamics that drive the emergence of new forms. I interpreted the early appearance of the V construction in the history of *hark(en)* as a sign that the rebracketing of the forms described by Brinton (2001) had already appeared in Middle English. This claim awaits validation by future research.

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The Corpus of *Early Modern English Trials* (1650-1700): Building of the Corpus and Hypotheses of Normalization

Abstract

The present paper discusses the building stages of the Corpus of *Early Modern English Trials* (1650-1700), henceforth *EMET*, a 1.8 million words highly specialized historical corpus of trial proceedings. The main purpose of the creation of the above-mentioned corpus is to shed light on the pragmatic aspects of Early Modern spoken English, since trial proceedings are considered records of authentic dialogues (Culpeper and Kytö 2010, 17). More specifically, the *EMET* was created in order to investigate the pragmatic influences both on the choice of the second person pronoun, which coexisted in the forms *thou* and *you*, and of any T- and Y-form used during the Restoration: *thee*, *prithe*, *prethee*, *prethy*, *pray thee*, *thy*, *thy self*, *thyself*, *thine*, *you*, *ye*, *your*, *your self*, *yourself*, *yours* and *pray you*.

The initial part of the essay will briefly explore the phase of the archives' consultation, the criteria behind the selection of the trials and the technical stages that are necessary to the uploading of a corpus on #LancsBox and its study. Afterwards, the *EMET* itself will be presented (number of documents, total number of tokens and average number of tokens per text, and types of charges involved).

Then, the essay will focus on editing, normalization and POS tagging. More specifically, it will be illustrated how trials, and historical documents in general, should be edited in order to successfully analyse them with corpus linguistics tools. Then, different hypotheses of normalization of the *EMET* will be compared in detail and discussed. After determining which normalization parameters suit best the corpus, the advantages of such process will be highlighted. Lastly, the issues derived from the normalization process – mainly bound to proper nouns, badly preserved documents (i.e., noisy texts), and Latin (and foreign) terms – will be examined.

1. *Towards a Corpus of Early Modern English Trials (1650-1700)*

The Corpus of *Early Modern English Trials (1650-1700)* is a highly specialized historical corpus of trial proceedings, which serves the primary purpose of shedding light on the pragmatic aspects of Early Modern spoken English, as trial proceedings are considered to be authentic records of dialogues (Culpeper and Kytö 2014, 17). The present essay will begin with the discussion of the corpus compilation phase, outlining the steps taken in order to upload the corpus to #Lancsbox and prepare it for analysis. Then, the *EMET* corpus itself will be presented.

The corpus building stage took almost two years, as the quality of the research is heavily dependent on the choices made in this phase. As Gablasova, Brezina and McEnery (2019, 127) underline,

[t]he properties of a corpus, such as representativeness, structure and amount of evidence, directly affect the ability of researchers to interpret findings and generalise to contexts outside of the corpus (Leech 2007; Gablasova et al. 2019). Decisions made at the corpus-building stage can thus have far-reaching consequences for the quality of research studies based on them; this is especially true of large-scale corpus-building projects, with their products expected to be used in a large number of research studies [...].

Therefore, informed decisions were crucial in the first stages of the research, that is: i) archive consultation and trial selection; ii) editing [phase A]; iii) normalization and editing [phase B]; iv) linguistic annotation.

2. *The Archives Consultation*

The first phase of corpus compilation involved querying several databases, including *Archive.org*, the *Oxford Text Archive*, *Old Bailey Online*, and *Early English Books Online (EEBO)*. The search was conducted using the Early Modern variants of the word 'trial' (i.e., 'trial', 'triale', 'triale' and 'tryall'), which were determined with the help of *Lexicons of Early Modern English (LEME)*¹

1 *LEME (Lexicons of Early Modern English: introduction)* is a historical database comprising various types of useful printed or manuscript sources from about 1475 to 1755 (monolingual, bilingual, and polyglot dictionaries, lexical encyclopaedias, hard-word glossaries, spelling lists, and lexically-valuable treatises).

and of *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (Onions et al. 1966). Because of the nature of the research question – which involves an analysis of face-to-face interaction – accounts of trials in running prose, which was “the form traditionally used for official records” (Culpeper and Kytö 2014, 50), were excluded, and only trials in the dialogue format were selected because of the high frequency of the second person pronoun² (Walker 2007, 12). Indeed, the documents included in the *EMET* are believed to be ‘speech-based’ since they represent real life face-to-face interaction (Culpeper and Kytö 2014, 16-7); furthermore, they may be considered authentic dialogues, since they are “written records of real speech events taken down at the time of the speech event” (Ibid.: 23). However, they are not ‘verbatim’ transcriptions since no electronic devices existed and stenography was only at its dawn (Aliprandi and Pigò 1936; Culpeper and Kytö 2014, 17). More specifically, no full systems of shorthand existed and “most speech-based texts [were] reconstructions assisted by notes” (Culpeper and Kytö 2014; Shoemaker 2008, 560). In other words, the process followed by the scribes when reconstructing the oral discourse of the people intervened with the cause cannot be definitively known (Doty 2007, 26). For these reasons, an exact copy of what was said in the courtroom is impossible to obtain.³ Thus, it is more appropriate to adopt the notion of *faithfulness* and to consider the factors of influence pinpointed by Short, Semino and Wynne (2002), as quoted by Culpeper and Kytö (2014, 79-81):

- *Anterior discourse accessibility*: if no recordings are available, spoken language is accessible only at the moment of the utterance and, thus, the collected data is to be considered only partially accessible.
- *Posterior discourse accessibility*: report and reported speech are to be compared in order to verify the level of faithfulness.
- *The importance of (the wording of) what is being reported*: the exact word uttered are of fundamental relevance in witchcraft, libel and slander cases.
- *The memorability of the original*: replicability is a fundamental notion within trial proceedings and it is strictly bound to the notion of memorability: if a deposition cannot be repeated because, for instance, the witness is dying,

2 The pragmatic influences on the second person pronoun are the object of the research that required the building of the *EMET*.

3 An additional reason lies in the diamesic variation from speech to writing (Culpeper and Kytö 2014, 79).

their words become more memorable and more efforts will be made in order to remember them precisely.

- *The status, social role and personality of the producer of the original discourse*: it is believed that, when reporting the utterances of powerful personalities, the scribes may have been more punctilious.
- *The social role, personality and attitude of the reporter*: even though information about the scribe is often not available, his attitude towards what happens in the courtroom inevitably influences what is reported.
- *Text-type or speech context*: despite being courtroom speech considered extremely faithful (Culpeper and Kytö 2014, 80), it must be argued that historical trial proceedings cannot be considered as faithful as the contemporary ones.
- *The part of text in which reporting occurs*: utterances between inverted commas or texts in the dialogue format are believed to be more faithful to the exact words that were uttered.

As Shoemaker (2008, 560-2) points out, when discussing the *Proceedings of the Old Bailey* and considering the pivotal researches of Langbein (1978), the published trials constituted abbreviations of what happened in the courtroom: in fact, the scribes (i.e., shorthand writers) as well as the publishers, had the power to decide which parts to include and exclude, and thus to shape the content of the publications, even according to their need to sell copies to a wide audience who desired entertainment (Shoemaker 2008, 564). Therefore, with respect to the scribes, it can be affirmed that despite having a limited explicit role in the dialogues of the trial proceedings⁴ (Culpeper and Kytö 2014, 23), their implicit role was extremely influ-

⁴ The role of the scribe was limited to the identification of the speakers, eventual statements that a certain witness appears or is sworn in court, brief descriptions or comments about non-verbal communication or comments about the tone used during some utterances (Walker 2007, 13). In contrast with trial proceedings, witness depositions, which were often in third person, display a more prominent role of the reporter because of the presence of legal formulae and information about the deponent (e.g., age, domicile, occupation/marital status) (Culpeper and Kytö 2014, 24; Walker 2007). The second person pronouns are rarer in this type of document since they are to be found only when the witness “reports an earlier speech event, and the scribe renders the words quoted as direct speech” (Walker 2007, 13). For the above-mentioned reason, depositions were not included in the *EMET*.

ential.⁵ Other influential factors were certainly noise and problems concerning stationery; in fact, courtrooms “were crowded and noisy, making it difficult to hear what was being said” (Culpeper and Kytö 2014, 52) and the writing equipment constantly needed maintenance: ink had to be re-applied, pens had to be resharpened etc. Despite the difficulties, it is believed that scribes aimed at reporting as faithfully as possible the words uttered during the trials (Walker 2007, 15) and occasionally provided explanatory comments about the trials and non-verbal communication (Ibid.: 12). Anyway, the selection of the documents resulted in the *EMET*, a highly specialized historical corpus of trial proceedings containing 59 trials and over 1.8 million words.⁶

As in most small-scale projects, the focus of the research is on a specialized type of discourse used by a relatively restricted group of speakers (Paquot and Gries 2020, 3). The chosen trials are believed to be ‘samples’, which statistically can be defined as ‘a group of cases’ representative of a population; because of representativeness, the results concerning the above-mentioned samples can be generalized to the population living in the period of the Republic and Restoration (McEnery and Hardie 2012, 250). Metadata about the speakers have been collected, but it is worth noting that most of the speakers in the *EMET* are from higher ranks of society, likely because trials about personalities were easier to sell and often showed the power of the monarch. High treason is the most common accusation in the *EMET*; and, while acquittals in such cases were rare, they were common in ordinary criminal prosecutions (Langbein 1978, 267).

3. *Editing (Phase A)*

The texts underwent editing prior to the word count; more specifically, information about retrieval, which was often automatically included in the files,⁷

5 It should also be noticed that information about the scribe is rarely available; thus, it is not known whether the scribe was a professional (Ibid.: 15). (Culpeper and Kytö 2014; Walker 2007)

6 The exact number of tokens after editing and normalisation is 1,847,699.

7 The files frequently included the URL, an abstract, page numbering (often including the word ‘page’), information about publication, author and manuscript (or book); furthermore, the title was often listed twice.

dedications,⁸ advertising,⁹ warnings, and disclaimers¹⁰ were deleted, as well as letters and depositions¹¹ that were not read during the trials. Furthermore, extra documents, which publishing houses often added at the end of the texts for entertainment purposes, were also omitted. Any deletions were indicated within the text using square brackets ([...]), and were excluded from the final word count.

Afterwards, each document was converted into plain text (.txt) and normalized due to the significant spelling variation found in Early Modern Eng-

8 The dedication that was present at the beginning of the *The Proceedings and Tryal in the Case of the Most Reverend Father in God, William, Lord Archbishop of Canterbury and the Right Reverend Fathers in God, William, Lord Bishop of St. Asaph, Francis, Lord Bishop of Ely, John, Lord Bishop of Chichester, Thomas, Lord Bishop of Bath and Wells, Thomas, Lord Bishop of Peterborough, and Jonathan, Lord Bishop of Bristol* is partially reproduced here: “To his Most Illustrious Highness William Henry, Prince of Orange. May it please Your Highness, how deeply the Design was laid, and with what Violence carry’d on by those who lately Steer’d the Helm of this State, for the Subversion of the Establish’d Religion and Government of these Three Kingdoms, is already sufficiently well known to Your Highness. [...]”.

9 Early Modern Courts were venues for entertainment, especially if notorious individuals were involved in the trials (Culpeper and Kytö 2014, 119); for the same reason, accounts of trials and ‘verbatim’ records were a form of written entertainment. Thus, it was customary to include information concerning the next publications at the end of the pamphlet or book. For instance, the following advertisement, which was placed at the end of *The Tryal and Condemnation of Dr. Oliver Plunket*, was deleted: “Advertisement. Some Passages of the Life and Death of John Earl of Rochester, who died the 26. of July, 1680. By Gilbert Burnet, D. D. Are to be sold by Eliphaz Dobson Bookseller on Cork-Hill, 1681”.

10 For instance, here is partially reported a disclaimer that was part of *The Tryal of John Giles*: “To the Reader. Certain it is, that by the Fall of Adam the General Peace establish’d through the whole Creation betwixt Man and Man, and even among the Beasts themselves, was universally-broken. Nature could never restore that Peace to the Brute Animals, but that they still devour and prey one upon another. But Heaven provided for Rational Man a Sacred Means to regain and preserve that Blessed Unity, which would have always accompany’d his State of Innocency, which was the Observance of Religion; which as it binds us to God, so ought it to tie us one to another in the strict bonds of Heavenly Example. To this intent, at length Christ himself brought down from Heaven a Gospel of Love and Charity; so that, as it is the True Character of a True Religion to Unite and Preserve, so it is the most certain Sign of a False and Counterfeit Religion, to disunite and destroy Mankind. [...]”.

11 Cusack (as quoted in Culpeper and Kytö 2014, 54) affirms that “[t]he regular procedure was for depositions to be read aloud in court, the witness being present to confirm his or her evidence and to answer any questions that might arise”.

lish texts, despite the gradual standardization that occurred between 1500 and 1700 (Görlach 1991; Nevalainen 2006). As the following graphs, based on the average variant percentage from six corpora (*ARCHER*, *EEBO*, *Innsbruck*, *Lampeter*, *EMEMT*, and *Shakespeare*), illustrate (Baron 2011, 55), spelling variation decreased significantly between 1400 and 1800 but was still present. Thus, researchers must address the problem, otherwise the search in any corpus of Early Modern English texts would be particularly problematic because:

using a simple search algorithm would only return the occurrences of the word when it is spelt exactly the same as the search query – spelling variants of a word would not be returned. One option is to search for both the word and its variants, however, it is often difficult to know all of the possible spelling variants for a word and the lists can be very long, substantially increasing processing time. (Baron 2011, 18)

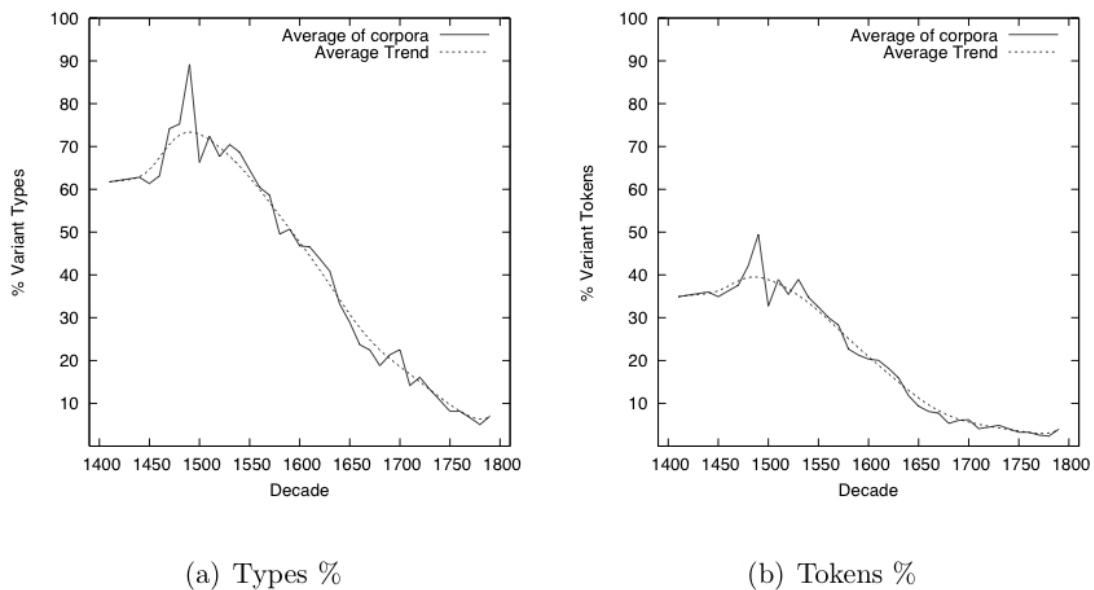


Fig. 1. Comparison of variant counts in EEBO corpus samples with (=original) and without initial capital words (Baron 2011, 55).

The trials examined in this study, as well as most Early Modern texts, can be classified as ‘noisy’ texts due to the significant variability in spelling they exhibit. As Baron (Ibid.: 2) points out, the spelling of a word could change depending on the author, scribe, or publisher, among other factors.

Given the aforementioned challenge and the need to analyse Early Modern corpora, normalization becomes a crucial step in any corpus linguistics research involving historical texts. In other words, spelling variation poses a hindrance to corpus linguistics analysis and must be addressed meticulously, either by using normalized texts when available or by normalizing the documents in question (Ibid.: 17).

4. *Normalisation and Editing (Phase B)*

The software utilized for normalization in this study is the Variant Detector (VARD, version 2.5.4), which is a customizable and trainable tool that allows for tuning the normalization process to “a specific corpus and the unique properties of its spelling variation” (Baron 2011, 140). VARD was developed through the manual compilation of a large ‘Early Modern regularization list’, created by manually inspecting words tagged as Z99 by the UCREL Semantic Analysis System (USAS). Since USAS relies on a modern dictionary, any untagged word could potentially be a spelling variant (Ibid.: 28).

VARD is designed to standardize spelling variation in historical corpora, facilitating analysis with computational linguistics tools. It can be used for manual or automated processing (‘batch normalization’) of texts. The tool helps identify spelling variants and, when used manually, suggests “appropriate modern equivalents”; when used automatically, it selects “the appropriate equivalents” (Archer et al. 2015, 11). Scholars using VARD have the option to either retain the original spelling within the corpus, signalling it with an XML tag surrounding the replacement (e.g., [“h]ence: <normalized orig=”charitie”>charity</normalized>) (Ibid.), or use the plain version of the corpus without any indication of the normalization that took place.

Manual normalization of a corpus containing 1.8 million words is time-consuming, so batch normalization was performed. As the *EMET* was specifically designed to investigate pragmatic differences in the use of Y- and T-forms, every term under investigation was searched in various hypotheses of normalization, as well as in the non-normalized corpus. After quickly comparing multiple versions of the batch normalized corpus, two different combinations of parameters were selected and thoroughly compared to determine the most appropriate option:

- a. F-score weight: 1.0; Threshold: 50%;
- b. F-score weight: 1.0; Threshold: 75%.

The parameter called ‘f-score weight’ is closely related to confidence scores for methods and replacements, and it is calculated by considering both precision and recall scores. In the *EMET*, precision and recall are considered to be equally relevant, so the f-score weight was set to 1, avoiding any bias towards precision (f-score weight < 1) or recall (f-score weight > 1) (VARD User Guide 2013).

Setting the threshold for normalization required a slower process, as it is closely tied to the concept of confidence score. For each potential normalization of a given variant, a confidence score is assigned, and when using batch processing mode, the tool automatically selects the normalization with the highest confidence score to replace the variant (Ibid.). Therefore, the threshold is crucial in determining the minimum confidence score required for a normalization to be accepted, and if the threshold is not met by the top normalization suggestion, the word is retained as a variant (Ibid.).

Upon observing the following table, it becomes immediately apparent that the corpus (and consequently the research question itself) greatly benefits from the normalization process.

Threshold	Thou	Thee	Prithee	Prethee	Thy (includes thy self)	Thy self Thyself	Thine	You (singular and plural)	Ye	Your (includes your self)	Yourself Your self	Yours	Pray you
Non normalized	523	146	13	17	350	38 0	0	29 090	57	8 606	11 480	68	30
50%	523	155	25	6	355	38 0	0	29 096	62	8 607	11 482	69	30
75%	523	155	25	6	350	38 0	0	29 095	62	8 607	11 482	68	30

Table 1. Comparison among different versions of the *EMET*.

Upon setting the parameters as follows: a) f-score weight: 1.0 and threshold: 50%, the results were unusual. The forms of the second person singular pronoun ‘thy’ and ‘thy self’ were found to be 355, whereas in the non-normalized corpus they were 350. This difference can be attributed to the normalization process: when the parameters threshold 50% and f-score weight 1 were used, some forms that lacked the final letter(s) in the files due to incomplete readability of the manuscripts were erroneously emended by the normalization software.

Setting the b) parameters (f-score weight: 1.0 and threshold: 75%) resolved the issue;¹² however, it introduced another problem. Specifically, in *The Trial of Thomas White alias Whitebread* (1679), a form was incorrectly left as “prithe”, and thus it was manually amended to “prithee”:

12 VARD 2 was utilized on several corpora, including the *Corpus of English Dialogues* (CED), the corpus of *Early Modern English Medical Texts* (EMEMT), the *Lampeter Corpus of Early Modern English Tracts* and the *Corpus of Early English Correspondence* (CEEC), significantly diminishing spelling variation (see Lehto, Baron, Ratia and Rayson 2010; Baron, Rayson and Archer 2011; Archer, Kytö, Baron and Rayson 2015; Palander-Collin and Hakala 2011). Notably, the use of VARD on the CED and the *Lampeter Corpus* is particularly interesting.

The CED (1560-1760) comprises a variety of documents, such as trials, witness depositions, prose, handbooks, comedy drama and miscellaneous materials (Culpeper and Kytö 2014). Baron, Rayson and Archer (2011) specifically selected trials and witness depositions in order to test VARD 2.4 and DICER, a software that “[d]etermines what letter replacement rules are required to convert the variant form into the normalised form” (Baron, Rayson and Archer 2011) and that was under maintenance at the time of writing this essay. After dividing the documents into two periods (1560-1639 and 1640-1749), the scholars trained VARD for each sub-corpus with a sample of 10 000 randomly selected words. They then decided to adopt a 75% replacement threshold.

Similarly, the *Lampeter Corpus of Early Modern English Tracts*, which contains tracts and pamphlets about religion, politics, science, law, economy, trade and miscellaneous, dated between 1640 and 1740 (Schmied 1994) underwent an analogous process. Baron, Rayson and Archer (2014), in this case as well, selected law texts and, after training VARD on “10 randomly selected 1,000 words samples”, they opted for a 75% threshold. Thus, it seems that the correct threshold to normalize Early Modern English texts is 75%, since such normalization threshold was used for the CED, the *Lampeter Corpus* and the EMET.

NORMALIZED VERSION	MANUALLY EMENDED VERSION
No Simpson said I, well said he <i>prithe</i> come to us. So I was with him walking a little while, and then this Blunt and one Henry Howard were playing one with an-other, throwing stones at one anothers Shins.	No Simpson said I, well said he <i>prithe</i> come to us. So I was with him walking a little while, and then this Blunt and one Henry Howard were playing one with an-other, throwing stones at one anothers Shins.

Table 2. Manual emendation of the word “prithe” in *The Trial of Thomas White alias Whitebread* (1679).

Setting a high threshold ensured that terms were normalized only when the software had a “high confidence” in its top-ranked candidate normalization (Baron 2011, 141), resulting in a higher precision level.

There are several challenges in the normalization process, including terms that may not be present in the dictionary, such as proper nouns,¹³ encoded words, words in other languages (e.g., Latin, which is frequent in the *EMET*), and words that are not part of the modern list, such as “betwixt” and “how-

13 For this reason, the names of the files are composed by the year when the trial was held and name of the (main) defendant(s), with the exception of the documents (re) printed in Dublin (for instance, “1679 RDU Thomas White alias Whitebread”.txt). In fact, in the above-mentioned documents, the name of the (main) defendant(s) is preceded by the acronym (R)DU, which stands for ‘(re)printed in) Dublin’. The choice was made in order to possibly divide the corpus into two sub-corpora, depending on the place where the record was printed. In other words, the file names are not constituted by an acronym, as it is common in other corpora. For instance, in the *Corpus of English Dialogues*, “[t]he name of the text file has eight or fewer characters. In the file names, the first character is D for ‘dialogues corpus’. The second is the subperiod number. The third character, or third and fourth characters, is the code for text type [T (Trial), W (Witness Deposition), C (Drama Comedy), HO (Didactic Work, other than Language Teaching handbook), HF (Language Teaching handbook, with French as the target language), HE (Language Teaching handbook, with English as the target language), HG (Language Teaching handbook, with German as the target language), F (Fiction), M (Miscellaneous)]. The remaining characters consist of the first five letters (or initials) of the name of the author, the defendant (or initials of defendants), the place of the speech event, or a keyword from the short title” (Kytö and Walker 2006, 33); for instance. D1TNORFO.

beit” (Ibid.: 56). The large normalization ranges observed¹⁴ are believed to be caused by the inclusion of a significant number of proper nouns in the trials. As mentioned in section 2, only trials in the dialogue format, which resemble plays, were selected for this research, and nouns tend to have a high frequency of occurrences in such formats. However, it should be noted that while the normalized corpus produced is a viable substitute for corpus analysis, a fully normalized and manually checked corpus would be the ideal choice for publication (Ibid.: 170).

4. Linguistic Annotation

Despite the existing various types of annotation, everyone of each capable of enhancing the value of a corpus (Aijmer and Rühlemann 2015, 6; Paquot and Gries 2020, 25), it was decided that in the first stages of the research only linguistic annotation would be added. The main reason of this choice is practical. In fact, the automatic process of tagging¹⁵ is particularly helpful when managing large corpora such as the *EMET*. Probably, the “annotated [*EMET*] corpus is unlikely to meet all the expectations of a researcher in terms of its categories of annotation, [but] it can still be an invaluable resource” (Paquot and Gries 2020, 26) and, thus, a great help.

14

WORDS	Total Words	Variant Forms		+	Normalised		=	Originally Variants		Variants Normalised	Not Variants	
SUM	129362	13509			9717			23226			106136	
AVERAGE	2192,58	229	10,44%		164,7	7,51%		393,66	17,95%	41,84%	1798,9	82,05%
MAX	5492	1042	28,13%		403	11,42%		1371	37,01%	63,82%	4313	92,26%
MIN	235	20	4,33%		9	3,34%		29	7,74%	24,00%	206	62,99%

Table 2. Statistics about words.

	Total tokens	Variant Forms		+	Normalised		=	Originally Variants		Variants Normalised	Not Variants	
SUM	1691415	53981			31068			85049			2E+06	
AVERAGE	28668,05	914,9	3,19%		526,6	1,84%		1441,5	5,03%	36,53%	27227	94,97%
MAX	123899	4490	7,19%		2163	4,39%		5709	10,57%	66,60%	119506	96,99%
MIN	503	31	1,52%		15	0,74%		46	3,01%	21,35%	457	89,43%

Table 3. Statistics about tokens.

15 Lately, corpus linguistics is focusing on the development of new methods to automatically annotate corpora (Paquot and Gries 2020, 26).

The process was conducted automatically; the role of VARD 2.5.4 has been fundamental since it is a ‘pre-processor to other corpus linguistic tools’ [among them Parts Of Speech (POS) tagging], which aims to improve their accuracy (VARD User Guide 2013). In short, POS tagging consists in labelling (or tagging) “each word of a corpus with information about the grammatical category of the word at issue (e.g., noun, verb, adjective, etc.)” (Ibid.). However, POS tagging is strictly bound to tokenization and, thus, to the concept of token. The term ‘token’ is sometimes considered a synonym of ‘word’. Nevertheless, this simplification may induce to think that tokenization is an absolute concept and that there is one and one only tokenization possible. Instead, depending on the decisions, the results vary, and the term should not be considered a synonym of ‘word’. Indeed, a token can be defined as “an instance of a sequence of characters in some particular document that are grouped together as a useful semantic unit for processing” (Manning et al. 2008, 22). For instance, ‘aren’t’ could be tokenized in the following ways (Ibid.): 1) aren’t, 2) arent, 3) are / n’t, 4) aren / t.

The discussion around tokenization is not the focus of the present essay and of the study that required the development of the *EMET*. Consequently, since #LancBox allows an easy change of tokenization if the corpus is reloaded on the software, the standard parameters were set and POS tags were automatically added to the corpus.

TOKEN DELIMITERS	\t\n\r
LEMMA	Include POS groups
POS	Tagging
PUNCTUATION	. , ; : ? " ! ° , ; : ? ! , & i ... ' " ' ` “ ” „ () <=> [] { } «» <> «> ---* ---
SENTENCE DELIMITERS	(?s).*[\. ! \? ° ? !].*

Table 4. Standard tokenization parameters in #LancsBox.

5. Concluding Remarks

The present essay has highlighted that it is essential to normalize corpora of documents written in Early Modern English. Indeed, the standardization between 1500 and 1700 was gradual: the English language throughout the period still presented a marked spelling variation and was still undergoing major

changes. Thus, normalization ensures the consistency and standardization of data, eliminating (most) spelling variation and allowing for an accurate and reliable analysis of the corpus object of study, which appears more homogeneous, thus, POS tagging can also be applied. Furthermore, it enables the comparison of the language in a corpus across different documents and speakers, as well as with other corpora.

It should also be noted that, when consulting archives, the best choice is to consider every spelling variant of the keyword(s), which allows the search of every document including such term(s). In fact, since most archives do not contain normalized versions of the files or of their titles, querying only the contemporary spelling of the keyword(s) would allow the identification and selection of only a restricted group of documents. In order to identify the Early Modern variants of a word, the consultation of both the *LEME* and an etymological dictionary ensures accuracy.

Moreover, the comparison between the normalization parameters of the *Corpus of English Dialogues 1560-1760*, the *Lampeter Corpus of Early Modern English Tracts* and the corpus of *Early Modern English Trials* seems to suggest that the best decision for Early Modern English texts is to adopt a 75% replacement threshold. Indeed, despite the documents included in the above-mentioned corpora are of different genres, among them trials, witness depositions, prose, handbooks, comedy drama, and pamphlets about religion, politics, science, law, economy and trade, it is with such threshold that the best results are obtained.

In conclusion, the analysis of corpora of Early Modern texts might be troublesome because of spelling variation. Thus, normalization is the key to (try to) overcome such issues since it facilitates effective searching, and thus, the analysis of the corpus itself.

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A Corpus-driven Analysis of the Early Modern English Recipe Manuscripts at the Folger Shakespeare Library: Zooming in on Morphosyntax and Pragmatic Interfaces

Abstract

This article analyses a corpus of early modern English manuscript recipe books, denoted here as FEMER (Folger Early Modern English Recipes), digitised by volunteers working in the digital resources section at the Folger Shakespeare Library. Chronological and content-related criteria for the selection of the manuscripts analysed here will be provided, along with norms for the modernisation of the texts that was carried out with the aid of VARD2 software. Next, a detailed corpus-driven investigation through #Lancsbox will be presented and quantitative/qualitative data provided. Specific emphasis will be on the most recurring and peculiar morphosyntactic structures, e.g., initial purpose infinitive clauses, of the culinary recipe text-type in early modern English, and their interfaces with pragmatics.

1. *Synchronic and Diachronic/Historical Culinary Linguistics*

Food studies are one of the most multidisciplinary fields of research, encompassing such disciplines as anthropology, biology, chemistry, philosophy, semiology, and sociology, among others – and, last but not least, linguistics. Of course, this is not surprising: food being a basic human need, food discourse is pervasive. And since language can also be considered a basic human need – in this case for communication rather than nutrition – linguists have always found numerous connections between the two fields. Nevertheless, scholars lament the limited interest towards culinary linguistics, and especially towards what I would call diachronic/historical culinary linguistics. For instance, Bucini affirms that “[t]here is no established or well-defined field that brings to-

gether linguistics [...] and food studies” (2013, 147), especially from a historical perspective, where structuralism and historical linguistics could inform our understanding of past food discourses:¹

[S]tructural linguistics can shed light on how cuisine is constructed as a semiotic or symbolic system and how such a system changes over time. [...] [H]istorical linguistics serves as a practical tool in the study of the history of specific foodstuffs, composed dishes, cooking utensils, etc., and thus of the social location and historical development of specific cuisines. [...] In addition, [...] one can [...] also make comparisons between different stages within the history of one and the same language and with that one enters into the field of diachronic lexical semantics. The degree to which this line of inquiry with a specific focus on the culinary has been followed by linguists is limited. (2013, 146-8)

Similarly, in what she defines as the first “attempt [...] to bring together research at the intersection of language and food in an overview”, Gerhardt affirms that “when it comes to the relation between language and food, there does not seem to be any publication fathoming the work at this intersection” (2013, 12). Her concern is for culinary linguistics in general, not a diachronic/historical perspective exclusively. For the same reason, even very recently, Absalom and Anderson (2020) have envisaged the implementation of food studies in language curricula, to underline that culinary linguistics – concerned with either a synchronic or diachronic approach – remains an underestimated field of research.²

Nevertheless, food discourse studies and culinary linguistics cannot be dismissed as being elitist or a solely academic prerogative. Suffice it to think of Jurafsky’s *The Language of Food: A Linguist Reads the Menu* (2014), an attempt by a Stanford University linguist to popularise culinary linguistics that was shortlisted for the 2015 James Beard Book Award and translated into Chinese, Japanese, and Korean. This is only one example of a non-academic publication about culinary linguistics written by an academic.

1 Buccini here is referring specifically to the intersections between lexical semantics and food studies, but the statement can be easily extended to other levels of linguistic analysis in general and other subfields of linguistics.

2 For an attempt at integrating food discourse (i.e., dish names in Italian-English-French trilingual restaurant menus) in the foreign language classroom, see, among others, Graziano’s CLIL experiment with Italian secondary school teachers (2019).

Perhaps the first edited collection of essays on culinary linguistics is Lavric and Konzett's *Food and Language: Sprache und Essen* (2009), an interdisciplinary volume that highlights the many interconnections between food studies, (historical) linguistics, and some of the disciplines mentioned above.³ Another characteristic of culinary linguistics that emerges from Lavric and Konzett's collection is the fact that most of the studies concerning food adopt a comparative linguistic (Gerhardt 2013) or cross-linguistic (Buccini 2013) approach, thus illustrating similarities and differences between languages when dealing with lexical families and semantic classes (see, for instance, Adami 2019 for an interdisciplinary cross-linguistic analysis of Indian cuisine).

Focusing on the levels of linguistic analysis investigated by (diachronic/historical) culinary linguists, it is evident that philology, lexicography, and etymology are “the three traditional language-related fields that have had the most sustained impact on food studies” (Buccini 2013, 148). Gerhardt affirms that morphology has also been studied, especially in relation to word formation (2013, 16-9). Regarding syntax – which will be one of the main foci of this article – Gerhardt appears to complain about the fact that dealing with it in an overview of culinary linguistics will involve “a rather short section” (2013, 20). As a matter of fact, with the exception of Culy's exploration of null objects (1996, revisited by Bender in 1999) and Sylwanowicz's investigation of complex noun phrases modification in early modern English recipes (2017), very few studies have focused on syntax.⁴ These studies have been carried out using such approaches as “construction grammar, cognitive linguistics,⁵ pattern grammar

3 Unfortunately, most of the articles in this collection are in German; hence, the dissemination and resonance of this study has been limited.

4 See also Arendholz et al. 2013 and Diemer 2013, who deal with syntax from a diachronic intralingual perspective from Middle and Old English, respectively, to the twentieth and twenty-first century. In particular, Arendholz et al., drawing on Görlach's seminal studies of culinary textual typologies (1992; revisited and expanded in 2004), analyses syntactic structures in recipes for beef stew from Middle English to Jamie Oliver's version. Diemer, on the other hand, considers some case studies of recipes and their evolution from Old English to the twentieth century, with emphasis on readers, the syntactic-related procedural matters, and lexical complexity.

5 See, for instance, Bagli 2021, a thorough exploration of the ‘words of taste’ (as the author defines the lexico-semantic fields he investigates) in contemporary English through the lenses of cognitive linguistics and conceptual metaphors in particular.

or research in corpus linguistics,”⁶ and all of them “stress the inseparable nature of syntax and lexis”⁷ (Gerhardt 2013, 20).

The focus of this article is not on linguistic interfaces between morphosyntax and lexicon; rather, resorting to corpus-based methods, I investigate interconnections between morphosyntax and pragmatics in a series of digitised early modern English recipe MSS⁸ at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C.

Gerhardt provides no overview of pragmatic analyses of recipes but offers a comprehensive state of the art of critical discourse analysis in food studies (2013, 26-39), a field of research that shares many similarities with pragmatics, especially when dealing with spoken interaction and food talk. Although some pragmatic explorations of food discourse have been carried out quite recently, most of them focus on contemporary English and/or other languages (see, among others, Brdar-Szabó and Brdar 2009; Fortunati 2015; Adami 2017; Cavanaugh and Riley 2017; Al-Azzawi and Abdulameer 2020).

Therefore, with its primary focus on matters of etymology and philology, diachronic/historical culinary linguistics has been a much neglected field of research, whose contribution to food discourse studies has been limited to – with sporadic exceptions – interlinguistic analyses of the origin of words belonging to the culinary lexico-semantic field, and of so many intersections with other disciplines that sometimes the focus on language becomes an excuse to deal with more culture-related issues.⁹

2. Writing about cookery in early modern England: Cure and/or pleasant nutrition?

Food historians agree¹⁰ that writing recipes in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance meant both passing on family traditions about how to prepare food

6 This latter approach constitutes the main methodological framework adopted in this article.

7 See, for instance, Graziano and Mocini’s 2015 article about a Hallidayan reading of menus as semantic units characterised by scanty narrative syntax.

8 *Manuscript* will be abbreviated as MS and *manuscripts* as MSS.

9 See, for instance, Zycherman’s cultural domain analysis of free lists and pile sorts, or Albala’s historical anthropological investigation of primary sources, both included in the “Linguistics and Food Talk” section of Chrzan and Brett’s edited collection *Food Culture*, vol. 2: *Anthropology, Linguistics, and Food Studies* (2017).

10 See, among others, Thirsk 2006; Gentilcore 2015; Werrett 2021; Holmes 2022.

and drinks,¹¹ and providing future generations with useful medical treatments for a plethora of diseases and illnesses.¹² According to Leong, “[t]he collecting together of veritable medicine chests of recipes to cure or ward off particular (and at the time, usually incurable) conditions, from plague to rabies, might serve a talismanic, prophylactic purpose, as well as targeting specific experienced illnesses” (2018, 14). Therefore, cuisine and medicine went hand in hand, since the “household was the primary (and yet already seldom, the exclusive) site for both food preparation and medical care” (Pennel and DiMeo 2013, 11).

This cuisine-medicine binomial is also evident in the collection of MSS that will be investigated in this article, where compilers alternated between such recipes as pudding or stew, and homemade remedies, e.g., drinks to cure the plague, smallpox, or various body parts’ aches. Görlach also pointed out that from a text-type perspective, culinary and medical recipes were identical in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance (1992, 745). The following examples, written one after another in the same MS of the corpus investigated in this article, clearly demonstrate Görlach’s statement, being one a remedy against bone problems in children, and the other a recipe to make cream with gooseberries:

To cure the rickets, take the livers of rooks and dry them well and beat them into fine powder and give a little of it to the child in milk, or beer, or broth, or minced meat, and do it for three times a day for some time.

To make a very fine cream with gooseberries, take your gooseberries and skald them and strain them into your crème, so that it may be thick, and season it with rosewater and sugar, and so serve it up. (V.a.7)¹³

11 Speaking of which, Leong lists three main reasons for recipe book writing (and reading) in the Middle Ages and the early modern period: 1) “making recipe knowledge was very much part of household management and largescale planning for provisions”, 2) “recipes also played a key role in economies of patronage and gift exchange. Thus household recipe books not only were active maps of a family’s social network but were in effect ledgers or account books recording its social obligations and credits”, and 3) “recipe collections took on yet another role – as records of family activities and archives of family histories” (2018, 10-1).

12 Actually, the idea of food as medicine dates back to the Greek civilisation. Suffice it to think of Hippocrates’s famous motto, “Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food”.

13 In this article, MSS will be indicated by the call number given by the Folger Shakespeare Library itself.

After all, from an etymological point of view, the English terms to refer to cooking instructions and medical prescriptions overlapped for a long time and only began to be distinguished at the end of the period under scrutiny here. Certainly, this linguistic development, as explained below, took its impetus from the great scientific advances of the early modern English period, and in particular in the fact that

while still informed by Galenic precepts and humour theory, medicine was increasingly seen as something more than a practical craft, thanks also to the development of a more pronounced professional awareness among the surgeons within the barber and surgeon guild association; the same impulse was fuelling the study of human anatomy. (Plescia 2019)

Similarly, it was during the English Renaissance that cookery became a fashionable craft (Leong 2018, 2). Therefore, medical advances, on the one hand, along with the keen interest in making recipes a household fashionable craft, on the other, resulted in a general semantic specialisation of the words used to indicate the preparation of food.

Let us begin with the lemma *recipe*, used today to indicate the list of ingredients and the procedure to prepare food. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the lemma indicates “[a] formula for the composition or use of a medicine, a prescription; a medicine prepared according to such a formula; a remedy. [...] Now historical or archaic” (*OED*, n. 1).¹⁴ Moreover, it designates “[a] statement of the ingredients and procedure required for making something, (now) esp. a dish in cookery” (*OED*, n. 2). The *Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* specifies that in the sixteenth century the lemma still designated a “formula for a medical prescription” and in the 1700s it began to be used “for a dish in cookery”. The Online Etymology Dictionary (or Etymonline) is even more specific:

recipe (n.) 1580s, “medical prescription, a formula for the composing of a remedy written by a physician”, from French *récipé* (15c.), from Latin *recipe* “take!” (this or that ingredient), second person imperative singular of *recipere* “to hold, contain” (see *receive*). It was the word written by physicians at the head of prescriptions. [...] Meaning “instructions for preparing a particular food” is recorded by 1716.¹⁵ The older sense in English survives chiefly in the pharmacist’s abbreviation.

¹⁴ This meaning has now been replaced by such terms as ‘prescription’.

¹⁵ Most scholars agree that it was much earlier, in the first half of the seventeenth century (see, for instance, Bator and Sylwanowicz 2015, 2, quoted below).

Therefore, most of the MSS analysed below do not use the term *recipe* to indicate any cooking procedures,¹⁶ nor should we describe the MSS themselves as recipe books, since “[t]he compound noun recipe book, referring to a printed compendium of cooking instructions, is a term occurring hardly earlier than 1803” (Arendholz 2013, 120). Nevertheless, for practical reasons, I will adopt the current meanings of *recipe* and *recipe books* to indicate food preparation and a collection of instructions to prepare food, respectively.

However, which was the term used to refer to the ingredients and procedures in food preparation? During the early modern English period it was *receipt*, a lexeme which, not surprisingly, has a common origin with *recipe*, i.e., the Latin verb *recipere*, meaning ‘to take’ or ‘to receive’.

Bator and Sylwanowicz summarise the historical evolution of the two terms as follows:

Nowadays, the term *recipe* is immediately associated with the kitchen, various spice cupboards and cookbooks. Very few people realize that the word (with relation to cookery) appeared only in 1631 (OED: s.v. *recipe*). Earlier, since 1400s, *recipe* was a common term used by physicians and apothecaries. Hence, it was recorded mainly in medical writings as the heading of medical formulas. In the field of cookery, it was the term *receipt* which was used on everyday basis to denote the culinary instruction. Nowadays, the terms *recipe* and *receipt* have distinctive meanings and no one uses them interchangeably. [...] Additionally, the term *prescription* appeared in English with reference to medicine in the late sixteenth century and was slowly replacing the term *recipe* in the context of medical instruction. [...] In the early Modern English period we can observe how the multi-meaningful lexemes became arranged within the semantic field. Thus, the term *recipe* gained dominance with the culinary reference, *prescription* became the medical term, and *receipt* was rejected from either of these, denoting “a statement confirming the reception of something”. (2015, 2; 4; 20)

16 Actually, the situation is much more complex and would require a much more detailed historical and etymological corpus-based account. As a matter of fact, very briefly, due to the poor conditions of some of the MSS – and hence of their transcriptions – and the high level of spelling fluctuation in the texts themselves, it is sometimes difficult to understand whether the term used to indicate food preparation was *recipe* or *receipt*. Nevertheless, since this article explores other linguistic issues with the MSS, the spelling modernisation carried out through the VARD2 software (see next section) has ruled out the possibility of investigating spelling-related issues. An old-spelling version of the texts would certainly help scholars interested in this topic.

In linguistic terms, *recipe* underwent a semantic change or shift, with *recipe* and *receipt* overlapping for some time in the Renaissance. More complicatedly, *receipt* was already a polysemous word indicating both “the act of receiving something or someone” (Arendholz et al. 2013, 120) and food preparation. Over time, the primary meaning of the lemma underwent a semantic narrowing, thus “refer[ring] to money” (*OED*, n. I.1.a) in particular,¹⁷ while the meaning associated with food became obsolete.

Having clarified these terminological questions, it is worth noting what kind of texts recipes are from a text-type and typological point of view, bearing in mind that in the case of recipes, “text-types are [...] defined by linguistic characteristics” (Carroll 1999, 38). In this sense, although “time did not pass the recipes’ formal aspects without leaving its marks, [and] [...] also left its imprints on the functional ones” (Arendholz et al. 2013, 131),¹⁸ I would argue that early modern English culinary recipes do not differ too much from today’s cooking instructions, since their “basic function has not changed over the centuries” (Görlach 1992, 745) and thus “the text type ‘cooking recipe’ has seen less development than many other types have” (2004, 140). In particular, from a formal, technical perspective, what Görlach defines as the “standardization of arrangement (e.g. subsections ‘title’, ‘ingredients’, ‘procedure’, ‘how to serve up’)” (2004, 125) still constitutes the basic features of a recipe today. What is more, from a functional point of view, we are living in times deeply concerned with issues regarding healthy food and wellness; hence, the idea of eating food as a kind of natural medicine is as widespread today as it was in the past.

Structurally speaking, “[e]arly modern recipes replicate the medieval structural pattern where the text begins with a title specifying the purpose, the ingredients, followed by the preparation and application phases and a final efficacy phrase” (De la Cruz-Cabanillas 2020, 48). Although De la Cruz-Cabanillas is referring to early modern medical prescriptions, the culinary recipes analysed in this article have the same structure, given the numerous overlaps between culinary and medical discourses in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, as noted

¹⁷ The modern meaning of “[a] written or printed acknowledgement of receiving something, esp. of the payment of money” (*OED*, n. 3.b) began to appear in the sixteenth century.

¹⁸ Arendholz et al.’s comparison between the Middle English recipe for *beef y-stywyd* and Jamie Oliver’s for stew and ale also focuses on the “medial point of view” (2013, 125). In this sense, it is obvious that the two recipes differ from a formal standpoint, with the English chef’s recipe being a multimodal computed-mediated text.

earlier. The following example from the corpus at the Folger clearly shows the tripartite structure of the recipes described by De la Cruz Cabanillas:

The milk water

Take six handfuls of carduus green, 3 handfuls of spearmint, 3 of balm, 2 of wormwood. Steep them all night in a gallon of new milk and distill it the next day in a common still. It is good in a fever or surfeit or any illness of the stomach. When you give it, put sugar to it. (V.b.366)

Some scholars define today's recipes as regulatory or prescriptive texts (Herbert 2014, 116; Fortunati 2015) that provide instructions on how to prepare food resorting mainly to the imperative. Graziano and Mocini (2015, 124), meanwhile, prefer to interpret recipes as analytic implicit narrative texts, of which dish names are the synthetic version, an assertion that appears to be confirmed in part by Fortunati's survey of 137 Italian common people (2015, 34). This is also true, some scholars affirm, in the case of early modern – especially manuscript – recipes (DiMeo 2017, 175), where sometimes the regulatory function of the instructions alternated with personal accounts of the author/compiler who had tried the recipe¹⁹ or given advice about the best way to serve a dish, when to consume it, etc. Sometimes the compiler tells how s/he obtained the recipe(s), and proper names abound. These are “the names of significant donors or authors of recipes – physicians, aristocrats, royalty – [that] imbued the texts with the cachet ascribed to such figures, and set the parameters for the trust one could invest in such recipes” (Pennel and DiMeo 2013, 14). This peculiarity of culinary narrations, which not only involves eminent personalities but also “team[s] of men and women who also possessed hands-on experience and expertise with a range of practical tasks” (Leong 2018, 175), functions as a kind of *auctoritas* principle and adds value to the recipe(s) presented.

The narrative tone of recipes had been partly hinted at by Görlach (1992, 749), who, although affirming that from a syntactic point of view they were very simple texts,²⁰ noted that temporal clauses represent a phrasal construction which contributes to the ‘narrativisation’ of recipes and add complexity to the sentence structure (2004, 125). I will argue also that purpose clauses

19 In most cases, the MSS analysed contain interesting Latin expressions such as *probatum*, *probatissimum*, *probatum est*, etc., a clear intervention by the author/compiler who reported her/his positive experience with a certain recipe, thus appraising its success.

20 See also Carroll (1999, 31): “[t]he culinary recipes are made up largely of simple clauses”.

had a high degree of occurrence in early modern English recipes and comprised a paramount morphosyntactic element for pragmatic reasons, as will be seen later.

3. *Describing the Digital Archive and Making It Ready for Corpus Analysis*

The dataset selected for the corpus-driven analysis is the “Recipe books at the Folger Shakespeare Library” digital archive (available at https://folgerpedia.folger.edu/Recipe_books_at_the_Folger_Shakespeare_Library), a collection of 144 manuscript recipe books dating from ca. 1550 to ca. 1870. Of these MSS, only 53 have been transcribed thus far at the Folger, two of which have copyright restrictions and cannot be consulted in open access.²¹ Given my interest in early modern English, I have decided to consider the time span 1550-1700; hence, only the 45 MSS in the Folger archive dating up to 1700 have been considered.

Most of the MSS were digitised by volunteers of the EMROC (Early Modern Recipe Online Collective), a long-term project founded in 2012 by professors Rebecca Laroche (University of Colorado) and Amy L. Tigner (University of Texas), with the aim of making early modern English recipe manuscript books accessible and electronically searchable. Every year since 2019, the EMROC organises a transcription marathon called Transcribathons whose outcomes are uploaded to a specific section of LUNA, the Folger Digital Image Collection, called the Folger Manuscripts Transcriptions Collection, by Emily Wahl, metadata specialist, and Michael Poston, data architect, both at the Folger Shakespeare Library (for details about how to make transcriptions accessible online, see Tersigni 2019).

One of the main difficulties in creating the corpus is the poor conditions of MSS, as noted by Leong: “[o]ften created and used over generations, household recipe books were scribbled over, marked up, crossed out, written and rewritten [through] marginal notes, interlineal interjections, Xs, and other scribbles” (2018, 175). This certainly affected the corpus analysis presented in this paper, since lacunae and crossed-out repetitions or false starts, to give only

21 These are V.a.621, compiled by Catherine Bacon, around 1680 and 1739 (approximately), and W.a.311, compiled by Mrs. Johnston, in 1700 (approximately). In this article, MSS are indicated by their Folger call number.

one example, may alter both the word count (and hence statistical data) and collocational patternings. For this reason, each decision I made during the process of systematisation and epuration of the corpus was in aid of machine readability and reliability of the corpus analysis.

Some MSS also contained other miscellaneous texts which had nothing to do with recipes. For example, V.a.260 included long lists of ships belonging to the English fleet in the seventeenth century, and V.a.347 had several sermons in both Latin and English. For the same reason as above, matter unrelated to culinary recipes in the MSS has not been uploaded to the software. Even paratexts – e.g., frontispieces, tables of contents, etc., except for marginalia and interlinear glosses – were not included in the word count and corpus analysis.²²

Once the texts (or portions of them) were ready to be analysed using corpus linguistics software, the last step was to modernise early modern English spelling, since for obvious reasons the analysis would benefit significantly from modern spelling versions of the MSS. As a matter of fact, the purpose of my investigation was neither philological nor etymological; hence, an old spelling version of the texts would prevent statistical considerations about keyword analysis, collocations, annotations, etc. To this end, I used VARiant Detector (WARD₂) software, a semi-automatic tool developed by Alistair Baron at the University of Lancaster. Texts were then checked manually and uploaded to both #Lancsbox and The Voyant Tools, since the functions they offer are user friendly and sometimes differ from each other; thus a combined analysis of their respective functionalities was desirable.

4. Discussion of Results: Initial Purpose Infinitive Clauses (IPICs) and Their Pragmatic Function(s)

As hinted at above, recipes are characterised by “a particular syntax” (Arendholz 2013, 120). This “particularity” derives from the fact that, according to some scholars, even in the past “[r]ecipes were more than a set of instructions.

22 Here I follow the example of the Visualizing English Print (VEP) project and its adoption of the SimpleText format, specifically designed to support statistical analysis of historical corpora (see <https://graphics.cs.wisc.edu/WP/vep/simpletext/> for further details about preparing a text to be formatted according to SimpleText criteria).

They were forms of narration” (Smith 2016) and hence combined the nature of procedural and narrative texts (Pomata 2013; Graziano and Mocini 2015, 123-4). As Cognard-Black observes, “[a] recipe is a story. It sets a scene, forms a plot, arrives at a climax, and ends with a denouement” (2015).

Below are a few prototypical examples of recipes from the FEMER, which illustrate this combined nature of procedural and narrative text types (where, for instance, the temporal clauses emphasised by Görlach are evident):

To hash a calf’s head, there must be some bacon boiled with the head. When it is cold slice it thin and mince the bacon small. Put to them some strong broth, claret wine and vinegar anchovy, cloves mace and a little pepper and a little butter and an onion. Fry some sausage meat, some larks roasted a little. When it’s stewed enough, then put to it some very thin pieces of bacon fried crisp, serve it up with sippets and lemon. (V.a.347)

A receipt to make curran wine

Take 24 pounds of good ripe red currans, bruise them in your hands and strain them. When they are all broken, add to the juice 4 Scots pints of spring water, then put in 8 pounds of powdered sugar, and have of the same liquor by you to fill up the barrel always as it works over. Take away the thick scum every morning for 10 or 12 days and fill up the barrel, which must hold but 8 pints, then stop the barrel and set it in a closed place for a quarter of a year. Then draw it of in bottles and stop them closed for your use. (X.d.745)

In addition to illustrating instances of both instructional and narrative text types, the examples above also demonstrate that “[s]yntax in food discourse is restricted” and that “[p]revailing syntactic constructions are parallel, mostly by repeated imperatives and item lists. These features remain essentially universal until the end of the Early Modern English period” (Diemer 2013, 156).

It is with these premises in mind that I conducted a morphosyntactic corpus-based analysis of early modern English recipes in order to understand what kind of clauses and phrases account for the narrative and procedural features of the texts, respectively. I began by arranging the corpus²³ in the chronological order of the MSS, in order to analyse possible diachronic developments, changes, shifts, etc., of the linguistic features looked for. I called the corpus FEMER (Folger Early Modern English Recipes) and analysed it using #Lancsbox, first with particular reference to morphosyntactic structures. To this end, the

23 In terms of word count, the corpus comprises 1,152,331 tokens and 48,640 types.

Ngrams tool was used, since it is the most appropriate one the software offers to investigate morphosyntax. After noun phrases, the most recurring morphosyntactic structure was the *to*-infinitive phrase ‘TO + VV’, with VV indicating the base form of the verb, according to #Lancsbox POS tags. Of all the occurrences of *to* indicating an infinitive, 3301 (relative frequency: 28.64²⁴) collocate with the base form *make*, with most of them indicating a purpose (infinitive) clause²⁵ which often appears in the initial position (henceforth IPIC, Initial Purpose Infinitive Clause). From a diachronic perspective, the IPIC *to make* shows an average regular distribution in the period under analysis (1550-1700), as seen in the figure below from The Voyant Tools (Fig. 1):

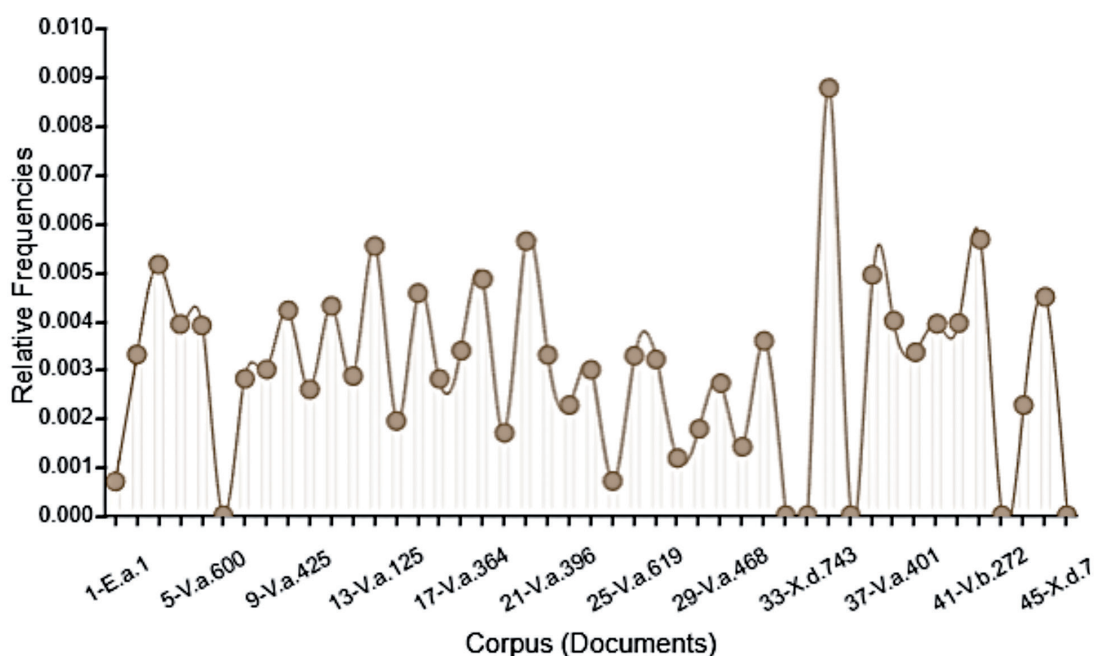


Fig. 1. The diachronic distribution of *to make* in the FEMER.

²⁴ #Lancsbox calculates the relative frequency per 10k words.

²⁵ I here adopt Sandra Thompson’s (1983) taxonomy as she focused specifically on initial/final purpose clauses and their pragmatic implications in sentences. Other definitions, such as Karlsen’s (1954) idea of absolute infinitive of purpose, Quirk et al.’s (1985) notion of purpose adjuncts, or Los’s (2005) concept of *to*-infinitive as *GOAL* have not been considered in this article, for no other reason than Thompson’s greater relevance to the topics dealt with here.

The centrality of the verb *to make* would likely not surprise food discourse scholars, firmly convinced as they are that early modern culinary culture was characterized by the “knowledge of making”, a “pan-European scheme of everyday tasks directed toward making things” (Leong 2018, 4). Nevertheless, the corpus-analysis reinforces their conjectures.

To study the collocational patterning of *to make*, I have decided to set a span of 0 words to the left (0 L) and 15 words to the right (15 R), since no lexical item precedes IPICs in the recipes of the FEMER. The GraphColl tool²⁶ in #Lancsbox (see Fig. 2) shows that of the 3301 occurrences of *to make* as an IPIC, 2418 (73%) collocate with the imperative form *take*:

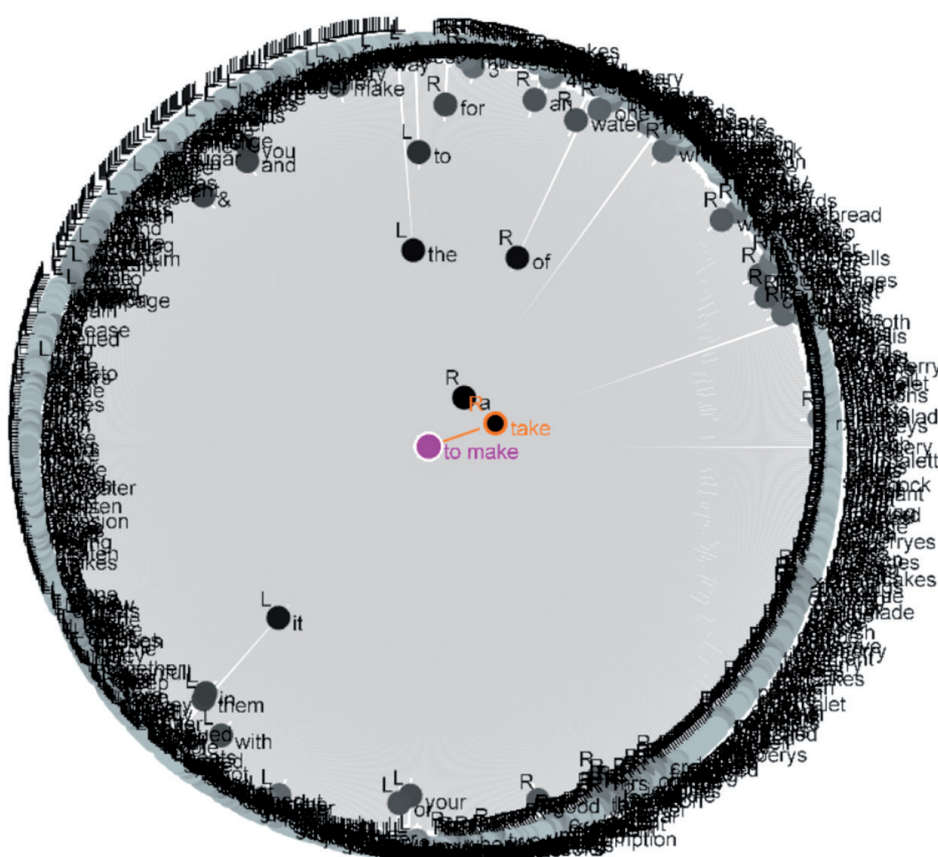


Fig. 2. Most recurring collocates of the node *to make* in the FEMER, with *take* highlighted in orange.

26 GraphColl is a tool that produces collocational graphs and allows users to visualise data as networks.

The reason for such a wide right span is that sometimes the object of the IPICs is so long, with all its pre- and post-modifying items (Sylwanowicz 2017), that the instructional part of the recipe, which usually begins with the imperative *take*,²⁷ is not in the immediate lexical neighbourhood of the node *to make*, as in the following examples:

MS	RECIPE	'TO MAKE...TAKE...' COLLOCATION	RIGHT SPAN
E.a.5	A balm	<i>To make</i> a balm presently that shall heal any green wound in 5 days, <i>take</i> ...	13 R
V.a.125	Apple tart	<i>To make</i> jelly for whole oranges or the peels of them <i>take</i> ...	10 R
V.a.364	A water	<i>To make</i> a water to wash the face used of a gentlewoman, <i>take</i> ...	11 R

Table 1. Example of the 'To make...take...' collocation in the FEMER.

Even in this case, scholars are familiar with reflections on the textual structure of recipes. Carroll (1992) was probably one of the first to recognize the importance of the initial part of recipes in Middle English: "It can be seen then that the Middle English recipes usually begin with a heading, often containing an infinitive" (32). I would specify that the infinitive Carroll refers to is a purpose infinitive, as Stannard (1982), Mäkinen (2004), and De la Cruz-Cabanillas (2020, 48), among others, have noticed, in the case of early modern prescriptions and recipes. Scholars have variously defined the initial part of recipes, as summarised by Sylwanowicz: "[i]n various publications [the initial] part of the recipe is given different labels, e.g. purpose (Stannard 1982; Mäkinen 2004), rubric and indication (Hunt 1990), title (Görlach 1992;²⁸ Taavitsainen 2001; Alonso-Almeida 2013)".²⁹ Since "[s]ome [recipes] include a clear statement of

27 Adopting a pragmatic perspective, this imperative should be referred to as a directive speech act, according to Searle's well-known taxonomy of speech acts. Nevertheless, as noted by Al-Azzawi and Abdulameer, "[t]he highest use of 'directive' is not a haphazard matter but rather for purpose" (2020, 15095). In other words, this imperative form can be interpreted as an instructional performative speech act, a sub-category of directives, as stated by Brdar-Szabó and Brdar (2009).

28 More precisely, Görlach also calls the initial part 'heading' (2004, 145).

29 To this list I would add De la Cruz-Cabanillas, who calls the initial part "a title specifying the purpose" (2020, 45), albeit referring to medical recipes.

purpose [...], whereas others include only the name of the medicament”, Sylwanowicz prefers calling the initial part “heading” (Ibid.), like Grund (2003) and Görlach (2004) before her.

Nevertheless, terminological matters aside, to my knowledge the pragmatic implications of this morphosyntactic organisation of recipes as texts have never been investigated. Initial purpose clauses, and IPICs in particular, have received scant attention. Drawing on Firbas’s functionalist theories,³⁰ Golkova (1968), a member of the Second School of Prague, observed that IPICs have less communicative dynamism (CD)³¹ than final purpose clauses. This is in line with Firbas’s CD:

Entering into the flow of communication, the meaning conveyed by a linguistic element acquires the character of information and participates in the development of the communication and in the fulfilment of the communicative purpose. If unhampered by other factors, linear modification produces the following effect. The closer to the end of the sentence an element comes to stand, the greater the extent to which it contributes towards the development and completion of the communication. Whereas the element occurring finally contributes most to this development, the element occurring initially contributes least to it. (1996, 23-4)

Nevertheless, Halliday established that usually the initial element of a sentence is “the point of departure of the clauses as a message” (1967, 212), and it is well-known that he calls this point ‘theme’, thus alluding to discourse, instead of considering sentences in isolation as Golkova had done.³²

Fries (1983) developed Halliday’s discourse implications of the theme, affirming that themes provide important information about the organisation of a text. In particular, sentence-initial themes are called by Fries marked themes, since they

30 In particular, Golkova here refers to the Functional Sentence Perspective or FSP by Firbas (1956; 1966).

31 First introduced by Jan Firbas in his seminal article “Poznámky k problematice anglického slovního pořádku s hlediska aktuálního členění větného” [Some notes on the problem of English word order from the point of view of functional sentence perspective] (1956), CD is defined as “a phenomenon constantly displayed by linguistic elements in the act of communication. It is an inherent quality of communication and manifests itself in constant development towards the attainment of a communicative goal; in other words, towards the fulfilment of a communicative purpose” (Firbas 1992, 7).

32 For an application of Hallidayan linguistics to food discourse, see Graziano and Mocini 2015; Graziano 2019.

are rarely the subject of the sentence, which is defined as the unmarked theme. This is evident in the examples from the FEMER, where the *to-make* IPIC, understood as a marked theme, is never the subject of the sentence, this latter syntactic element being a generic ‘you’ coinciding with the subject of the imperative *take*.

Thompson, on the other hand, “suggest[s] that an initial purpose clause provides a framework within which the main clause can be interpreted, and that it does this by means of its role as a link in an expectation chain” (1985, 61). In this expectation chain, “initial purpose clauses [...] guide the reader’s attention in a very specific way, by naming a problem which arises from expectations created by the text or inferences from it, to which the following material, often consisting of many sentences, provides the solution” (67). This is exactly the case of the recipes of the FEMER and, not by chance, Thompson’s analysis focuses on narrative and procedural texts (57), the two text types to which culinary recipes belong. In early modern English recipes, the *to-make* IPIC directs the reader’s attention to the problem of ‘how to make something’ (the ‘something’ part generally being a noun phrase) and creates expectations (often thanks to a series of pre- and post-modifying items of the NP). The rest of the text provides the solution to the problem.

Below are some prototypical examples from the corpus (the POS tags have been provided by #Lancsbox with the KWIC tool, using the ‘Text with POS’ function):³³

MS	IPIC	MAIN CLAUSE
V.a.20	<i>To_TO make_VV a_DT very_RB good_JJ cake_NN</i>	<i>take_VV a_DT quarter_NN of_IN a_DT peck_NN of_IN flower_NN...</i>
V.a.562	<i>To_TO make_VV an_DT excellent_JJ good_JJ jelly_NN</i>	<i>take_VV three_CD gallons_NN of_IN fair_JJ water_NN...</i>
V.b.13	<i>To_TO make_VV an_DT oil_NN good_JJ for_IN the_DT sight_NN</i>	<i>take_VV the_DT flowers_NN of_IN rosemary_NN...</i>

Table 2. Examples of IPICs and main clauses from the FEMER, analysed through #LancsBox.

33 The POS tags automatically assigned by #Lancsbox, which are present in the examples above, are as follows: CD = cardinal number; DT = determiner; IN = Preposition or subordinating conjunction; JJ = adjective; NN = noun, singular or mass; RB = adverb; TO = to; VV = verb base form (unfortunately, #Lancsbox does not recognise *take* as imperative, since this tag is not present in the software).

Moreover, the initial position of final clauses plays an important role in terms of Information Structure (IS); in particular, in the distribution of topic and focus³⁴ in the texts considered. Generally – and over-simplistically – speaking, “the focus is that part of the utterance that realises the utterance’s informative purpose and conveys its illocutionary force. The topic is the rest of the utterance, whose function is that of providing accessory information that facilitates the comprehension of the topic” (Lombardi Valluri 2009, 88. Translation mine).

In general, “[p]urpose clauses do not [...] set an interpretative frame or thematic ground for the ensuing main clause, but tend instead to provide new information. Their discourse-pragmatic function, then, should favour purpose clauses in rhematic (focus) position rather than thematic (topic) position [...]: purpose clauses are overwhelmingly frequently postposed, even if they contain a clause-final subordinator and hence require a comparatively high processing effort” (Schmidtke-Bode 2009, 123). This is not the case of the FEMER. As a matter of fact, here purpose clauses are anticipated, or “preposed” (Ibid.: 124), and Schmidtke-Bode agrees with Thompson in saying that “[w]hen the purpose clause is moved to the beginning of the complex sentence [...] it loses the [...] rhematic characteristics and adopts the discourse-organizing function of other initial adverbial clauses” (Ibid.). Therefore, we can conclude that *to-make* IPICs in the FEMER function as organising topical clauses, a title-/heading-like given piece of information which introduces the new information conveyed by the recipe procedure.

5. Conclusion

The corpus-based analysis of the FEMER presented above has highlighted the morphosyntactic features of the digitised MSS that seem to confirm the double nature of recipes as text types. On the one hand, *to-make* IPICs contribute to the ‘narrativisation’ of early modern English recipes – something that has been

34 The overlapping and/or differences between such labels as topic, theme, ground, on the one hand, and focus, rheme, comment, on the other, will not be discussed in this article, given the topic’s complexity. For further information, see Masia 2017, among others. I decided here to adopt the topic-comment dichotomy, following Emanuela Cresti (cit. in Lombardi Vallauri 2009, 88), since it is focused specifically on the communicative scope of utterances, and less bound to the form of the topical and focal units.

lost in contemporary recipes – thus making syntax less scanty and more hypotactic. In this way, purpose clauses are added to the temporal clauses studied by Görlach (2004, 125). On the other hand, the collocational pattern ‘*to make* + object³⁵ + *take* + object’ clearly demonstrates the procedural nature of recipes.

The recurrence of certain syntactic structures also has important implications at the level of pragmatics. As a matter of fact, IPICs have proved to be marked structures which have statistical significance only in early modern recipes, where they become an unmarked feature. This affects the topic-focus alternation, as seen above, and creates an expectation in the readers, as noted by Thompson (1985). The topic presents a piece of information as if it were already known to the reader, and thus its function is to outline a context to better interpret the focus. IPICs are a sort of ‘stage-setting’ of the main event. The reader, focusing on that string of text, knows that s/he must treat it with less attention, because it is already shared information, but which s/he needs to use to decode the main event, the one most often introduced by ‘take’. This aspect corroborates the text-based peculiarity of this phenomenon.

Further corpus-based investigation could shed more light on the narrative nuances of early modern English recipes, even examining comments and pieces of advice inserted by the MSS compilers and authors. Such explorations, I argue, would benefit from corpus software and from interfaces between morphosyntax and pragmatics, although lexis still represent an important field of research in terms of scrutinising food discourse.³⁶

35 As observed in the analysis, most of the time the object is made up of a NP and its projections in terms of pre- and post-modifying elements.

36 See, among others, Graziano 2017; 2019 for an analysis of food discourse as ESP.

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Complex prepositions in (Medieval) Portuguese: The question of language contact

Abstract

One important question in the current line of research concerning adpositions is how complex prepositions emerged in the diachrony of Portuguese. This is the question we address, focusing on the first centuries of available texts, and aiming to determine whether CPs have emerged independently from other European languages. Starting with definitions and lists of CPs in Modern Portuguese, and with a usage-based approach, we document the presence of several CPs as early as the 13th century. These findings do not exclude the importance of language contact, but are also compatible with an independent emergence of CPs in different European languages.

1. *Introduction*

Adpositions have been central in semantics in the last decades, with a huge body of literature, due in part to a strong focus on space and language which benefited from many studies on *simple* prepositions, mostly in European languages (from Brøndal 1950 to Vandeloise 1986; Zelinsky-Wibbelt 1993; or Tyler & Evans 2003) but also from other perspectives, especially typological (Svorou 1994; Hagège 2010) and diachronic (Di Meola 2000; Fagard 2010).

One important question which has emerged in this line of research is how *complex prepositions* emerged in European languages (Horst 2013, 182; see also Hoffmann 2005; Hüning 2014; and more recently Fagard et al. 2019; 2020). Indeed, one might wonder why these constructions are so frequent among European languages, and specifically whether language contact has had an impact

on their emergence, as seems to be the case at least in some of them (e.g., Breton or Albanese, see Rottet 2020; Bonnet and Fagard 2020).

In line with previous work by the authors, which has described both the emergence of complex adpositions in the diachrony of Portuguese (Lima 2014; 2019ab) and the influence of language contact, in the form of text translations, on this evolution (Fagard 2023), this paper aims to describe the emergence of CPs in the diachrony of Portuguese, focusing on the first centuries of available texts, in order to determine the importance of language-internal phenomena. The aim of our investigation is to search for clues indicating whether CPs have emerged independently from other European languages. Based on earlier research on other Romance languages (Cifuentes Honrubia 2003; Piunno and Ganfi 2017; Fagard 2020), we expected to find only few sequences in Medieval Portuguese, with a low relative frequency, and larger paradigms only in later stages (Classical & Contemporary Portuguese).

After Section 1, dedicated to the introduction, we discuss in Section 2 existing definitions and lists of CPs in European languages, and more specifically those existing for Modern Portuguese. Section 3 is dedicated to a presentation of our methodological approach. In Section 4, we present the general results of our corpus study, and go on in Section 5 to analyze in further detail three case studies, before concluding in Section 6.

2. *Complex Prepositions in Portuguese: Towards a Working Definition*

Grammars of Portuguese have provided varying definitions, labels and lists of Complex prepositions. In this section, we review these lists, which we then use as a starting point for our corpus search.

Complex prepositions are notoriously hard to define and identify: they are not a consensual category – or even a “helpful” one, according to Seppänen et al. (1994, 25). The definition adopted for this study relies on a definition of adpositions as relational expressions with 3 main functions: (i) introducing a nominal constituent; (ii) establishing a relation between this constituent and a (higher) constituent; (iii) helping determine the semantic nature of this relationship. This definition is valid of course for simple adpositions, as in (1) below in which *em*, i.e., *em* ‘in’, introduces the constituent *sete maneiras* and links it syntactically and semantically to the verb *dividirse*.

(1) o peccado mortal açima dito se diuide ã sete maneiras.
'The mortal sin mentioned above is divided in seven ways' (Dom Diogo de Sousa, *Constituições do Bispado do Porto*, 1497, Corpus do Português)¹

Complex adpositions are defined in turn as functionally equivalent, but morphologically complex, typically having 3 formal components dedicated each to one of the 3 functions: this is illustrated in (2), where the semantic relationship is specified by the noun phrase *o pé* 'the foot' and the simple prepositions *a* 'at' and *de* 'of, from' fulfill functions (i) and (ii) above (for further details and a discussion of marginal cases and exceptions, see Stosic and Fagard 2019; Fagard et al. 2020).

(2) Lançou-se a dormir **ao pé do** muro, debayxo daquela ataude
'he threw himself down by the wall, below that coffin' (*Crónica de D. Fernando*, 1431-1443, Corpus do Português)

In Portuguese, this type of sequence has been identified mainly as a "prepositional phrase" (*locução prepositiva*, see e.g., Nunes 1930, 352; Cunha and Cintra 1984, 551-2) or as a "complex preposition" (*preposição composta*, see e.g., Cunha and Cintra 1984, 551-2). The inventories we have been able to identify in the literature range from a dozen sequences (Nunes 1930, 352) to several dozen (44 in Cunha and Cintra 1984, 551-2; 54 in Bechara 2002, 305; 62 in Raposo et al. 2013, 1503-4). Additionally, some authors introduce distinctions among complex prepositions; for instance, Raposo et al. (2013, 1503-4) distinguish prepositional phrases on the basis of the nature of the nucleus: they list 4 "noun-based" items, 17 "adverb-based" items and 41 "preposition-based" items (by default in Table 1).

As shown in previous works on complex adpositions in Romance languages (see e.g., Fagard et al. 2019; Fagard et al. 2020), most items follow one of two patterns, pattern A: [Preposition₁ + (Determiner +) Lexical nucleus + Preposition₂]; or pattern B: [Adverb + Preposition].² These patterns are illustrated in (3) (see also (2) above for an example with determiner) and (4), respectively.

(3) Esta foy a reuerença que fezerom os discipollos a xpisto que nõ o leixarõ caualgar em ouosso mas ante **em lugar de** sella lhe poserõ de baixo seus vistidos.

1 All examples are our own, and were selected from the corpus chosen for this study.

2 In Portuguese, sequences pertaining to Pattern B are often described as *advérbios relacionais*, i.e., "relational adverbs" (Raposo et al. 2013, 1500).

‘Here is the favor the disciples did for the Christ: they did not let him ride bareback but rather instead of a saddle they put their clothes beneath him’ (Gonçalo Garcia de Santa Maria, *Euangelhos e epistolas con suas exposições en romãçe*, 1497, Corpus do Português)

(4) E passou **aalem do** ryo.
‘and he went beyond the river’ (*Crónica Geral de Espanha*, 1344, Corpus do Português)

These patterns are common in Romance languages (Fagard et al. 2020), and even in other Indo-European languages, especially in Western Europe.

For Portuguese, we compiled the lists provided by the authors mentioned above, and obtained a total of 102 items which they consider to be Complex Adpositions. There is wide variation across lists, with partial agreement on only 41 sequences. Unsurprisingly, most sequences in this list follow pattern A (65 items, i.e., 63.7%) or B (22 items, i.e., 21.6%). Pattern A, though more productive in terms of types, may be expected to be less frequent overall (see Fagard, in press). Some sequences pertaining to Type A contain an adverb as lexical nucleus, while a few sequences could be classified as pertaining to Type A or B, depending on the analysis, e.g., *em cima de / encima de*. Indeed, this sequence could be analyzed as [Preposition *em* ‘in, on’ + nominal nucleus *cima* ‘top’ + Preposition *de* ‘of’] or as [Adverb *encima* ‘above’ + Preposition *de* ‘of’]. In such cases, the noun may be headed by a determiner (*na cima do ano* ‘at the end of the year’), as in (5), in which the substantive nature of the lexical nucleus is shown by the presence of a determiner.

(5) des ali rezou el, e non lle foi greu, / quanto lle mandara ela; e, com’ oý eu, / **na cima do ano** foy-o consigo levar.
‘from then on he prayed as much as she had commanded, and it did not seem hard to him; and as I heard, at the end of the year she took him to be with her’ (*Cantigas de Santa Maria* 1, 12th c., Corpus do Português)

An important specification in this definition is that the Complex Adposition must constitute a semantic unit, i.e., present at least some degree of semantic opacity. In some rare cases, there is direct evidence for this unity, e.g., when a CP in Portuguese is used to translate a simple preposition in Latin, as in (6).

(6) canis **circum** intestina. || cão **ao redor de** tripas
‘a dog around offal’ (Jerónimo Cardoso, *Dicionário de Latim-Português* 1, 1569-70, Corpus do Português)

For other sequences listed in Table 1, this might not – or not entirely – be the case. For instance, the sequence *ao conselho de* appears very early in the corpus; however, even later occurrences are not always prepositional, as illustrated in (7). Similarly, in (8), *em redor de* should not be analyzed as a CP, since *em redor* is an adverbial phrase modifying the verb *cobrir* ‘to cover’, while *de cores* ‘of colors’ is an argument of the same verb.

(7) E **mádo ao Conçelho** de vihões que os enparë
 ‘And I order the Council of Vihães to protect them’ (*Documentos foraleiros da Chancelaria de D. Dinis-Bragança*, 16th c., Corpus do Português)

(8) Toda gloria da filha do rrey he dentro em faldas douro, **cubertas ë redor** de coores de muytas maneyras.
 ‘All the glory of the king’s daughter is within in golden borders, clothed all around with a wide variety of colors’ (*Orto do Esposo*, 15th c., Corpus do Português)

To take another example, *a braços com* might be better analyzed as part of the verb phrase *vir* (or *andar*) *a braços (com alguém)* ‘to come to blows (with someone)’: indeed, all five examples in the corpus (13th-17th c.) follow this pattern, as in (9).

(9) Terceira, soltura, segurança e atrevymento pera **vïir a braços** com qual quer homem, ainda que mais ryjo que elle seja.
 ‘3rd [advantage when it comes to waging war]: flexibility, self-confidence and boldness in coming to blows with any man, even if he should be more vigorous’ (*Livro da Ensinança de Bem Cavalgar Toda Sela*, 15th c., Corpus do Português)

Finally, some sequences are clearly grammaticalized, but seem to behave more like conjunctions than prepositions. The affinity between these two categories is indeed well-known (Pottier 1962: 195-197, Piot 1993). This is the case, for instance, of *a fim de* ‘in order to’, as illustrated in (10).

(10) Da outra parte pensou que era bem de enviar a eles huû messegeiro, da parte del-rei Tholomeu e da sua, **a fim de os pacificar** e trautar com eles paz (*Vida e feitos de Júlio Cesar*, 15th c., Corpus do Português)
 ‘On the other hand he thought it would be good to send them a messenger, in the name of king Tholomeu and his own, in order to allay them and negotiate peace with them’

Table 1 below lists the sequences we compiled from the literature.

TYPE A1 – WITH DETERMINER (PDXP)			
P1 = a, P2 = de (à/ao X de)			Other
à altura de, à conta de, à custa de, à direita de, à disposição de, à esquerda de, à frente de, à mercê de, à roda de, à volta de, ao lado de, ao longo de, ao pé de, ao redor de			na conta de, para a frente de, pela frente de
Type A2 – without determiner (PXP)			
P1 = a, P2 = de (a X de)	P1 = em, P2 = de (em X de)	P1 = por, P2 = de (por X de)	Other
a (meio) caminho de, a bel-prazer de, a conselho de, a despeito de, a fim de, a mais de, a meio de, a menos de, a par de, a partir de, a respeito de	em baixo de, em cima de, em favor de, em frente de, em lugar de, em prol de, em razão de, em redor de, em torno de, em troco de, em vez de	por baixo de, por causa de, por cima de, por debaixo de, por defronte de, por dentro de, por detrás de, por diante de, por perto de, por trás de	a braços com, a julgar por, a par com, a seguir a, com base em, de acordo com, de caras com, de cima de, de conformidade com, em frente a, para além de, para alguém de, para baixo de, para cima de, sem embargo de
TYPE B			
P2 = de (X de)		P2 = a (X a)	other
abaixo de, acerca de, acima de, adiante de, além de, antes de, apesar de, após de, alguém de, atrás de, através de, cerca de, debaixo de, defronte de, dentro de, depois de, detrás de, diante de, fora de, junto de, longe de, mercê de, perto de, próximo de		até a, enquanto a, face a, frente a, graças a, junto a, quanto a	dentro em, para com, por entre
Other			
de so, dentre, exceto, não obstante			

Table 1. Complex prepositions in Portuguese: list of potential sequences, per construction type; based on Nunes 1930; Cunha and Cintra 1984; Bechara 2002 and Raposo et al. 2013.

Though theoretically all simple prepositions may fill slots 1 and 3, these are typically occupied only by the most grammaticalized ones. Indeed, among the sequences we compiled, most are headed by *a*, *em* or *por*, and slot 2 is generally occupied by *de* or, less frequently, *a*, as shown in Table 1.

3. Methodological Approach

For this study, we adopted a usage-based approach. Using the list of sequences presented in Table 1 as a starting point, and including also several sequences identified as complex adpositions by Pinto de Lima (2014; 2019ab) and Fagard (2023), we controlled for the presence of CPs in a diachronic corpus of Portuguese, the *Corpus do Português* (Davies and Ferreira 2006), with a triangulation approach combining frequency counts (presented in Section 4) and qualitative analyses, esp. case studies (presented in Section 5).

The *Corpus do Português* is a very large corpus, with 1 billion words in total. We relied on the historical section of the corpus (from the 13th to the 20th century), which is much smaller, but of acceptable dimensions for a diachronic corpus, with 45 million words from nearly 57,000 texts. The interface enables the use of lemmas and of complex queries, with the possibility of sampling for large outputs, making it a very useful tool for diachronic studies.

For the quantitative part of our study, we tested all 102 sequences listed in Table 1. In order to check for the existence of other sequences, we also used open queries, testing for patterns A and B and their most frequent subpatterns described in Section 2: *à/ao X de*, *a/em X de*, *Adv a/de*.

The amount of noise can be limited by including in slots 1 and 2, i.e., as *Adposition₁* and *Adposition₂*, only those items which appear in the sequences listed in Table 1. Some sequences found as a result of these queries do not pertain to either pattern, but were found to be functionally equivalent, and were thus included in our analysis. One example of such a sequence is the pattern in which two adpositions are used in sequence: in such cases, two items which generally function as simple prepositions are found to behave jointly as a complex preposition with distinct semantics, as is the case in (11) for *para com*.

(11) Da grande caridade, e compayxão que o Infante tinha **para com** os pobres.
'Of the great charity and compassion that the Infant had for the poor' (*Crónica de D. Fernando*, 1431-1443, *Corpus do Português*)

We systematically analyzed the first occurrences to see when they were first used as complex adpositions, rather than as syntactically free sequences.

For the qualitative part of our study, we retrieved all occurrences of each sequence, and analyzed a random sample of 100 occurrences per century, for each sequence. The randomization was performed with the Excel software, af-

ter noise exclusion – noise being understood as resulting e.g., from cases of homonymy, as with *cabo* ‘head, end’ and ‘cape’, as in (12).

(12) Viagem de lisboa ate ao **cabo** de boa esperança
‘Trip from Lisbon to the Cape of Good Hope’ (*Virgeu de consolaçon*, 15th c., Corpus do Português)

Once retrieved, all occurrences were then analyzed in order to distinguish between referential uses (as in (2) or (5) above), i.e., those in which the lexical element in the sequence has a referent and may thus be for instance the antecedent of an anaphor, and non-referential uses, which display at least some degree of semantic bleaching. For instance, in example (3) above, the noun *lugar* is not preceded by a determiner, and its referential potential seems low. Indeed, in example (3) *em lugar de* could be glossed both *in the place of* (i.e., they put their robes where one usually attaches a saddle) and *instead of* (i.e., they did not attach a saddle but instead put their robes on the horse’s back). The existence of such ambivalent contexts, also called bridging contexts (Heine 2002), is typical of grammaticalization phenomena.

In referential occurrences, the sequence can generally be considered as non-adpositional. However, such occurrences typically pave the way for more grammaticalized uses of a sequence. This explains the frequent shift of constructions from the pattern [Preposition₁ + Determiner + Lexical nucleus + Preposition₂] to the pattern [Preposition₁ + Lexical nucleus + Preposition₂], as is the case for *ao cabo de* (14th c., in our corpus) and *a cabo de* (16th c., in our corpus).

We also aimed to describe the possible adpositional uses of each sequence, and distinguished broad semantic categories (spatial, temporal, abstract) in order to identify diachronic semantic shifts.

4. *Corpus Study – General Results*

Our quantitative analysis suggests that dozens of complex adpositions are already present in Medieval Portuguese. We were able to detect the presence of several CPs as early as the 13th c., for instance *em redor de* ‘behind’. Others seem to appear slightly later, e.g., in the 14th c., for instance *por parte de* ‘on behalf of’ or *em favor de* ‘in favor of’, centuries, as illustrated by examples (13-5).

(13) Senhor, se teverdes por ben, cavalguemos ambos soos e vaamos andar **en redor da** villa.
 ‘Lord, if you will, let the two of us ride alone **around** the town’ (*Crónica Geral de Espanha*, 1344, Corpus do Português)

(14) o ssenorio & directo do Couto de Bueu que uos Johan Martinz ia dito auyades **por parte de uosso padre & de uossa madre**
 ‘the land and right of land of Couto de Bueu which you, aforementioned Johan Martinz, have had from your father and your mother’ (*Textos Notariais. História do galego-português*, 1262-1300, Corpus do Português)

(15) bem se comprio esto em el Rei dom pedro. ca el mouido per sobeio queixume comtra seus Jrmaãos & outros do Reino por aazo da teemçom que tomaram **em fauor da** rrainha dona bramca & comtra os parentes de dona maria de padilha segumdo ouuistes.
 ‘This was well accomplished by King Dom Pedro, because he, moved by exaggerated grievance against his Brothers and others of the Kingdom on account of the dispute that they took in favor of the queen Dona Branca and against the parents of Dona Maria de Padilha, as you heard.’ (*Cronica de Dom Pedro*, Fernão Lopes, 15th c., Corpus do Português)

Our quantitative analysis suggests that the main pattern in terms of relative frequency is Pattern B, i.e., AdvP sequences. It is more frequent than all other patterns, throughout the diachrony of Portuguese (Table 2).

Relative Frequency, per type	1200s	1300s	1400s	1500s	1600s	1700s	1800s	1900s	Total
Type A1 (P1detLexP2)	29,0	103,3	181,5	329,2	222,1	197,3	772,5	777,0	596,6
Type A2 (P1LexP2)	190,6	489,3	483,0	664,7	415,2	420,6	840,0	1552,4	1054,7
Type B (AdvP)	350,3	803,8	1620,5	2356,9	1826,4	2054,2	3250,2	4061,5	3159,5
PP	14,5	17,5	24,0	69,0	79,2	72,5	62,2	38,7	49,7
Other	0	1,5	2,8	7,2	20,2	34,0	83,8	102,5	69,2
Total	584,4	1415,4	2311,8	3427,0	2563,3	2778,6	5008,8	6532,1	4929,7

Table 2. Relative frequency of specific patterns of Complex Prepositions in our corpus.

The frequency of this pattern, which appears clearly in Graph 1, is common to all Ibero-Romance languages, and distinguishes them from other Romance languages (Fagard 2010).



Graph 1. Relative frequency of Patterns A and B ([P1(det)LexP2] and [AdvP], respectively) *vs* other sequences, in our corpus.

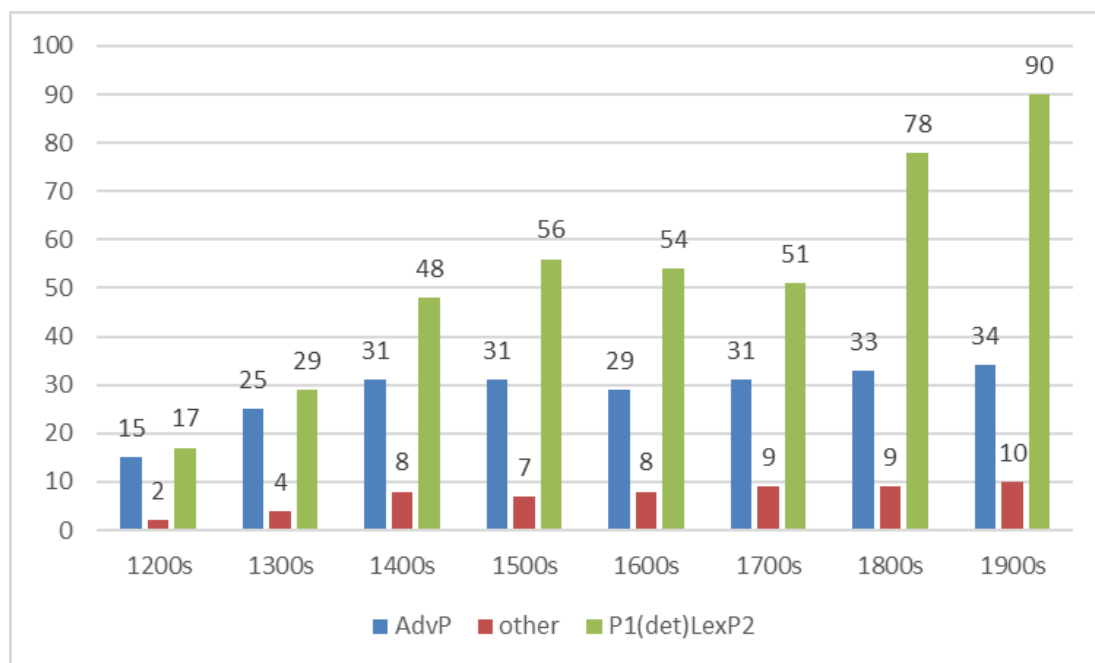
Another significant result is the emergence of new sequences throughout the Middle Ages, as observed in other languages, viz. French (Fagard 2020) or Italian (Pionno and Ganfi 2017).

As shown in Table 3, most new sequences first follow patterns A2 and B, then A1 and A2; by the end of the 17th century, over 68% of all CP-like sequences in the corpus are of type A (83/121).

Items per type	1200s	1300s	1400s	1500s	1600s	1700s	1800s	1900s	Total
Type A1 (P1detLexP2)	5	3	13	31	33	27	43	43	43
Type A2 (P1LexP2)	15	26	44	52	50	47	75	86	88
Type B (AdvP)	15	25	31	31	29	31	33	34	34
PP	2	3	4	4	4	4	3	4	4
Other	0	1	4	3	4	5	6	6	6
Total	37	58	96	121	120	114	160	173	175

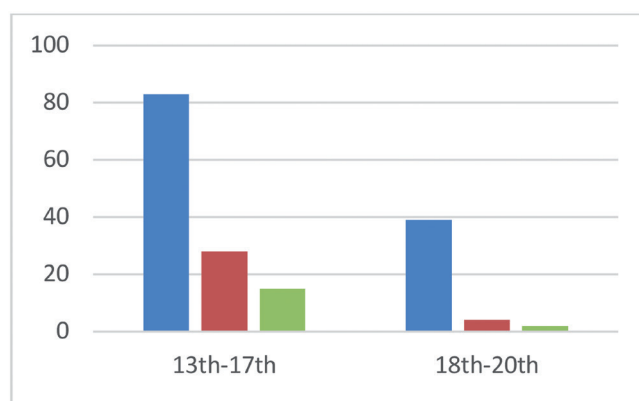
Table 3: CP-like sequences in the corpus, per type & century (relative frequencies per million words; Corpus do Português).

The cumulative frequency of Pattern A is similar to that of Pattern B at first, and gradually becomes twice as important (Graph 2).



Graph 2. Patterns A and B vs other types of CP-like sequences, per type & century (relative frequencies per million words; Corpus do Português).

The relative importance of pattern A tends to increase with time, as shown in Graph 3. This could indicate that the pattern itself is undergoing a process of grammaticalization (or constructionalization, i.e., the formation of entrenched form-meaning pairings; see Goldberg 1995, and for their use in a diachronic perspective Traugott and Trousdale 2013), and eventually started functioning as a fixed construction. This, in turn, explains the possibility of using the pattern to create new sequences as it seems *ex nihilo*, i.e., without a previous phase of grammaticalization, as shown by Hoffmann for English (2005). We have not yet identified such cases in the diachrony of Portuguese, but it would explain the uptake in frequency of the pattern; this remains an issue for future research.



Graph 3. Relative weight of patterns A and B vs other types of CP-like sequences in the diachrony of Portuguese (in % of all sequences identified as CP-like; Corpus do Português).

Minor sources of CPs which we have not included in Table 4 include sequences based on present participles, which may be considered as undergoing a grammaticalization process but not fully grammaticalized, e.g., *não obstante* ‘notwithstanding’. Such sequences may be shown to be functionally equivalent to prepositions or other CPs, e.g., *a despeito de* in the case of *não obstante*.

1st occurrence	AdvP	P ₁ detLexP ₂	P ₁ LexP ₂	other
1200s	<i>acerca de, acima de, adiante de, além de, dentro de, dentro em, depois de, diante de, fora de, fruto de, graças à, longe de, mercê de, quando de, quanto a</i>	<i>da parte de, na conta de, ao pé de, no meio de, na altura de</i>	<i>em nome de, em cima de, de cima da, em razão de, por força de, em lugar de, por cima de, por causa de, em redor de, com coita de, em prol de, em forma de, a mais de, em vez de, por parte de, em defesa de</i>	<i>de entre, de só</i>
1300s	<i>antes de, apesar de, após de, aquém de, até a, cerca de, detrás de, junto a, perto de, por entre</i>	<i>ao cabo de</i>	<i>em torno de, em busca de, em termos de, a par com, a par de, para cima de, em hora de, em virtude de, em pós de, por meio de, sem embargo de, sob pena de, por mercê de</i>	<i>para com, face a</i>

1400s	<i>abaixo de, através de, abaixo de, enquanto a, junto de, próximo de</i>	<i>ao longo de, ao caminho de, no caso de, na hora de, ao redor de, ao fim de, à hora de</i>	<i>para além de, a fim de, por diante de, por baixo de, a despeito de, de acordo com, para alguém da, em baixo de, a braços com, por abaixo de, em altura de, a propósito de, por detrás de, por dentro de, de frente de, em face de, em caso de, em favor de, por via de</i>	<i>dentre, devido a, não obstante, no que toca a</i>
1500s		<i>à conta de, na matéria de, à semelhança de, ao contrário de, ao encontro de, à disposição de, à volta de, ao cargo de, à margem de, ao lado de, à luz de, ao meio de, às custas de, à altura de, à mercê de, ao abrigo de, ao favor de, na sede de</i>	<i>a cargo de, a seguir a, a cabo de, em situação de, para baixo de, em frente de, em relação a, por conta de, em troco de, para lá de, em matéria de</i>	<i>a não ser</i>
1600s		<i>na base de, à beira de, à roda de</i>	<i>sem deixar de, em conformidade com, por perto de, a julgar por, em consequência de, em detrimento de, a título de</i>	
1700s	<i>relativamente a, frente a</i>	<i>ao nível de</i>	<i>a respeito de, a través de, por trás de</i>	<i>no que respeita a</i>
1800s		<i>à espera de, à frente de, à procura de, à excepção de, à direita de, à esquerda de, pela frente de, para a frente de</i>	<i>a favor de, a partir de, em vias de, a caminho de, de conformidade com, em meados de, de cara com, por defronte de, em função de, por volta de, com excepção de, em direcção a</i>	
1900s	<i>aquando de</i>		<i>a menos de, com base em, em fase de, a nível de, com vista a, em base de, em regime de, a conselho de</i>	

Table 4. CP-like sequences in the corpus, per type & century (Corpus do Português).

Once in place, in line with what could be expected in a grammaticalization or constructionalization perspective, these patterns seem to attract or license the emergence of similar sequences which may seem to fulfill only partially the required features. This could explain the existence of sequences in which the nature of the lexical nucleus is less than obvious. This is the case, for instance, of *mais* ‘more’ in *a mais de* ‘besides’.

5. Case Studies

In order to better understand the dynamics of this phenomenon, we focus here on three of these sequences, chosen because they illustrate different types of Complex Adpositions in the diachrony of Portuguese: *em redor de* ‘around, about’ is formed on a relational noun (also called *internal localization noun*, see Aurnague et al. 2000),³ which is typical of Type A CPs (see e.g., Stosic & Fagard 2019); *por parte de* ‘on the part of, on behalf of’ presents a case of CP based on a more abstract noun, which could explain the very different pattern of semantic shift it displays; finally, *ao longo de* seems to present a hybrid pattern, since it is based on a noun which is not relational, but does have a spatial meaning.

For each case study, we analyze the grammaticalization process underlying the emergence of the Complex Adposition, from a free syntactic sequence with a fully referential lexeme to a Complex Adposition.

5.1 *em redor de*

This sequence is quite representative, in that like many others it presents a high degree of internal variation, viz. there are several variants for P_I, but also for the lexical base itself, with no clear meaning shift, as can be seen in (16). In this paragraph, indeed, two distinct sequences – *em redor de* and *per d’arredor de* – are used to describe the same situation, in the same spatial layout (see above our example (13), which immediately precedes this excerpt).

(16) E cavalgarom ambos soos **per d’arredor da** villa
‘And the two of them rode alone **around** the town’ (*Crónica Geral de Espanha*, 1344, Corpus do Português)

3 Relational nouns sometimes grammaticalize into adpositions (Heine 1989; DeLancey 1997).

In Medieval Portuguese, this sequence remains mostly spatial, but a semantic shift eventually takes place, with a new use-type emerging which is quite present in the 20th c. (17-8) but seems to appear quite late: in this case, *ao redor de* introduces a quantity, and takes on a meaning of approximation.

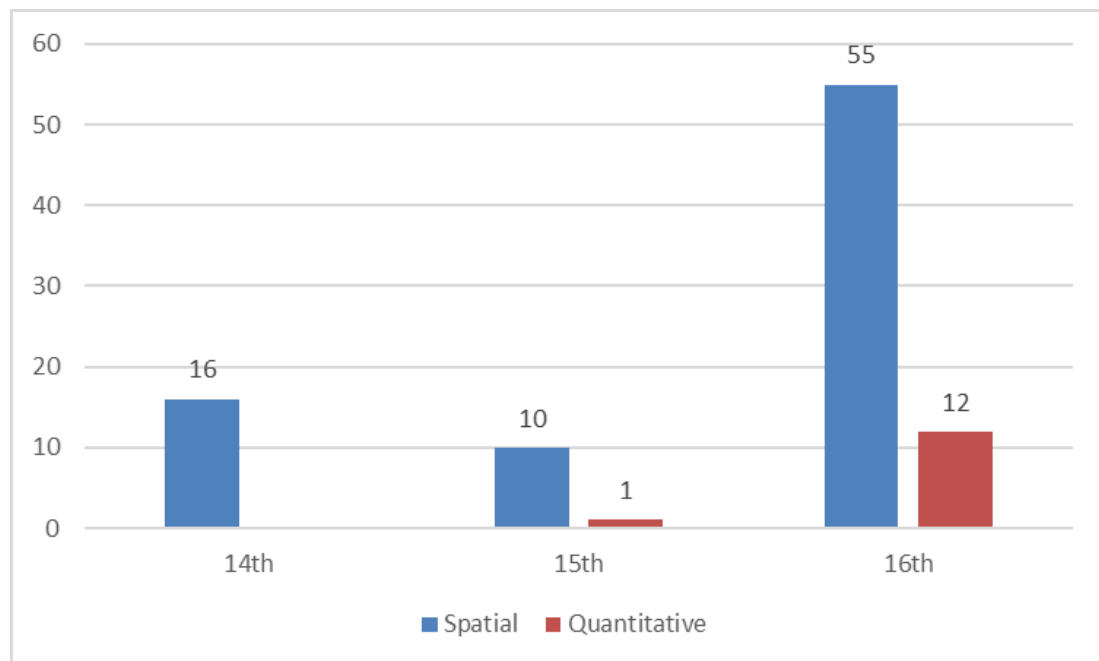
(17) ele tem o direito de durante seis meses levantar até vinte mil cruzeiros pagando um juro **ao redor de** dois por cento

‘he has the right to raise up to 20,000 Cruzeiros during six months, paying an interest rate of around two percent’ (Brazil, 20th c., Corpus do Português)

(18) O senador Jonas Pinheiro (PFL-MT) disse que a taxa foi de 16% quando a inflação estava em torno de 40% e, no ano passado, foi de 12% para uma inflação **ao redor de** 20%.

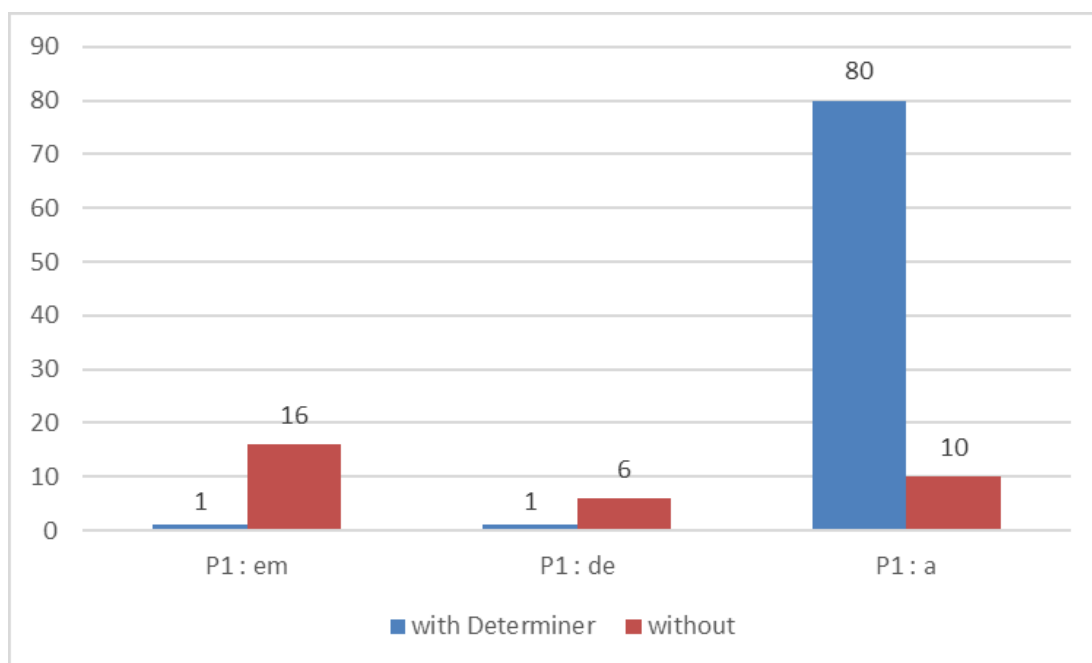
‘the senator Jonas Pinheiro (PFL-MT) said the rate was 16% when inflation was around 40% and last year at 12% with an inflation around 20%’ (*Governo antecipa normas para custeio da safra agrícola*, 16 de abril de 1997, Corpus do Português)

The emergence of quantitative uses seems gradual, as shown in Graph 4.



Graph 4: Spatial vs Quantitative uses of complex adpositions having *redor* as their lexical nucleus (Corpus do Português, 13th-15th c.)

Though the spatial use is found for various sequences, as illustrated in (19-20), the approximative use is found only for the sequence *ao redor de* (21), which is the most frequent variant (Graph 5).



Graph 5: Sequence types for complex adpositions having *redor* as their lexical nucleus (Corpus do Português, 13th-16th c.)

(19) Em este logar quero eu aver mynha sepultura. Mas, com todo esto, os Barboros, de que ja dissemos, nõ quedavã de dar guerra e correr toda a terra **em redor de** Cordova, de guisa que destroirom e estragarom Eceja e Carmona e toda a ribeira d'Alquyvir.

'In this place I wish to have my grave. But with all this the barbarians, as we have already said, did not cease to wage war and run all over the land around Cordoba, and as a result they destroyed Ecija and Carmona and all the river of Guadalquivir' (*Crónica Geral de Espanha de 1344*, 14th c., Corpus do Português)

(20) E o conde foisse entom pera sua terra com todos os outros cristããos que hy eram com elle. El rei, depois desto, mandou fazer a carcova **em redor da** cidade quando [sic] sayrom aa batalha que ouverom cõ Çolleima, assy como ja avemos dito.

'And the count then went to his land with all other christians who were there with him. After that, the king gave orders to build a ditch around the city when they left for the battle

that they fought against Suleiman, as we said earlier' (*Crónica Geral de Espanha de 1344*, 14th c., Corpus do Português)

(21) nunca deixou de aver dos nossos **ao redor de** - 200 - soldados feridos
'there were never less than about 200 of our soldiers wounded' (*Década oitava*, Diogo de Couto, 16th c., Corpus do Português)

In later centuries, another use-type arises, viz. temporal uses, as in (22).

(22) **ao redor do** meio-dia, apareceu o barbeiro da Lamosa, com um pifão, o desalmado, que até lhe caía a baba ao falar.
'Around midday appeared the barber of Lamosa, completely drunk, the wretched man, drooling as he talked' (Manuel Ribeiro, *A Planície Heróica*, 1927, Corpus do Português)

It should be noted that this shift from a spatial to a temporal use is common for spatial adpositions and adverbs (Haspelmath 1997; Heine and Kuteva 2002), including in Romance languages (Fagard 2010). The same goes for the semantic shift from spatial proximity to the more abstract notion of approximation, which is also found in other Portuguese adpositions, e.g., *cerca de* 'near, about'.

5.2 *por parte de*

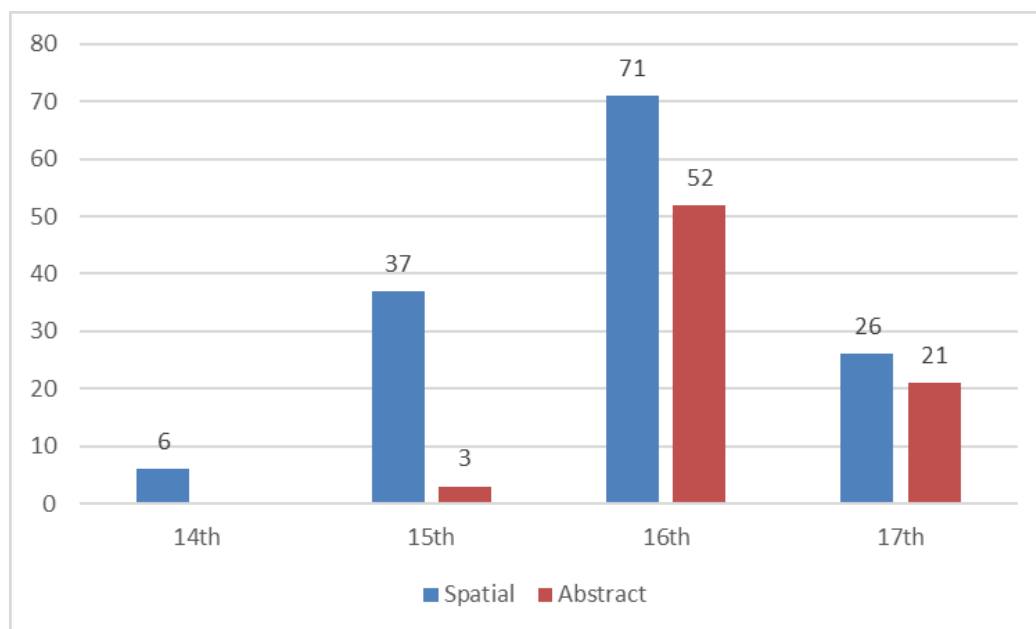
The sequence *por parte de* appears in the corpus from the 13th c. onward. In the first occurrences, the complement is always a human being, and the sequence typically introduces either the source of a command (e.g., complements of the verb *mandar* 'to order'), as in (23), or the origin of an inheritance, as in (24).

(23) E o dicto visitador mandou tomar a posse della **por parte da** hordem.
'and the above-mentioned visitor sent word to take possession thereof on account of the religious order' (*Tombos da Ordem de Cristo*, 1505-1509, Corpus do Português)

There is a gradual shift towards more abstract uses, as in (24); this shift is illustrated in Graph 6.

(24) teve sobre isso tantos contrastes e empedimento, **por parte do** induzimento dos mouros mercadores que ali resediam, peitando grossamente aos governadores da terra

‘he encountered many difficulties and hindrances, due to the instigation of the Moorish merchants residing there, fighting hard against the governors of the land’ (João de Barros, *Décadas da Asia* (*Década Terceira*, Livros I-X), 16th c., Corpus do Português)



Graph 6. Uses of *por parte de* in the corpus.

Once again, it should be noted that this shift from a spatial to a more abstract use is common for spatial adpositions and adverbs (Heine and Kuteva 2002), including in Romance languages (Fagard 2010).

5.3 *ao longo de*

The sequence *ao longo de* appears in the corpus from the 14th c. onward. In contrast to the two previous sequences, there seems to be a remarkable semantic stability over a long period, with exclusively spatial uses from the 14th to the 18th c., in our corpus. In these uses, *ao longo de* introduces a spatial complement describing the extent of a motion or of a static scene, as in (25).

(25) Jmdo do nos asy **ao longo da** costa por rrespeito [d]o vento que era pouco, com o vento da terra pera o orar e a viraram pera terra, de dia com a calma lançavamos anquoras.
‘As we went thus along the coast on account of the gentle wind, with the wind coming from the land in order to pray and turn it towards the land, during the day as all was calm we

cast the anchors.’ (*Diário da viagem de Vasco da Gama (O descobrimento das Índias)*, 1498, Corpus do Português)

However, in the 20th c., temporal uses appear, as in (26).

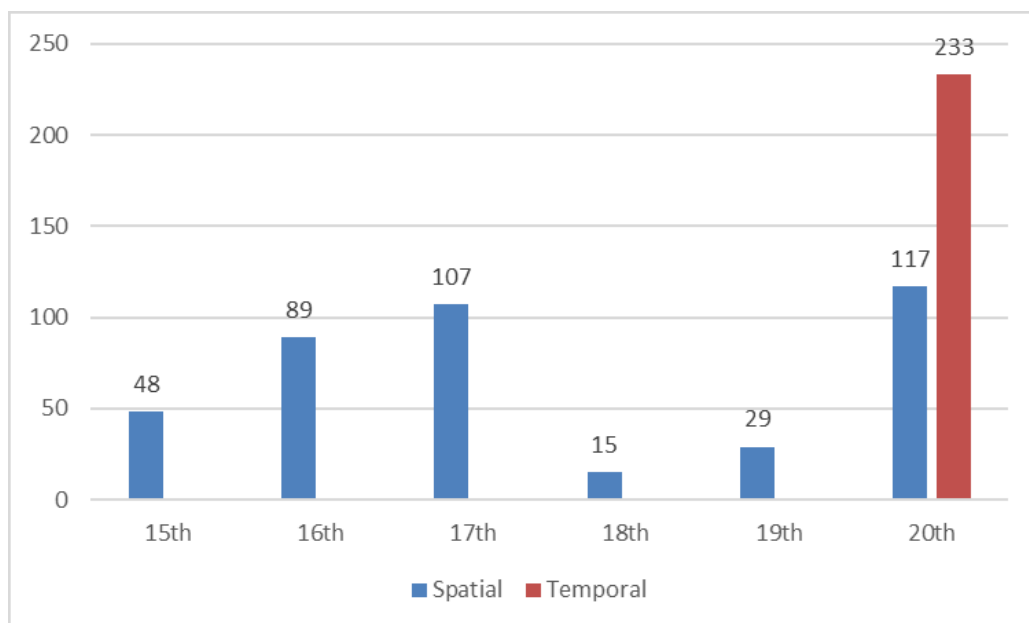
(26) A loucura é um problema que enfrentamos **ao longo de** toda a vida.
‘Madness is a problem we have to face through all our life’ (Ivan Angelo, 12 julho 1997, Corpus do Português)

The semantic shift may be illustrated by cases in which the relation can be seen as both spatial and temporal, as in (27), which constitutes another instance of bridging context.

(27) a obra Footstone, constituída por cinco montes de pedras de várias regiões, executada **ao longo de** uma caminhada de 126 milhas que o levou da costa irlandesa à linha costeira do mar do Norte.

‘the creation Footstone, made from five mounts of rocks from various regions, executed during a hike of 126 miles which led him from the coast of Ireland to the coast of the North Sea.’ (Richard Long, 20th c., Corpus do Português)

This semantic extension, which takes place very late in the diachrony of Portuguese, is quite abrupt, as illustrated in Graph 7.



Graph 7. Uses of *ao longo de* in the corpus.

As mentioned above, this shift from a spatial to a temporal use is common for spatial adpositions and adverbs, and found for instance, in Romance, for Italian *lungo* ‘along’ or French *au long de* ‘along’.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, we show that CPs appear early on in Portuguese: as early as the 13th c., with a constant renewal of the category, as new items emerge.

These new items typically follow one of two main patterns of CPs. One pattern is emblematic of Ibero-Romance; it involves an adverb followed by the preposition *a* ‘at’ or *de* ‘of’. This pattern is more frequent but less productive overall than the others.

The other pattern is more typical of CPs in Romance, and includes a lexical root linked to the rest of the sentence by two simple adpositions, generally *em* ‘in, on’, *a* ‘at’, *para* ‘to’ or *por* ‘by, through’ and *de* ‘of’.

Though the possibility of influence via language contact is not excluded, and can even be shown to have operated in the case of complex prepositions, our results show that these patterns are highly productive throughout the diachrony of Portuguese, which suggests that language-internal phenomena are at play.

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Light Verb Constructions in Italian: A Corpus-based Analysis of 15th-17th-century Texts

Abstract

This paper aims at analysing the structural and functional features of Light Verb Constructions in Italian. In particular, the investigation is devoted to the analysis of texts written between 1376 and 1691, extracted from the MIDIA corpus.

Light Verb Constructions are an extensive subgroup of complex lexemes in Romance, including both Contemporary and Old Italian. From the structural point of view, Light Verb Constructions are made up of a Light Verb, i.e., a predicate lacking full referentiality, and a noun carrying the predicative meaning of the construction. Thus, in these sequences, the verb has a light semantic characterization, restricted to the functional features of verbal class (such as Tense Aspect Modality, and person traits), while the noun designates the action or the event. In the following, some instances of Italian Light Verb Constructions are shown (i.e., *dare carico* and *dare forma* in A, and *avere bisogno* in B):

(A)

diede carico ad uomini eccellenti di darle forma
(he) ordered to men excellent to shape her

“he ordered (*lit.* gave charge) to excellent men to shape (*lit.* give_her shape) her” (1589, ESP₃_BOT_RAGI00)

(B)

Tutti abbian bisogno di poeti
All (they) needed of poets

“(they) all needed (*lit.* had need) poets” (mind-16th century, ESP₃_AMM_DEDA00)

This paper investigates a set of Light Verb Constructions in Italian texts of the 15th-17th centuries, which are extracted through the text mining tools included in the MIDIA corpus. As far as the structural analysis is concerned, Light Verb Constructions are classified according

to (a) the kind of Light Verb used, (b) nouns they occur with, and (c) the selected argument structures. As for the functional analysis, the semantic shift beyond constructional meanings characterizing Light Verb Constructions is reconstructed.

1. *Introduction*

A growing number of contributions devoted to the study of Light Verbs have shown the importance of this phenomenon both in terms of its crosslinguistic spread and its pervasiveness within Romance languages.¹

Light Verb Constructions (henceforth LVCs) are generally defined as complex verbal configurations composed of a verb and a nominal phrase² (or a prepositional syntagma, cf. Alonso Ramos 2004; Pompei 2017), in which the verbal element denotes grammatical functions, while the predicative content is generally conveyed by the noun (G. Gross 1996; De Miguel 2006; Sanromán Vilas 2014). However, several studies have shown the existence of a coselection relationship between the verbal and nominal elements, which can be motivated by the presence of a semantic coherence between the Light Verb and the noun (Bosque 2001; De Miguel 2008; Samvelian, Danlos and Sagot 2011; Pompei and Piunno 2023).

The syntagmatic link between Light Verbs and nouns can be traced back to the aspectual values or other semantic features of the noun (Pompei and Piunno 2023). Two different methods of analysis of LVCs have been identified in the literature (Marini 2013). (a) On the one hand, some approaches study the Light Verbs first, and then their relations with reference nouns in the different LVCs (among others, M. Gross 1982; 1986). (b) On the other

1 For the Italian, among others Elia, D'Agostino, and Martinelli 1985; La Fauci 1997; La Fauci and Mirto 2003, Cicalese 1999; Cantarini 2004; Ježek 2004; 2011; Mastrofini 2004; 2013; Pompei and Piunno 2023. For Spanish, Alonso Ramos 1991; 2004; Mendivil Giró 1999; Bosque 2001; 2004; Bustos Plaza 2005; De Miguel 2007; 2008; Martínez Blasco 2008; Sanromán Vilas 2009; 2011ab; 2014; Moncó Taracena 2011; Sidoti 2014. For French, M. Gross 1981; 1982; 1986; 1988; 1990; Vivès 1983; 1984; 1988; Giry-Schneider 1987; G. Gross 1989; 1993; 1996; 2004. For a general overview of Light Verbs see, among others, Wierzbicka 1982; Butt 2010; Gross and De Pontonx 2004.

2 For further discussion on predicative properties of nouns we refer to Simone 2003; 2008; Simone and Pompei 2007.

hand, other approaches classify the reference nouns of LVCs according to different semantic classes first (G. Gross 2012) and then they study the relations between Light Verbs and referential nouns.³ Scholars studying LVCs mostly focus on single languages (cf. Pompei, Mereu and Piunno 2023), having mainly a synchronic perspective, since they focus on contemporary varieties of the investigated languages.

This paper investigates LVCs in Italian 15th-17th-century texts, using the first approach. Firstly, Light Verbs are manually selected. Secondly, data are extracted through corpus analysis focusing on the period under investigation. Lastly, sequences are analysed to study functional and formal properties of LVCs.

2. Data

This paper investigates a set of LVCs in Italian texts belonging to the 15th-17th centuries extracted through the text mining tools included in MIDIA corpus.⁴ In particular, the Light Verbs selected were *fare* ‘to do / make’, *avere* ‘to have’, *prendere* ‘to take’ and *dare* ‘to give’. To extract a significant set of LVCs, the finite forms of the verbs above preceding bare nouns (i.e., without article and/or modifiers) were collected using functions included in the corpus web interface. This data extraction limits the types of the constructions considered, excluding both LVCs embedding nouns with articles or adjectives (e.g., *fare la pelle* ‘to kill’, lit. to make the skin),⁵ and LVCs characterized by other elements occurring between verbs and nouns (e.g., *fare sinceramente*

3 Among the different nominal semantic classes analysed in the literature we can mention: (a) eventual nouns (Sanromán Vilas 2009; Sidoti 2014; Moncó Taracena 2011; Pompei and Piunno 2023), (b) psychological state nouns (Sidoti 2014; Moncó Taracena 2011), (c) nouns denoting a sound (Moncó Taracena 2011; Pompei 2023), (d) emotional cause nouns (Sanromán Vilas 2011, 260), (e) communication nouns (Sanromán Vilas 2014) and (f) body part nouns (Ganfi and Piunno 2019).

4 MIDIA (Morphology of Italian in DIAcrony) corpus (D’Achille and Grossman 2017) is a corpus of Italian written texts, fully annotated through lemmatization tagging and part of speech tagging for each occurrence. The corpus, which spans a chronological period from the early 13th to the first half of the 20th century, is divided into five time periods and seven text types and includes about 7.8 million occurrences subdivided in 800 texts.

5 It is worth noticing that articles and modifiers may sometimes force the meaning of a noun to the construction (Ježek 2004).

pena ‘to be fully pitiful’, lit. to do honestly pity). Nevertheless, data filtering reveals to be useful for the current study, since it qualitatively and quantitatively refines the number of sequences investigated, highlighting those units that can be interpreted as LVCs.⁶ Furthermore, data selection is restricted to texts written between the 15th and 17th centuries. This data extraction process allows us to collect these sequences:

LVCs	No. of sequences
<i>fare</i> ‘to do / make’	2,096
<i>avere</i> ‘to have’	2,224
<i>prendere</i> ‘to take’	113
<i>dare</i> ‘to give’	997

Table I. Number of LVCs.

Relevant data are manually chosen for the corpus-based analysis described in the following paragraphs.

3. *Analysis*

This section is devoted to the structural and functional analysis of LVCs in 15th-17th-century texts. The inquiry of our textual sample will be driven distinguishing constructions according to:

- (a) Light Verbs: examples of the verbs *fare* ‘to do / make’, *avere* ‘to have’, *prendere* ‘to take’ and *dare* ‘to give’ are considered,
- (b) Nouns: the functional and constructional values of noun are considered,
- (c) Argument structures: the type and number of LVC’s arguments are considered.

The relationship with semantically analogous synthetic verbs is also discussed to highlight the significance of LVCs among the data investigated. As for the functional analysis, the semantic shift beyond constructional meanings

⁶ The data extraction excludes LVCs characterized by other syntactic schemata, such as LVCs with V + SP structure. For further information about these constructions, we refer to Pompei 2017.

characterizing LVCs is reconstructed.⁷ The analysis highlights the semantic features of constructions, distinguishing them according to a) the presence / absence of compositional meaning, b) the eventual metaphorical / metonymical reinterpretation, and c) the constructional values of the entire structure. Argument structure analysis accounts for a) the semantic features of the participants engaged in the action designated by the LVCs, investigating the relation between semantic roles of arguments and their syntactic realization and b) the comparison between semantic properties of internal and external participants of the LVCs.

3.1. Fare LVCs

The Light Verb *fare* is often used in LVCs in the sample of data investigated here, since 2,096 sequences containing *fare* occur in MIDIA corpus.

As it has been noticed in literature, in LVCs the nouns are constructional elements providing most of the predicative value of the sequence. Thus, the analysis of LVCs with *fare* confirms that nouns bear the semantic specificity of the sequences. As far as semantics is concerned, the corpus analysis highlights a frequent occurrence of abstract nouns. In the following example the Light Verb *fare* selects the abstract noun *paura*, referring to the feeling of fear:

- (1) *Mi fa paura la sua spada sfolgorante.* (ESP₃_ARE_ARTE₀₀)
'I fear (lit. to me it makes fear) his blazing blade'

The noun *paura* codifies a psychological state and the LVC is used to refer to the entity that provokes the fear (which is felt by the subject). It is worth noting that even if the Italian synthetic verb *temere* codifies the same meaning of feeling fear, the analytic construction with the Light Verb *fare* can be used in its place. It should be highlighted that the meaning of the LVC is also causative.⁸

7 During the analysis, we use the terms (a) 'source meaning' or 'nuclear meaning' to refer to literal values of the single elements out of construction, and (b) 'target meaning' or 'constructional meaning' to designate the values of the entire combinatorial sequence.

8 As suggested by one of the two anonymous reviewers, in this case the LVC *far paura* may differ from analytic verb *temere*, since it presents causative value (cf. Jezek 2004 and Mastrofini 2005).

A similar preference for the analytic forms over the synthetic ones can be viewed in LVCs selecting event nouns. For instance, in the following sentence the writer selects the LVC *far resistenza* to describe the action of resisting:

- (2) *il mal habito del peccare à cui non si vuol far resistenza* (ESP3_ANT_EDUC00)
'the bad habit of sinning to which people do not want to resist'
(lit. to do resistance)'

In this case the construction embeds the deverbal noun *resistenza* indicating the action of resisting. Nevertheless, the existence of the synthetic verb *resistere* does not prevent the use of the semantically equivalent analytic construction *fare resistenza*.

An analogous preference for the analytic structure can be viewed in the next example, documenting the LVC *fare naufragio*:

- (3) *ma si perde e fa naufragio in porto.* (ESP3_BOT_RAG100)
'but he gets lost and sinks (lit. does shipwreck) in harbor'

In this case as well the event noun *naufragio* has a verbal counterpart, i.e., *naufragare*, which shares the same meaning of the LVC. Thus, event nouns are commonly used in combination with *fare* to denote a dynamic event or an action. Therefore, the constructional analysis of *fare* LVCs confirms that when *fare* is used in the constructions its meaning appears to be quite general, while nouns codify referential traits meant by the constructions. It is worth noting that the analysis of the 15th-17th-century texts has highlighted a conspicuous use of analytical constructions even if the same meaning can be expressed by synthetic verbs. This feature deserves further analysis from a quantitative perspective, since it is not the purpose of this paper.

For the argument structure analysis, the distinction between *internal* and *external* arguments (i.e., between arguments of the Light Verbs and arguments of entire construction, cf. Ganfi and Piunno 2019) reveals to be relevant. LVCs involve transitive verbs as Light Verbs syntactically heading other constituents, and predicative nouns occupying object positions. Thus, the internal argument structure of Light Verbs is saturated by predicative nouns. However, there are many cases in which two or three participants, beyond internal ones, are required. In such cases, the external argument can occur within the construction, introduced by the Italian preposition *a*.

In the following example, the LVC requires two external participants i.e., the one offending and the other being offended. The first argument *io* is coded as the subject of the LVC and the second one *la grandezza vostra* is marked by the preposition *a*:

(4) *io faccio ingiuria a la grandezza vostra col partir mio* (PER₃_ARE_LETT₀₀)
'I offend (lit. I do an offense to) your greatness with my leaving'

Therefore, in (4) the argument structure of the LVC entails the presence of an agent, i.e., the offending participant, and a patient, i.e., the offended participant. Since the object position is saturated by the reference noun *ingiuria*, the patient is realized in the external argument structure as an indirect object (*a la grandezza vostra*).

3.2. *Avere* LVCs

In the MIDIA corpus *avere* LVCs appear to be the most frequent constructions among the ones investigated, since 2,224 tokens of these sequences were collected.

As viewed for *fare* LVCs, also the Light Verb *avere* can select abstract nouns to create predicative sequences. This is the case of the following example:

(5) *ho speranza che sarà gradita la volontà* (ESP₃_ACC_DISS₀₀)
'I hope (lit. I have hope) that the desire will be appreciated'

Also for *avere* LVCs, the existence of synthetic verbs does not inhibit the presence of analytic constructions, since in the Italian lexicon the verb *sperare* 'to hope' shares the same meaning of *avere speranza*.

The following sentence shows another case of selection of abstract nouns in *avere* LVCs:

(6) *ella ha riguardo alla felicità humana, considerata da i filosofi*, (ESP₃_ANT_EDUC₀₀)
'she takes care (lit. has care) of human happiness, considered by philosophers'

The meaning of the noun *riguardo* refers to the abstract content of care. By means of the Light Verb *avere* the writer can build verbal sequences provided

by all predicative features of the embedded noun. It is worth noting that similar values can be expressed by different LVCs selecting synonymous nouns, as can be seen comparing the previous example to the following one:

- (7) *Abbi cura a mantenere il fuoco* (TEA₃_LAS_GELO₀₀)
'take care (lit. have care) of keeping the fire (lit.)'

Despite a noun variation in LVCs, the LVCs' meaning does not vary because of the semantic similarities of the nouns involved (i.e., *riguardo* and *cura*).

As pointed out in the case of *fare* LVC, the study of 15th-17th century texts shows that the meaning expressed by *avere* Light Verb is quite general. Corpus-based analysis reveals that *avere* Light Verb often occurs with nouns designating psychological states, experienced by subjects of the LVC.

Avere LVCs can be used in combination with event nouns indicating phases of action.⁹ In the following sentence, we report an instance of this function:

- (8) *questo avvenimento non poteva aver principio* (PER₃_GIR_LETT₀₀)
'this event cannot happen (lit. have beginning)'

It is worth noticing that also for this value several synthetic verbs are available in Italian (e.g., *avvenire* 'to happen' or *verificarsi* 'to occur'). Nevertheless, the use of analytic LCVs appears to be quite common, as shown by the instances of complex predicates analyzed in this paper.¹⁰

As far as the semantic analysis is concerned, constructional elements are often characterized by a metaphorical reading. Thus, in *avere* LVCs metaphorical shifts apply to both verb and noun meanings, since (a) *avere* Light Verb does not show its concrete content of possession but refers to the general relation among its subject and the referential value of nouns, and (b) nouns denote abstract values, needing to be specified by the overall construction in which they occur. Constructional meaning always arises through the combination of the meaning of both syntagmatic elements of the LCV; this value is often modulated by the metaphorical reinterpretation.

9 These lexical entities are predicates denoting the fact an event is taking place (cfr. Levin and Rappaport 1995, 282).

10 In this paper quantitative data concerning the use of analytic or synthetic construction are not considered. Nevertheless, further studies using quantitative evidence can shade new light on the preferred type of construction (simple verb or LVC).

Indeed, the significance of metaphorical interpretation in *avere* LCVs is particularly evident when constructions embedding concrete nouns are considered, as can be seen in the next sentence:

- (9) *una grande sceleratezza può aver luogo nelle tragiche azioni* (ESP₃_CAR_DANT₀₀)
'A big devilry can happen (lit. have place) during tragic actions'

In this example the LVC denotes the fact that an event (i.e., the performing of devilry) is happening. Even if the core meaning of the embedded noun *luogo* has a concrete reference (i.e., a place in the spatial domain), the constructional value of the entire sequence does not retain any trait of designation of concrete referents, since the LVC describes the happening of an event. The noun is reinterpreted through a metaphorical process, obscuring the original spatial meaning, and leading to the abstract value of happening.

Nevertheless, the semantic analysis of *avere* LVC reveals that there may also be sequences characterized by a compositional reading, as shown by the following sentence:

- (10) *Ognuno habbia notitia delle vie dritte* (GIU₃_GRID_MIL₀₀)
'Everyone knew (lit. had news) the straight roads'

The meaning of the complex expression *habbia notitia*, denoting the action of knowing, can be gathered by the sum of the meanings of its components, since the semantics of knowing can be inferred by the act of having information. Thus, also in (10) the Light Verb has a compositional reading, since *avere* shows a value similar to receiving. Similar compositional readings can be viewed in the next sentence:

- (11) *abbiano potestà loro di eleggere li altri* (GIU₃_STAT_PAL₀₀)
'they can (lit. had power) choose the others'

Avere potestà LVC shows a meaning quite close to the value of the modal Italian verb *potere* (i.e., to can). This value can be derived by the act of having the power, which represents the content of all the constructional elements.

The argument structure analysis of *avere* LVCs shows that when the internal argument structure is saturated, extra arguments can be added using prepositional phrases, as in the following sentence:

- (12) *tutti abbian bisogno dei poeti* (ESP3_AMM_DEDA00)
'we all needed (lit. had need) poets'

Avere is a transitive verb, hence its argument structure is saturated by the object (in this case, the referential noun *bisogno*). Since another argument (the element needed) is required according to the general meaning of the construction (i.e., the act of needing), this argument is introduced through the prepositional phrase *dei poeti*. Therefore, the external argument structure requires a further argument to saturate the participants designated by the meaning of the constructional predicate.

It is worth noticing that the corpus analysis shows several instances of *avere* LVCs characterized by other argument patterns. Even if the argument structure of *avere* is saturated by a noun phrase, a complement sentence can occur within the verbal phrase, as shown in the following example:

- (13) *Egli ha sospetto il suo Debitore, che non se ne fugga* (GIU3_MERC_BOL00)
'He suspects (lit. has suspicion) his borrower could run away'

The internal argument structure of *avere* LVC appears to be saturated by the noun *sospetto*. Nevertheless, the external argument structure of the LVC can take another complement, holding the clause *non se ne fugga*, introduced by the complementizer *che*.

It is worth noticing that LCVs share the inter-clausal properties of analytic verbs which have analogous meanings. As shown by (13), the LVC *avere sospetto* can head an objective clause and the same subordinate clause could be embedded in the corresponding analytic verb *sospettare*.

3.3. Prendere LVCs

Among the constructions that have been considered, *prendere* LVC is the least common, since only 113 sequences are attested in the MIDIA corpus. Nevertheless, significant constructional features characterize this structure.

As far as the referential noun analysis is concerned, *prendere* LVCs can embed nouns denoting a concrete referent. This is the case of the following example:

- (14) *quelli che prendono moglie* (ESP3_ANT_EDUC00)
'those who get married (lit. take wife)'

The noun embedded in the construction denotes a human being (a wife), thus has a concrete reference which is physically identifiable in the real world. Furthermore, *prendere moglie* LVC shows a compositional reading, since the complex value of the sequence (i.e., getting married) can be derived from the sum of the meanings of the constitutive elements. A variation in meaning concerns a more general meaning established in the constructional value, since LVC denotes an unspecific act of getting married without any reference to a specific or individual wife. The equivalent meaning can be coded through the same structure embedding the noun *donna* ‘woman’, instead of *moglie* (i.e., *prendere donna*). An analogous situation can be identified in the following sentence:

- (15) *la sua donna abbia preso marito* (POE₃_TAS_RIME₀₀)
 ‘His woman got married (lit. had taken husband)’

The example shares the same compositional features of the previous sentence, except for the referential noun *marito*, which identifies a male human being engaged in the action of getting married. As highlighted for other LVCs in the previous paragraphs, the use of these constructions in our corpus coexists with the synthetic verb *sposarsi* ‘to get married’, sharing the same meaning and argument structure of analytic structures.

The corpus analysis reveals that *prendere* LVCs often also embed abstract nouns. The following example shows a construction selecting an abstract noun of feeling:

- (16) *Mario, sentendo tal cosa, ne prese piacere* (LET₃_FOR_GIOR₀₀)
 ‘Mario, hearing that, was gratified (lit. took pleasure)’

Prendere piacere denotes a psychological state experienced by the subject of the verb, i.e., Mario. Thus, in this construction the meaning of the verb does not maintain any trait of its concrete original value, but a metaphorical shift occurs: the concrete action of taking is reinterpreted as the abstract value of having a feeling. This semantic shift is similar to the reinterpretation process analyzed in *fare* LVCs (cf. § 3.1). The MIDIA corpus contains other analogous LVCs showing an opposite meaning and selecting an antonymic referential noun. A remarking example of these constructions is the following sentence:

- (17) *E di cotale errore ho preso piacere e dispiacere.* (PER₃_ARE_LETT₀₀)
'And since that mistake I was gratified and regretful (lit. has taken pleasure and displeasure)'

In example (17) two opposite values are coded by the same unit by means of a unique Light Verb, i.e., *prendere*, and two coordinated referential nouns (*piacere e dispiacere*). Since these nouns exhibit opposite meanings, the construction designates two opposite feelings, even if a single verb is explicitly expressed. This is allowed by the fact that both nouns require *prendere* as Light Verb. As far as the syntagmatic properties of LVCs are concerned, the example shows that these constructions can present a certain degree of syntagmatic variability. In literature (Ježek 2005; Simone 2007; 2017) combinatorial fixedness of multi-word elements has been put into relation with preclusion to the insertion and coordination of other syntactic elements within the structure. Therefore, the fact that LVCs admit syntagmatic insertion and coordination demonstrates the absence of a fully fixed combinatorial structure for these complex lexemes.

It is worth noticing that some examples of *prendere* LVCs show more complex constructional patterns. This is the case of the next sentence:

- (18) *prendono mezzi violenti per l'altrui ruina* (ESP₃_ACC_DISS₀₀)
'they chose to behave aggressively (lit. take violent instruments) to ruin others'

The LVC *prendere mezzi violenti* has a constructional pattern involving these constituents: verb-noun-adjective, instead of the verb-noun constructional pattern realized by the most common LVCs. In the sequence above, as observed in other LVCs, Light Verbs give grammatical traits, nouns provide referential information, and adjectives modify the nouns. The corpus analysis reveals other *prendere* LVCs, showing different constructional patterns, as the next sentence exemplifies:

- (19) *presi pratica e amicizia istrettissima con uno gentil giovanetto* (PER₃_CEL_VITA₀₀)
'I became a very close friend (lit. I took proximity and very close friendship) with a kind young boy'

The sequence *prendere pratica e amicizia istrettissima* shows a more articulated constructional schema since it realizes the verb-noun-conjunction-noun-adjective pattern. In this case, the meaning of the coordinated nouns is similar, be-

cause friendship entails moral or emotional proximity. Thus, the second noun does not add any new information to the sentence meaning but emphasizes the constructional value of becoming friends. Similarly, the adjective *istrettissima* reinforces the meaning of LVC.

Another interesting example concerns the sequence *prendersi briga*. Thus, as far as the lexical evolution of the embedded noun is concerned, the analysis reveals lexemes that in Contemporary Italian tend to occur only in combination with the verb *prendere*. This phenomenon is shown by the next sentence:

- (20) *voler prendersi briga di trovare il signor Garbeza* (PER₃_MAR_LETT₀₂)
 ‘to want to take on the task (lit. take trouble) of finding Mr. Garbeza’

The LVC *prendersi (la) briga* is still present in contemporary Italian, maintaining the value shown in 15th-17th-century texts, even if the noun *briga* does not appear out of this LVC. In fact, an analysis of itTenTen20, a contemporary Italian reference corpus,¹¹ reveals only an occurrence of the noun *briga* out of LVCs.

As far as the argument structure is concerned, *prendere* LVCs generally follow the regular syntactic pattern of a verb phrase in which the Light Verb *prendere* takes as object the reference noun. Other arguments required by the external argument structure can be coded using prepositional phrases, as shown in the next sentence:

- (21) *prendi pietà de le mie gravi pene*, (POE₃_GUI_RIME₀₀)
 ‘commiserate (lit. take pity) my great pains’

In this case, the LVC denotes the act of commiserating and, according to this meaning, another argument is required, i.e., who or what is commiserated. Since the argument cannot be codified as a direct object (this position is occupied by the reference noun *pietà*), it is introduced by the prepositional phrase *de le mie gravi pene*.

The corpus analysis reveals that *prendere* LVCs can embed subordinate clauses. In these cases, since the internal argument structure is saturated by the referential object, prepositions can be used as complementizers to in-

11 An all-purpose Italian corpus sizing 14,514,566,714 tokens and covering the largest possible variety of genres, topics, text types and web sources. Recommended for both general use as well as specialized language. The corpus is investigated through Sketch Engine platform.

introduce subordinated infinitive clauses. An example of this pattern can be viewed in (22):

- (22) *prendo ardimento di inviarle alcuni pochi frutti* (PER₃_MAR_LETT₀₂)
'I dare (lit. take daring) to send you few fruits'

The external argument structure of *prendere ardimento* LVC, denoting the action of daring, requires an extra argument, i.e., what is dared, which – according to the semantics of the LVC – is usually an action or an event.

Several examples show more complex structures characterized by multiple arguments taking part to the event coded by the LVC. This is the case of the following sentence:

- (23) *il padre [...] ha preso consiglio meco sopra tal fatto.* (TEA₃_ARE_IPOC₀₀)
'the father has consulted me (lit. has taken suggestion) about this affair'

The meaning of *prendere consiglio* refers to the event of consulting, which involves several actors participating in verbal action. Thus, in the external argument structure three arguments may be realized: (a) the consulter, usually codified as a subject; (b) the consulted, usually coded as an object; and (c) the matter of the consultation, usually coded by a prepositional phrase. Analyzing the case of *prendere consiglio*, since in the internal argument structure the object position is saturated by the reference noun, the consulted participant (b) is codified as a comitative and is introduced by the prepositional phrases *meco* 'with me'. The consulter and the matter of consultation are regularly codified as subject and as prepositional phrase headed by *sopra* 'about', respectively.

3.4. Dare LVCs

Dare LVCs are the last constructions analysed in this paper. The corpus investigation reveals 997 sequences that employ *dare* as a Light Verb. Similarly, to the constructions analysed so far, *dare* LVCs can embed concrete nouns showing metaphorical reinterpretation. Example (24) shows this phenomenon:

- (24) *volge le infiammate rote per dar luogo alla notte* (PER₃_MUZ_LETT₀₀)
'he turns around the flaming wheels to realize (lit. give place) the night'

The LVC *dare luogo* embeds a reference noun, whose core meaning designates a place in the spatial domain. Nevertheless, its meaning in the sequence does not entail any reference to spatial entities, because it denotes the action of producing some entities.

The corpus analysis reveals that *dare* LVCs can also embed event nouns, as shown in the sentence below:

- (25) *ottiene più trionfi che non dà assalti* (PER₃_MAR_LETT₀₁)
'he obtains more victories than he assaults (lit. gives assaults)'

In these cases, the meaning of the entire LVC corresponds to the event designated by the embedded noun *assalti*. It is worth noticing that the Italian synthetic verb *assaltare* 'to assault' can denote the same values expressed by the analytic construction and that, from a morphological point of view, the event noun *assalti* is overtly linked to the synthetic verb, since they share the same lexical root *assalt-*. In these constructions the Light Verb shows a vague meaning, indicating the predicative traits of the construction without adding other lexical information. There are other cases in which *dare* LVCs combine with event nouns carrying the verbal traits of constructions, as shown by the next sentence:

- (26) *se Dio gli darà vita* (PER₃_CEL_VITA₀₀)
'if God will give birth (lit. give life)'

In the example above, the action of giving birth is denoted metaphorically through the analytic sequence *dare vita*. In this construction the generation of a human being is conceptualized as a transfer of possession of life (i.e., the thing given) that moves from a participant (i.e., the giver) to another (i.e., the receiver).

The corpus analysis reveals that *dare* LVCs can embed nouns denoting psychological feeling, as the next example shows:

- (27) *so che vi ha dato fastidio* (PER₃_ARE_LETT₀₀)
'I know that it bothered you (lit. gave you bother)'

In the sentence above, the LVC, which indicates the action of bothering, embeds the noun *fastidio* referring to the psychological state or sensation of feeling annoyance. Also, in this example the constructional meaning is characterized by metaphorical reinterpretation: the evoking of an emotional state is

represented as an action of giving, that is, the passage of the psychological state from the giver, i.e., the participant evoking the feeling, to the receiver, i.e., the participant feeling the psychological state. Indeed, the target meaning of the entire construction is more abstract than the original values of giving.¹² It is worth noticing that, even if these instances of *dare* LVC are characterized by metaphorical reinterpretation, which often leads to more abstract value, the meaning of this construction is still quite compositional.

Nevertheless, data analysis shows several instances of *dare* LVCs without a compositional value, as the following passage exemplifies:

- (28) *parlare in quel tenore per dar animo a cardinali suoi* (LET₃_SAR_ISTO₀₀)
'to speak that way to comfort (lit. to give soul) his cardinals'

The LVC *dare animo* designates the action of comforting or consoling. Nevertheless, no semantic traits of the constructional meaning can be found in the nuclear values of its components out of the construction, since neither *dare* nor the noun *animo* refer to the action of comforting. Thus, in this case the metaphorical shift does not apply only to the Light Verb *dare*, as seen in example (27), but it also applies to the meaning of the embedded noun. The extension of metaphorical reinterpretation to nouns leads to the idiosyncratic reading of the whole construction. Similar cases of fully metaphorical LVCs can be found in constructions embedding body part nouns:¹³

- (29) *cominci [...] a dar orecchio ed assenso alla vera e buona filosofia* (SCI₃_GAL_LETT₀₀)
'he began to listen and approve (lit. to give ear and approval) real and good philosophy'

The LVC *dare orecchio* refers to the activity of listening. Even if a paradigmatic relationship between the target meaning of listening and the body part noun *orecchio* can be easily identified (the ear is the organ devoted to acoustic perception), the source meaning does not overtly refer to the listening activity. Thus, in this case the semantic reinterpretation leading to the constructional values regards both metaphorical and metonymical shifts. The metaphorical

12 A general overview on theoretical and methodological issues of metaphorical mapping can be seen in Lakoff and Johnson 1980.

13 For an overall account of LVCs embedding body part nouns in Old Italian we refer to Ganfi and Piunno 2019.

shift can be identified in the reinterpretation of concrete values, i.e., the action of giving as a change of possession, into more abstract ones, that is, an unspecific activity designated by *dare*. The metonymical shift concerns the coding of the target meaning, i.e., the activity of listening, paradigmatically linked to the source value, that is, the ears. From a structural point of view, it is worth noticing that the LVC embeds two coordinated reference nouns, *orecchio e assenso*, characterized by different semantic properties. In fact, *orecchio* refers to a concrete meaning, while *assenso* denotes a process. Nevertheless, the constructional values refer to two different processes, since in the case of *orecchio* the above analyzed reinterpretation has taken place.

Regarding the argument structure, the analysis of *dare* LVCs differs from the other ones studied in this paper, since *dare* as Light Verb presents a ditransitive argument structure, involving a giver, coded as subject, a given entity, coded as object, and the beneficiary, coded as indirect object, i.e., a prepositional phrase headed by *a*. Thus, in the case in which two arguments are engaged in the external argument structure, the second participant can be coded as the beneficiary, as shown in the next example:

- (30) *cominciò a dare opera alla musica* (PER₃_CEL_VITA₀₀)
 ‘he began practicing (lit. giving work) music’

The LVC *dare opera* refers to the action of practicing and entails (a) a first argument identifying the practicing participant, coded as subject, and (b) a second one coding the practiced thing, coded as indirect object. Of course, the second argument of the external argument structure *musica* cannot be coded as object since the noun *opera* fills the object syntactic position of the internal argument structure.

When further participants are engaged in situations characterized by *dare* LVCs, they are introduced by other prepositional phrases, as the following sentence shows:

- (31) *hanno dato cognizione di loro al mondo* (PER₃_CEL_VITA₀₀)
 ‘they popularized (lit. gave awareness) them to the world’

The action of popularizing, designated by *dare cognizione* LVC, involves three participants that have to be coded in the external argument structure: (a) the agent, that is, the popularizer, realized as the subject, (b) the patient, i.e., the

person/people who is/are popularized, introduced through a prepositional phrase headed by *di*, and (c) the experiencer of the popularizing, i.e., the person/people who know(s) the popularized participant, designated as indirect object. As highlighted above, the direct object position is saturated by the reference noun and hence cannot code participants involved in the external argument structure. It is worth noticing that in this sentence the LVC shows a causative function,¹⁴ since it introduces a further participant to the event of (acquiring) awareness, designated by the predicative noun. A comparison among *avere* and *dare* LVCs embedding the same reference noun *cognizione* reveals this causative function of *dare* Light Verb:

- (32) *senza aver cognizione della lingua greca e latina* (LET₃_SPE_DLIN₀₀)
'without knowing (lit. having awareness) Greek and Latin languages'

While in the example above *avere cognizione* LVC designates an action of knowing, the corresponding *dare cognizione* LVC in (31) maintains the same referential value, adding a participant who popularizes knowledge to the argument structure of the predicate.

It is worth noting that in LCVs' Italian system *dare* and *avere* can be used to represent the same predicative content according to different diathetic values. The following examples, in which the same reference noun *fede* combines with the two Light Verbs *avere* and *dare*, show similar situations represented in different diathetic perspectives:

- (33) *ciascune lettere di cambio s'intendano havere fede solamente un'anno* (GIU₃_MERC_BOL₀₀)
'all bills of exchange are considered to be valid (lit. having trust) only one year'

- (34) *si debba dar fede alli Libri* (GIU₃_BAN_GHET₀₀)
'they should trust (lit. give trust) to the books'

In (33) the LVC *avere fede* means that the subject can be considered trustworthy, while in (34) the LVC *dare fede* indicates the fact that the subject trusts another participant (i.e., *li Libri*). Thus, from a semantic perspective, the construction in (33) is similar to a passive equivalent of the sequence in (34).

14 We refer to Simone and Cerbasi 2001 for theoretical and functional remarks on causativity in Italian.

4. *Final Remarks*

Our inquiry of 1400s-1660s Italian texts has shown a significant use of *fare*, *avere*, *prendere*, and *dare* LVCs in the investigated data. It must be stressed that LVCs are often used, even if semantically equivalent synthetic verbs are attested in the Italian lexicon. LVCs' frequency may be linked to the stylistic choice of writers willing to increase the lexical and syntagmatic variability of texts. Even if LVCs are often viewed as features of contemporary Italian bureaucratic texts (Cortellazzo and Pellegrino 2003), the textual analysis conducted in this article on 15th-17th-century texts reveals that they are widespread even across different textual genres. Further quantitative analysis could highlight possible differences in the use of LVCs among several genres. This could show which genres are characterized by the prevalence of LVCs over synthetic verbs. Furthermore, a diachronic inquiry extended to other periods could highlight differences in preference of LVCs over synthetic verb forms among other historical phases.

As far as semantic analysis is concerned, LVCs can show both metaphorical and compositional readings. Thus, on the one hand, some LVCs embed concrete nouns that do not carry any traits of their original referential value, since they are characterized by a metaphorical shift, e.g., *avere luogo*. On the other hand, other LVCs show a compositional reading, since constructional meaning can be derived by the sum of its components, e.g., *avere potestà*. When a metaphorical shift applies to both the Light Verbs and the embedded nouns, the whole construction tends to lack compositional meaning, showing an idiosyncratic value. Different LVCs can present similar meanings when they select synonymous nouns: this phenomenon increases the polymorphism of the investigated constructions.

Furthermore, our study has emphasized the significance of opposition between internal and external argument structures to study syntactic schemata of LVCs. Thus, the internal argument structure of LVCs is often saturated by referential nouns, since Light Verbs are mainly transitive verbs or ditransitive, i.e., *dare*. Nevertheless, since LVCs, as complex units, have a constructional meaning, other arguments required by the external argument structures can be codified using other syntactic strategies. It is worth noting that the external argument structure of LVCs can entail the presence of embedded clauses, introduced by complementizers and headed by the Light Verb. Also in this respect, LVCs share inter-clausal properties of synthetic verbs.

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The Metaphorical/Metonymic Values of ‘Hand’
in Texts of 1400-1600s. A Corpus-driven Investigation
of French, Spanish and Italian

Abstract

This contribution proposes a corpus-driven description of the metaphorical/metonymic values of the lexeme ‘hand’ in Spanish, French and Italian in 15th-17th centuries texts. Metaphorical and metonymic reinterpretation of the lexeme is described in terms of embodiment of sensorial experience, namely a shift from concrete to abstract meaning, as several grammaticalisation and typological studies have claimed. Considering data gathered from diachronic corpora and dictionaries, the investigation aims at identifying the extended uses of ‘hand’ in the earlier phases of the languages. On one hand, a qualitative analysis of the semantic mapping, syntactic pattern, lexicalisation degree, and functional value is provided to identify cross-linguistic commonalities. On the other, the quantitative dimension is taken into account to verify the degree of productivity/conventionalisation of each semantic shift and of the cognitive process involved.

1. *Introduction*

This article discusses the extended meanings of body part nouns, and in particular of the lexeme ‘hand’, and the cognitive processes involved in the development of this kind of contextual polysemy in French, Spanish and Italian texts dating back to 1400s-1600s. Together with Vittorio Ganfi and Lunella Mereu, I have recently addressed this topic (Ganfi et al. 2023), providing a synchronic analysis of contemporary uses of body part nouns in geographically (and, in some cases, genetically) related languages. I come back to this theme by focusing my attention on the word ‘hand’ and the values realised by it in some Romance languages, in the period 1400s-1600s, when the languages considered had already fully begun to develop their own written and literary form,

although as vernaculars. The analysis provided in this article aims to i) identify the different values covered by the lexeme ‘hand’ in the selected period and their degree of conventionalisation, and ii) show the level of entrenchment and productivity of the use of cognitive mechanisms of embodiment (i.e., metaphor, metonymy) for the expression of abstract concepts.

The semantic class of body part nouns is frequently employed as a source of extended values, as several grammaticalisation and typological studies have demonstrated.¹ Ever since Lakoff and Johnson’s seminal study (1980), there has been much questioning of the way in which body part nouns are used by the different languages of the world to express bodily experiences and abstract notions. Scholars have proved that our understanding of abstract concepts reflects the embodied nature of cognition and language (cf. Lakoff and Johnson 1980; 1999; Evans 2010). Being lexically expressed by all languages, as concrete parts of the human individual, body part nouns play a fundamental role in our conceptual system (Kovecses 2000; Casadei 2003; Ruthrof 2000). The conceptualisation of human experiences by means of body part terms is mainly realised by two distinct cognitive mechanisms, i.e., metaphor and metonymy (Ibid.). Thus, metaphor and metonymy are not simply rhetorical functions, but “fundamental linguistic mechanisms which regulate the variation in the meaning of units” (Robert 2008, 61). On the one hand, metaphor allows the speaker to describe an entity, which is usually abstract, in terms of another domain which is usually concrete. On the other hand, metonymic transfers concern a shift based on a relation of logical contiguity. In both cases, it is possible to identify a common semantic pattern for all the values of a lexeme (Robert 2008), which “is present throughout all of the uses and which founds the semantic unity of the term” (Ibid.: 62). The pattern is a sort of regular semantic schema (‘semantic super-structure’ in the terms of Michaelis 1993; 1996), by means of which new senses/forms can be generated.

From a synchronic viewpoint, scholars have recently devoted their analyses to better understand how metaphor and metonymy can combine “in the polysemous network” of a word (Robert 2008, 69; Balbachan 2006; Lipka 1990). Thus, even though they can be considered as distinct cognitive processes, they

1 Cf. Lehmann 1995 [1982]; Heine and Kuteva 2002; Hopper and Traugott 2003; Goddard 2002; Koptjevskaja-Tamm et al. 2007; Wierzbicka 2007; Evans 2010. On this topic, cf. Ganfi et al. 2023.

may be strictly connected to each other. Metaphor has been described as a ‘radial’ shift,² while metonymy as a ‘chained’ one. In the case of metaphor, a core meaning from which all other meanings are directly derived can be identified (Lipka 1990, 127). Figure 1A represents some of the senses of the polysemous word ‘head’; those senses directly derive from the central meaning of ‘body part placed on top of the neck’, in a radial way, as Figure 1 shows. Figure 1B shows the metonymic chaining shift of the different senses: sense iii) (metaphorically) derives from sense ii), which in turn metonymically derives from i), i.e., the concrete meaning of the lexeme:

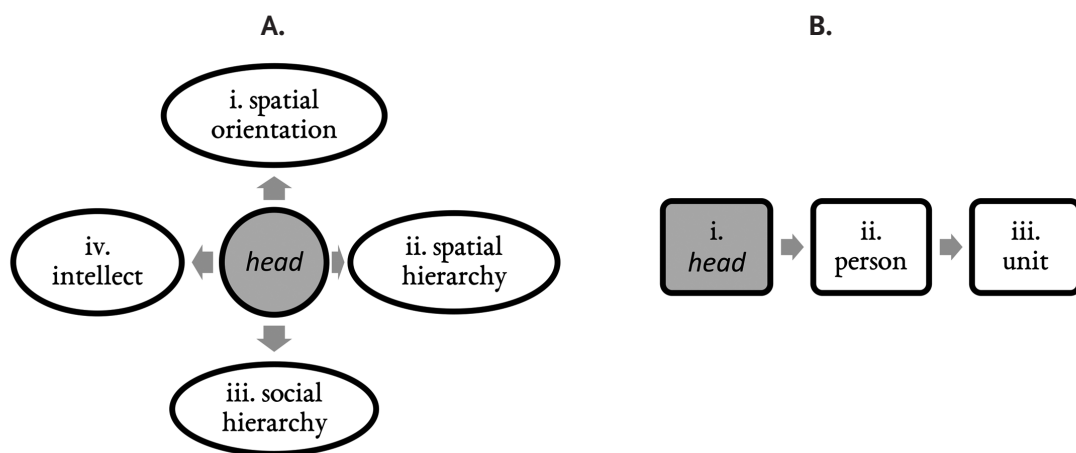


Fig. 1. Metaphorical (radial) and metonymic (chained) shift.

The diagrams, and in particular the different senses of the word in Figure 1B, can be read both synchronically and diachronically. Thus, both mechanisms are involved in the consolidation of the different senses of this polysemous word.³

From a diachronic perspective, the multitude of meanings that can be associated with a lexeme is correlated to semantic change: “where a lexeme instantiates a synchronic polysemy network, the structure of the network reflects the sequence of diachronic trajectories from which the modern array of senses arose” (Michaelis 1993, 180; cf. also Traugott 1986).

2 This term is due to Lipka (1990), who translates and reinterprets the categories of “mutation par rayonnement” and “mutation par enchaînement” proposed by Tournier (1985: 200).

3 On this topic, cf. also Bazzanella 2014; Panther and Thornburg 2007.

This paper investigates the relation between metaphor/metonymy mappings and the body part noun ‘hand’, and explores the interconnections between the two cognitive mechanisms, in a unified representation of the semantic shift evolution.

The article is organised as follows. Section 2 describes the method of data extraction and analysis of the different meanings related to the lexeme *hand* in the corpora considered. Section 3 provides the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the senses identified in French (§ 3.1), Spanish (§ 3.2) and Italian (§ 3.3) texts. Section 4 compares the data and discusses the major findings. Section 5 is devoted to the conclusive remarks.

2. Method of Analysis

This investigation is based on a corpus-driven method of analysis, namely an inductive procedure that aims to produce theoretical generalisations starting from the evidence provided by the corpus (Tognini Bonelli 2001, 66). Data have been extracted by means of different diachronic corpora. When available, dictionaries have been consulted as well to verify occurrences and related meanings.

French data were extracted from i) the *Base textuelle Old FRANTEXT*, which contains written texts from the 9th to the 21st century. The *Dictionnaire du Moyen Français* (DMF), and the online *Dictionnaire de la langue française – Le Littré (XMLittré v2)*⁴ were consulted to verify the values and etymologies. The French corpus allows the selection of a specific time span. However, in this case, only two texts were available in the corpus for the period 1400s-1600s. This means that the representativity of French data is biased, and results might not be fully generalisable. Nevertheless, the total frequency of occurrence of the word *main* in the corpus is high enough to ensure a comparison of data with the other languages considered. Thus, 94 occurrences have been classified.

Spanish examples were extracted from the *CORDE* corpus (*Corpus diacrónico del español*), which contains texts from the origins to 1974. The corpus allows the selection of a particular period of time, thus only 15th-17th centuries

⁴ *Base textuelle Old FRANTEXT*'s website: <http://oldfrantext.atilf.fr>. *DMF*'s website: <http://www.atilf.fr/dmf>. *Le Littré (XMLittré v2)*'s website: <https://www.littre.org>.

texts have been considered. To get a better sample of data, only a selection of the corpus was taken into account: for this reason, data were extracted from the subcorpus *CDH Nuclear* of the *Nuevo diccionario histórico del español*.⁵ This corpus also includes diatopic differentiations; this made it possible to select only texts that were produced in the Spanish peninsula. Since the number of examples was too large for the qualitative manual analysis, one example per text was extracted, and the first 100 results representing the time span selected were considered for classification.

Italian data come from the *MIDIA* corpus (*Morfologia dell'Italiano in DI-Acronia*), a collection of Italian written texts; the *Dizionario della lingua italiana di Tommaseo* was consulted as well to check particular uses/values.⁶ The *MIDIA* corpus allows the user to select a specific period among five,⁷ but the specification of temporal ranges different from those provided is not possible. Thus, only texts dating back to the time span from 1376 to 1532 were selected for the purpose of this analysis. Since the extracted sample was too big for a manual qualitative analysis and would not have been comparable to the corpora of the other languages in terms of frequency, data were further filtered by choosing randomly only one example per text. A total amount of 100 occurrences has been randomly selected and classified.

The computational tools used for the investigation allow the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the frequency and of the collocational properties of a word. Corpora were used to extract samples of concordances including the word *hand* in the different languages. Each occurrence was first classified according to semantic features (i.e., source and target meaning, type of cognitive process involved), morpho-syntactic features (i.e., type of combinatorial sequence including the body part term) and lexical properties (i.e., the most significant collexemes⁸ were identified and correlated to each specific value).

The analysis provides both qualitative and quantitative considerations.

5 *CORDE*'s website: <http://corpus.rae.es/cordenet.html>. *Nuevo diccionario histórico del español*'s website: <https://apps.rae.es/CNDHE/>.

6 *MIDIA*'s website: <https://www.corpusmidia.unito.it/index.php>. *Dizionario della lingua italiana di Tommaseo*'s website: <https://www.tommaseobellini.it/>.

7 Periods are subdivided as follows: i) from early 1200 to 1375; ii) from 1376 to 1532; iii) from 1533 to 1691; iv) from 1692 to 1840; v) from 1841 to 1947.

8 I borrow this term from the constructionist study by Stefanowitsch and Gries (2003), in which collexemes are different lexemes allowed by the variable portions of a construction.

The former are devoted to the identification of the pathways leading to the development of a particular type of semantic extension, the latter concern the frequency of occurrence of each semantic shift in the selected corpora.

3. Data Analysis

This investigation aims to provide a usage-based analysis of the semantic mappings related to the occurrences of the word ‘hand’ in French, Spanish and Italian texts, in the period 1400s-1600s. To this purpose, the source and target meanings were considered, and the different cognitive processes involved in the shift were described. Table 1 shows the first results of the corpus-driven analysis:

SOURCE MEANING	TARGET MEANING
<i>hand</i> >	i. control
	ii. activity
	iii. possession
	iv. temporal
	v. instrumental
	vi. direction
	vii. proximity
	viii. evidentiality
	ix. container/beneficiary
	x. individual
	xi. personality

Table 1. Target meanings of *hand*.

Table 1 is organised as follows: the left-hand column specifies the kind of source meaning, that in this case is only represented by the body part ‘hand’; the right-hand column provides the different target meanings that were identified in the corpora.

From the qualitative point of view, the contextual examples gathered by means of the corpus extraction shed light on the conventionalised uses and explain the different polysemies of the word ‘hand’ (e.g., hand is the possessor, hand is the pole of orientation, hand is the pole of activity, etc.). To this purpose, the correlations between the different values were also taken into ac-

count, and possible grammaticalisation pathways were traced. This approach highlights the presence of effects of ‘layering’⁹ (Hopper 1991) and coexisting values and contributes to the identification of several paths of grammaticalization for the period of time considered. Furthermore, the qualitative analysis also considered the type of word combination in which ‘hand’ expresses the metaphorical value. On the one hand, this approach highlights the distributional properties specifically connected to each value. On the other hand, it reveals the different lexicalisation degrees of a combination and its functional values in context. The identification of collexemes provides evidence of potential lexical cross-linguistic commonalities (e.g., the correspondence between contemporary EN ‘second hand’ and contemporary IT *di seconda mano*, SP *de segunda mano*, FR *de deuxième main*; on this cf. Ganfi et al. 2023).

The quantitative dimension was taken into account to verify the degree of productivity and of conventionalisation of each semantic shift in the different languages considered. Due to the kind of sample considered, the quantitative datum cannot be fully representative of the language spoken in the 15th-17th centuries, but some intralinguistic and crosslinguistic generalisations are still possible.

Next paragraphs are devoted to the analysis of the values of the word ‘hand’ in the French (§ 3.1), Spanish (§ 3.2) and Italian (§ 3.3) corpora.

3.1. *Results: The Word Main in the French Corpus*

Even though the French corpus contains a low number of texts and for this reason its representativity of the language used in the 15th-16th centuries is rather restricted, the occurrences of the word ‘hand’ can be associated to different extended values. This gives a fair picture of the uses of this word in the texts that have been considered. The absence of other potential uses does not indicate that these values were not present at the time the texts were produced, but that they were simply not found in the sample of data considered. This also means that quantitative data cannot be generalised as a whole, and should always be

⁹ This notion refers to “the persistence of older forms and meanings alongside newer forms and meanings” (Hopper and Traugott 2003, 124): it highlights a semantic overlap between two different meanings of the same form, which in some contexts are not easily distinguishable from one another.

considered as relative frequencies, which have to be associated with the type of sample considered. Although quantitatively low, French data are nevertheless interesting, since they are evidence of the semantic variability of the word ‘main’ in the period under consideration.

Table 2 represents the frequency of occurrence of the word *main* in the corpus. Data have been ordered according to the number of instances: the first frequency is related to concrete uses, while the others concern metaphorical/metonymic values, from the most to the least frequent.

TARGET MEANING	MEANING	FQ
Concrete value	<i>main</i> is a body part	27
Control	<i>main</i> is the controller	34
Activity	<i>main</i> is the agent	12
Possession	<i>main</i> is the possessor	6
Temporal	<i>main</i> is a temporal unit	4
Individual	<i>main</i> is the individual	4
Instrumental	<i>main</i> is the (animated) instrument	5
Direction	<i>main</i> is the pole of orientation	2
TOTAL		94

Table 2. Values of the word *main* in the French corpus.

Firstly, it should be noted that *main* is used in its concrete values only in 27 examples (28,72% of its occurrences). These values are associated with recurrent word combinations, such as collocations (e.g., *toucher de la main*, *prendre en la main*, *mettre la main*, *main droite*) or semi-fixed combinations, such as partially lexically specified patterns X_{NOUN} *en la main* ‘ X_{NOUN} in the hands’ (3):

- (1) Et quand le barbier y vouloit *toucher de la main*...
(Bonaventure Des Périers, *Nouvelles récréations et joyeux devis*, 1, 1558)
‘And when the barber wanted to touch it with his’
- (2) luy *met la main* sus le ventre et par tout
(Bonaventure Des Périers, *Nouvelles récréations et joyeux devis*, 1, 1558)
‘(he) put his hand over her belly and all over’
- (3) une bote *en la main*
(Bonaventure Des Périers, *Nouvelles récréations et joyeux devis*, 1, 1558)
‘a box in his hand’

Metaphorical uses are more frequent, even though most of the occurrences mainly concern the value of “control”, which covers alone the 36,17% of cases. In such uses, the *main* is the one who controls the initiation and the progress of an event, which may be concretely realised or managed by it:

- (4) Si quelcun tombe *en la main des brigans...*
 (Jean Calvin, *Institution de la religion chrestienne: livre premier*, 1560)
 ‘if anyone falls into the hands of bandits’
- (5) Ainsi ce mot s’estend tant à *sa main* qu’à ses yeux, c’est à dire que non seulement il voit, mais aussi ordonne ce qu’il veut estre fait
 (Jean Calvin, *Institution de la religion chrestienne: livre premier*, 1560)
 ‘So this word applies to both his hand and his eyes, meaning that not only does he see, but also orders what he wants to be done’
- (6) tout ce peuple fust conduit *sous la main d’un seul Roy*
 (Jean Calvin, *Institution de la religion chrestienne: livre premier*, 1560)
 ‘all this people was led under the hand of only one King’
- (7) ils ont conspiré ce que la *main de Dieu* et son conseil avoit décrété
 (Jean Calvin, *Institution de la religion chrestienne: livre premier*, 1560)
 ‘they conspired what the hand of God and his council had decreed’

Such metaphorical uses are typically conveyed by fixed expressions or collocational patterns. Among fixed units, complex prepositions are worth noting, i.e., phrases such as *en la main de*, *par la main de*, *sous la main de* having the role of a preposition, and introducing the noun of the person who has control (cf. Piunno and Ganfi 2019). Collocational patterns mainly concern verbal units, such as *demeiner de la main*, *avoir en la main*, *tomber en la main de*, *méner par la main*. Metaphorical uses related to control often invoke the presence of a leader, someone who has the function of guiding/assisting someone else, as in the following example:

- (8) des hommes, lesquels, sans avoir regard à Dieu comme s’ils n’estoyent pas *conduis de sa main*
 (Jean Calvin, *Institution de la religion chrestienne: livre premier*, 1560)
 ‘men, who, without looking to God as if they were not led by his hand’
- (9) l’église de Christ a vescu et vivra tant que Christ régnera à la dextre de son Père, *de la main duquel* elle est soustenue

(Jean Calvin, *Institution de la religion chrestienne: livre premier*, 1560)

‘the Church of Christ has lived and will live as long as Christ will reign next to his Father, from whose hand it is held’

Non-literal uses also denote the ‘activity’ which is performed by the hand (almost 13% of French occurrences):

(10) La terre apportoit toutes sortes de fruitz *sans main mettre*

(Bonaventure Des Périers, *Nouvelles récréations et joyeux devis*, I, 1558)

‘The earth brought all kinds of fruit without doing anything’

(11) ce ne fut pas sans faire la meilleure *derniere main* qu’il peust

(Bonaventure Des Périers, *Nouvelles récréations et joyeux devis*, I, 1558)

‘it was not without making the best activity he could’

(12) Mais à la fin ilz ne furent pas les maistres, quoy qu’ilz *missent la main aux armes* pour luy saulver la vie

(Bonaventure Des Périers, *Nouvelles récréations et joyeux devis*, I, 1558)

‘but in the end they were not the masters the ones who they took up arms to save his life’

The cognitive strategy employing this body part to denote the agent is based on a double process: it is “the result of a metonymic transfer, whereby the human hand is used to refer to the person as a whole” (Heine and Kuteva 2002, 166), as well as a metaphorical shift by which the physical individual denotes activity. It is already attested also in the earliest stages of other Romance languages (Piunno and Ganfi 2019), and it is still very common in the world’s languages, even though “[m]ore research is required on the exact nature and the genetic and areal distribution of this process” (Heine and Kuteva 2002, 166). Such uses are conveyed by multiword expressions of different nature, i.e., nominal (*main d’homme*), verbal (*toucher à la main*, *avoir la main à l’ouvre*, *prester la main*), prepositional (*de la main de*). This type is closely related to the ‘instrumental’ subtype (5% of French occurrences), that we have kept separated because of some semantic peculiarities. In this case, *main* denotes the means by which an action is executed, such as in the following example:

(13) lequel a ordonné la Loy *par la main de Moïse*

(Jean Calvin, *Institution de la religion chrestienne: livre premier*, 1560)

‘which ordered the law by the hand of Moses’

- (14) la Loy a esté donnée *par la main des Anges*
 (Jean Calvin, *Institution de la religion chrestienne: livre premier*, 1560)
 ‘the law was given by the hand of the Angels’
- (15) la parolle qu’il avoit prononcée *par la main d’Ahiba son serviteur*
 (Jean Calvin, *Institution de la religion chrestienne: livre premier*, 1560)
 ‘the word he had pronounced by the hand of Ahiba his servant’

Such uses are conveyed only by the complex preposition *par la main de*, where *main* is an ‘animated instrumental’ which “metaphorically recalls the domain of ‘manual activities’” (Piunno and Ganfi 2019, 151). The distributional features of this grammaticalised unit are worth noting: as examples (14)-(15) show, something can be ‘commanded’ or ‘pronounced by the hand of’ someone. This context of use highlights the semantic extension of the word *main* and its semantic bleaching in the specific construction.

One of the most frequent metaphorical values associated to the word ‘hand’ in the languages is ‘possession’. This value is also attested in earlier stages of French, even though it only covers about 6% of cases of our corpus:

- (16) un sergent [...] mit la charrette et les beufz de ce povre homme *en la main du Roy*
 (Bonaventure Des Périers, *Nouvelles récréations et joyeux devis*, I, 1558)
 ‘a sergeant [...] placed the cart and the oxen of this poor man in the hands of the King’

Such uses are typically expressed by the prepositional multiword *en la main de* ‘in the hands of’, where the locative meaning expresses possession, as in the formula *Y is at X’s place* > *Y is in X’s possession* (Heine 1997, 28).

The meaning of *main* as an individual develops from a metonymic use of the word.¹⁰ In such cases, the human part of the body is used to refer to the whole body, i.e., the individual:

- (17) sont parvenus de pères à fils, ceux qui les avoyent ouy parler en ont rendu tesmoignage de vive voix, et que *de main en main* cela a esté si bien testifié qu’il n’y avoit que douter
 (Jean Calvin, *Institution de la religion chrestienne: livre premier*, 1560)
 ‘(they) have been handed down from father to son, and those who have heard them spoken have testified to them in person, and that little by little this has been so well attested that there was no room for doubt’

10 On the metonymical use of body part terms to refer to the individual, cf. also Mol 2004.

In the example (17) *main* stands for person (4% of occurrences). This meaning is typically conveyed by the prepositional multiword unit with the adverbial function *de main en main* ('from one person to another', lit. from hand to hand). The value of this unit may be ambiguous, as happens in (18), where a new layer, in terms of Hopper (1991, 22), emerge:

(18) ...il ait ordonné des hommes ministres, lesquels enseignassent les successeurs *de main en main*

(Jean Calvin, *Institution de la religion chrestienne: livre premier*, 1560)

'...he ordained some men as ministers, who taught their successors from one person/generation to another'

In this case, the value of individuality of *de main en main* interacts with two more abstract meanings, i.e., the 'distributional' and 'aspectual' values: indeed, in (18) the sequence may be also read as 'progressively, from one generation to another', with the value of temporal progression.

Metaphorical uses referring to *main* as an explicit 'temporal' unit are worth noting, even if their occurrence is rather low in the corpus (4% of French instances). In the French texts, they are mainly based on the prepositional multiword unit *de longue main*, which has an adverbial function in context:

(19) depuis deux ou trois jours en ça j'en ay trouvé une que je congnois *de longue main*

(Bonaventure Des Périers, *Nouvelles récréations et joyeux devis*, I, 1558)

'after two or three days I have found one that I have known for a long time'

(20) il avoit apprins ce langage *de plus longue main*

(Bonaventure Des Périers, *Nouvelles récréations et joyeux devis*, I, 1558)

'he had learnt this language long time before'

(21) on rejette le remède, non pour autre raison, sinon que nous sommes déjà *de longue main* accoustumez aux calamitez

(Jean Calvin, *Institution de la religion chrestienne: livre premier*, 1560)

'we reject the remedy, for no other reason than that we are already accustomed to calamities'

As the examples show, even if it is syntactically and semantically fixed, the unit admits internal intensifiers/mitigators as *plus*, *assez*. In such cases, the sequence underwent a process of grammaticalisation, losing in morphosyntactic

and semantic substance: indeed, *main* cannot be inflected and its meaning is bleached. This means that this body part lexeme can be associated with the temporal value when used in the specific phrasal co-text which includes the preposition *de* ‘of’ and the adjective *longue* ‘long’. As far as some scholars have noted (cf. Heine and Kuteva 2002), temporal values may develop from locative ones. In particular, body parts may be used to “express deictic location and then develop further into temporal markers” (Ibid.: 49). Here, we may hypothesise that the particular temporal meaning referred to this unit employing *main* derives from the locative value, as the possessive one:

(22) LOCATIVE > TEMPORAL
> POSSESSION

The schema in (22) represents the grammaticalisation path of *main* and assumes that with a certain degree of probability both temporal and possessive values are derived from the same locative meaning (see Heine 1997, 207).

The last metaphorical shift that can be considered for French is related to the ‘locative’ semantics. In this case, *main* is used to express a direction (2% of occurrences), as in the following example:

(23) tourne à la bonne main, et peu allez tout dret
(Bonaventure Des Périers, *Nouvelles récréations et joyeux devis*, I, 1558)
‘turn to the right hand, and then go all straight’

In such uses, the hand is the pole of orientation and embodies the position of the individual in the space, thus becoming a grammaticalised directional marker.

3.2. Results: The Word *Mano* in the Spanish Corpus

In the case of the Spanish sample, *mano* is most frequently employed to denote a concrete entity. Indeed, the literal meaning of body part covers the 42% of occurrences:

(24) Señor, el vuestro vasallo Juçab Venalmao, rrey de Granada, vesa vuestras manos
(1431, anónimo, fragment)
‘Sir, your vassal Juçab Venalmao, king of Granada, kisses your hands’

- (25) *en su diestra mano espada tenía*
 (a1435, Páez de Ribera, Ruy, *Poesías*)
 ‘in his right hand he had a sword’
- (26) *Tendió los braços luego, alçó la mano tres vezes*
 (c1567-1597 Herrera, Fernando de, *Fragmentos de poemas perdidos*)
 ‘He stretched out his arms and raised his hand three times’

Table 3 provides some frequency data about the Spanish sample:

TARGET MEANING	MEANING	SPANISH
Concrete value	<i>mano</i> is a body part	42
Instrumental	<i>mano</i> is the (animated) instrument	20
Control	<i>mano</i> is the controller	17
Activity	<i>mano</i> is the agent	14
Proximity	<i>mano</i> is the distance	3
Direction	<i>mano</i> is the pole of orientation	2
Container/beneficiary	<i>mano</i> is the receiver	1
Individual	<i>mano</i> is the individual	1
TOTAL		100

Table 3. Values of the word *mano* in the Spanish corpus.

Firstly, it may be noticed that, differently from the other languages’ samples, the most frequent metaphorical shift concerning *mano* is related to the ‘instrumental’ value (20% of occurrences). In such cases, *mano* is used as the animated instrumental by means of which an action occurs. Even in this case, this meaning is typically conveyed by grammaticalised complex prepositions: it is possible to note a variability of the prepositional elements employed (e.g., *por/de/con mano de*):

- (27) *gastar el dinero por su mano*
 (1498-1501, Anónimo, *Libro de Acuerdos del Concejo Madrileño*)
 ‘spend the money by his hand’
- (28) *De mi mano aquesta carta te faze saber, sennora, que...*
 (c1407-1463 Villegas, Sancho de, *Sin título*)
 ‘From my hand that letter I make known to you, lady, that...’

- (29) (letra) bien *escrita con su mano*
 (a1435, Baena, Juan Alfonso, *Poesías*)
 ‘(letter) well written with his hand’

The second most frequent metaphorical value concerns the uses of *mano* as a ‘controller’, which is recorded in the 17% of occurrences. In this case, the meaning is almost always expressed by the complex preposition *en mano de* (or the alternative form *en X_{Possessive} mano*):

- (30) a peligro de morir cada hora *en manos de* sus enemigos
 (c1535, Anónimo, *Diálogo de las transformaciones de Pitágoras*)
 ‘at the risk of dying every hour at the hands of their enemies’
- (31) *en nuestra mano* la vida e la muerte fue puesta
 (a1407, Álvarez de Alarcón, García, *Poesías*)
 ‘in our hand life and death were placed’
- (32) *en su mano* está su salud e su salvamiento
 (a1435, Sánchez Calavero, Ferán, *Poesías*)
 ‘in his hand is your health and your salvation’

The metonymic/metaphorical shift of ‘activity’ covers the 14% of occurrences and is often conveyed by the light verb construction *poner la mano en (algo)*:

- (33) qualquiera otro rehusara *poner la mano en* cosa de tanta admiración
 (c1540, Villalón, Cristóbal de, *El Scholástico*)
 ‘anyone else should refuse to put their hand to something of such a value’

However, other combinatorial sequences are also possible, e.g., multiword nominal units (e.g., *oficio de mano*) and prepositional phrase with an adverbial (e.g., *con dura mano armada*) or an adjectival function (e.g., *de mano de*):

- (34) buscádesed tenprano algunt *oficio de mano* para la postremería’
 (c1455-c1482, Manrique, Gómez, *Consejo a Juan Poeta*)
 ‘you should seek out early some handcraft for the dessert trade’
- (35) edictos trabajosos *con dura mano armada* introdujeron
 (1569, Ercilla, Alonso de, *La Araucana*)
 ‘they introduced edicts with a strong-armed hand’

- (36) *Éstas son de mano de mi hija Aldonza!*
(1528, Delicado, Francisco, *La Lozana Andaluza*)
‘These are done by my daughter Aldonza!’

Finally, among the group of the least frequent metaphorical shift, also in this case it is possible to identify ‘direction’ (3%, example (37), where the hand represents the pole of orientation), and ‘individual’ (example (38), where the hand metonymically recalls the person):

- (37) *otros tantos por la mano derecha, cerca de un otero que estaua pegado con nosotros*
(1435 [s. 16th] Anónimo, fragment)
‘The same number of others on the right hand side, near a hill that was close to us’
- (38) *ya no ay mano que lo escriba*
(c1460-1479 Manrique, Jorge, *Comienzan las obras*)
‘there is no longer a hand who writes it’

Next to the ones above, there are two other values among the least represented, which have not been identified in the examples considered for French. They both express a locative value. The first is used as a sort of deictic element and conveys the meaning of spatial proximity (39), while in the second *mano* is a container (40):

- (39) *no pocas vezes he desseado que me veniesse a las manos esse hombre*
(1529, Valdés, Alfonso de, *Diálogo de Mercurio y Carón*)
‘more than a few times I have wished that this man would come into my hands’
- (40) *Alto Rey [...] resçibit en vuestra mano este escrito*
(1435, Baena, Juan Alfonso de, *Poesías*)
‘High King [...] receive in your hand this writing’

The first is based on a metonymic and a metaphorical shift, by means of which *mano* is in turn i) the whole body (part-whole relation) and ii) the, a deictic distance expression (it conveys the meaning of ‘at a short distance’ since the hands may move away from the rest of the body, albeit to a limited extent, while maintaining a minimum distance from it). In the second value, which is also based on a metonymic shift, *mano* is a place where something is contained.¹¹

11 As the anonymous reviewer has noticed, the use of the term *hand* in this example may be ambiguous, since it might also refer to the concrete body part.

Finally, it may be important to notice that the meaning of possession, as well as those of temporal unit, evidentiality and personality are not represented in the Spanish corpus used.

3.3. Results: The Word *Mano* in the Italian Corpus

All the metaphorical/metonymic shifts that have been identified for French and Spanish are attested in the Italian corpus as well, as Table 4 shows. Furthermore, the examples of Italian also illustrate cases of alternative values, different from those seen so far, e.g., evidentiality and personality, which are described below.

TARGET MEANING		ITALIAN
Concrete value	<i>mano</i> is a body part	36
Control	<i>mano</i> is the controller	17
Instrumental	<i>mano</i> is the (animated) instrument	15
Activity	<i>mano</i> is the agent	11
Container/beneficiary	<i>mano</i> is the receiver	8
Direction	<i>mano</i> is the pole of orientation	7
Proximity	<i>mano</i> is the distance	1
Individual	<i>mano</i> is the individual	1
Possession	<i>mano</i> is the possessor	1
Temporal	<i>mano</i> is a temporal unit	1
Evidentiality	<i>mano</i> is direct evidentiality	1
Personality	<i>mano</i> is personality	1
TOTAL		100

Table 4. Values of the word *mano* in the Italian corpus.

As far as frequency results are concerned, the first significant datum is related to the concrete value, which is the most frequent (36% of occurrences), as for Spanish. Also in the case of Italian, the value is mainly identifiable in collocations (e.g., *legare le mani*, *alzare/muovere/toccare la mano*, *mano bianca*) or semi-fixed patterns as X_{NOUN} *in mano* (e.g., *remi/chiave in mano*):

- (41) *avendoli legate le mane*, lo istracinavano per le piazze
 (1475, Manerbi Niccolò, *Volgarizzamento della Legenda Aurea*)
 ‘having tied his hands, they dragged him through the squares’

- (42) quelli che *la mano mossono* [...] *la mano alzorono*
(1497, Collenuccio Pandolfo, *Filotimo*)
'Those who moved their hand [...] the hand they raised'
- (43) co' *remi in mano*, la nave arsa in nel porto saltò
(beginning of the 15th century, Sercambi Giovanni, *Croniche*)
'with oars in hand, the burning ship leapt in the harbour'
- (44) s'io ti toccassi le *bianche mani* e 'l tuo bel viso
(second half of 15th century, Lorenzo de' Medici, *Poemetti in terza rima*)
'If I would touch the white hands and your lovely face'

The second most frequent value is the one of 'control',¹² which covers the 17% of occurrences (this trend is in line with Spanish, but is much lower than French, where it is the most frequent one):

- (45) per esser il governo *in mano di donna*
(1525, Capra Galeazzo Flavio, *Della eccellenza e dignità delle donne*)
'to be the management in the hands of a woman'
- (46) et tale inquisito se lo *havaranno in le mani*, consegnarli in le *mani de' signori*¹³
(1513, Anonimi, *L'Arte della seta nei secoli XV-XVI. Statuti e documenti*)
'and this suspect if they have him in their hands, they will deliver him into the hands of the lords'
- (47) lassono nove in pregione *nelle mani de' Franciosi*
(1494-1502, Portoveneri Giovanni, *Memoriale*)
'they leave nine (persons) in prison in the hands of the French people'

The metaphorical shift reinterpreting 'hand as the controller' is realised by the complex prepositions *nelle mani di/in le mani di*, which are typically preceded

12 As the anonymous reviewer has noticed, it is important to highlight that some of the examples that have been classified as 'control' may be associated with other values (e.g., 'possession'). However, in the analysis all the values have been assigned considering the general meaning of the sentence and of the text.

13 Here, the disambiguation between the two meanings, i.e., 'control' and 'possession', depends on the semantic properties of the entity that is possessed/controlled. When the entity is a concrete object, hand is interpreted as a possessor; when the entity is abstract, hand is a controller.

by a verb of transfer (e.g., *dare, lassare, depositare, condurre, consegnare*) or, less frequently, by a stative verb (e.g., *rimanere*).

The lexeme *mano* conveys the meaning of ‘animated instrumental’ in the 15% of cases:

- (48) gl’istromenti pubblici, fatti *per mano di* pubblico notaio
(1515, Anonimo, *Statuti di Frascati*)
‘the public instruments made by public notaries’
- (49) spargeran *di sue man* divini odori
(end of 15th – beginning of 16th century, Sannazzaro Iacopo, *Sonetti e Canzoni*)
‘(they) will scatter divine odours by their hands’
- (50) lettera *di mano de* tuo padre
[about 1495, Sabadino degli Arienti, *Porretane*]
‘letter from your father’s hand’

The animated instrumental refers to the origin or the executor of an action (cf. Piunno and Ganfi 2019). Also in the case of Italian, these uses are conveyed only by a complex preposition. Nevertheless, Italian shows a greater variability in terms of form (e.g., *per/di/con mano di*).

The metonymic/metaphorical shift representing the ‘hand’ as the pole of ‘activity’ covers the 11% of the occurrences. In this case, there are no particular preferences for a specific combinatorial pattern or collexeme, but some collocations emerge, such as *porre mano, mettere mano, operazione di mano*:

- (51) se Dio non li avessi *posto la mano*, si saria sparso di molto sangue
(end of 15th century, Savonarola Girolamo, *Trattato sul governo di Firenze*)
‘if God had not set his hand to it, it would have been sprinkled with much blood’
- (52) E ‘l padre non gli rispuose, ma *misse mano alla* spada
(second half of 15th century, Andrea da Barberino, *Reali di Francia*)
‘And the father did not answer him, but put his hand to the sword’

The lexeme *mano* denotes the activity or the person who executes it. The cognitive strategy employed is based on both metonymy (the hand is a person) and metaphor (the individual is the activity). In such uses, the metaphorical shift follows the metonymic one, as is represented in Figure 2:

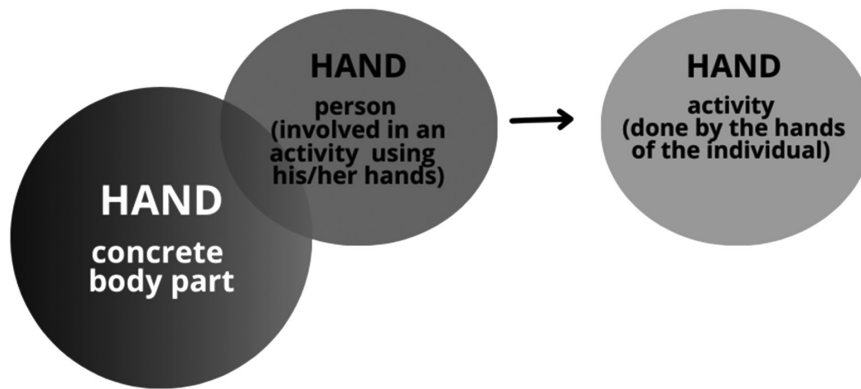


Fig. 2: Chaining shift for hand=activity.

Even if it is not high, the 8% of occurrences of *mano* as a (beneficiary) ‘container’ may be surprising.¹⁴ Here are some examples:

- (53) da essere paghate *nelle mani del Camerlengho*
(1496, Anonimo, *Statuto inedito dell’Arte degli Speziali di Pisa nel secolo XV*)
‘to be paid into the hands of the Camerlengho’
- (54) administratione della pecunia che *alle mani gli perverrà*
(1428, Anonimo, *Statuto del Comune di Empoli*)
‘administration of the monies that will reach his hands’

This semantic shift is based on three different cognitive mechanisms. Firstly, ‘hand’ does not simply denote a body part but stands for the whole person: thus, the part is metonymically employed with the value of ‘individual’. Secondly, it is metaphorically used as a container, i.e., the person who ‘holds in his/her hands’ something. Finally, the hand is the one who receives something, i.e., the beneficiary or destination of a process of transfer: the last

14 However, this is a common feature in the world languages, where the lexeme denoting the hand is not only metonymically employed with the value of ‘container’, but also metaphorically, as a quantitative unit. This value is also present in the period considered, in some of the languages, even though it is not attested in the selected corpus. See the following examples from French and Italian:

- i. *a plaine main* ‘abundantly’ (Marcadé, *Myst.Pass.Arras R.*, 1440)
- ii. *il gran con piena mano* ha sparso ‘the great with full hand scattered’ (1545, Giraldo Cinzio, Giambattista, *Egle*)

value is attributed to the lexeme by the context, and in particular by verbal collexemes, which denote a movements towards something (e.g., *pervenire* ‘arrive’, *venire* ‘come’).

The metaphorical shift concerning ‘locative’ meanings also appears in the Italian texts. 7% of instances concern ‘direction’ (55-56), while ‘proximity’ (57) is extremely rare:

- (55) Se tu navichi *ala mano dextra* arivarai alla villa de cavalli [...]. Et se tu navicarai *alla man sinistra* arivarai alla villa de Conselice
(1412, Anonimo, *Cronaca di Ferrara*)
‘If you sail to your right hand, you will arrive at the villa of horses [...]. And if you sail to the left hand, you will arrive at the villa of Conselice’
- (56) circondato da selve *a ogni mano*, ombrose e folte...
(15th century, Malecarni Francesco, *Rime*)
‘surrounded by forests on each side, shady and thick...’
- (57) La botte dello vino ch’era *a mano*...
(1384-1393, Datini Francesco, *Lettere*)
‘The wine cask that was at hand...’

In the first two cases, *mano* stands for ‘side’; such uses are realised by a very restricted range of word combinations, always employing the same collexemes, such as: *a mano dextra/ritta*, *a mano sinistra/manca*, *a ogni mano*, *da man destra a sinistra*. In the third case, the meaning of proximity is expressed by the combinatorial unit *a mano*.¹⁵

The rest of the values that have been identified only record one occurrence. Among these, some metaphorical transfers related to the expression of possession (58), aspectual value (59), personality (60) and evidentiality (61) are worth noting.

- (58) Camarlengho a la fine del suo offitio *avesse nelle mani* della pecunia
(1412, Bonaccorso Pitti, *Ricordi*)
‘Camarlengho at the end of his office had in his hands some money’

15 From an in-depth analysis of the corpus, a biunivocal relation between value and combinatorial unit seems to emerge. This could be an index of low productivity of the extended signifier; however, further investigation is still needed to confirm this hypothesis.

- (59) prima li cavalli [...], poi li squadroni [...] da poi veniva le fanterie et *di man in man* le altre squadre
(beginning of 16th century, Sanuto Marin, *La spedizione di Carlo VIII in Italia*)
'first the horses [...], then the cavalry [...] then came the infantry and step by step the other troops'
- (60) Costui, oltre che è uomo di assai buone lettere e persona di qualche giudizio, molto *alla mano*
(1525-1530, Firenzuola A., *Dialogo delle bellezze delle donne intitolato Celso*)
'He, besides being a well-educated and a person of some judgement, very easy-going'
- (61) *toccar con mano* la verità
(first half of XV century, Pisana Camilla, *Lettere*)
'to touch the truth by hand'

The last two metaphorical values are particularly interesting, since are not attested in the corpora of the other languages and deserve further comments. On the one hand, the metaphorical *mano* denotes a positive character or disposition of a person. This value may be connected (and may derive from) to the one of proximity, with which it also shares the form, since a common semantic substratum is present in both cases. The only difference is related to the productivity and to the distributional and functional features: in the case of the 'personality' meaning, there is a biunivocal relationship between the value and the combinatorial unit. Furthermore, the unit *alla mano* plays the role of an adjectival, and modifies nouns. The biunivocal relationship between value and form may also concern the metaphorical value of 'evidentiality', where the word *hand* only appears in the sequence *toccare con mano* 'touch by hands'. In this case, the *hand*, as the site of touch, acquires the meaning of 'direct evidence'.¹⁶

16 This metaphorical value has been investigated in terms of grammaticalisation patterns (Heine et al. 1991). "It appears to be an instance of a more general process whereby certain body parts, on account of their relative location, are used as structural templates to express deictic location" (Heine and Kuteva 2002, 141).

4. Data Comparison and Findings

The corpus-driven investigation of the Romance data considered has shown a great variety of extended uses in 1400s-1600s texts.¹⁷ The qualitative analysis has highlighted a strict correlation between metonymy and metaphor in the development of the polysemy of the lexeme denoting the ‘hand’ and has also shown that it is also possible to trace chains of derivation between the core meanings and the other extended values of the lexeme. As far as the former point is concerned, Table 5 shows the cognitive processes involved in each extended meaning:

SOURCE MEANING	TARGET MEANING	TYPE OF SHIFT
<i>hand</i> >	i. control	metaphor
	ii. activity	metonymy + metaphor
	iii. possession	metaphor
	iv. temporal	metaphor
	v. instrumental	metaphor
	vi. direction	metaphor
	vii. proximity	metonymy + metaphor
	viii. evidentiality	metaphor
	ix. container/beneficiary	metonymy + metaphor
	x. individual	metonymy
	xi. personality	metaphor

Table 5. Cognitive processes involved in the extended meanings.

It is possible to represent graphically the different connections between the values. Figure 3 summarises the main relations hypothesised for the core values of ‘hand’, on the basis of the corpus analysis.

17 It is important to notice that this analysis doesn’t presuppose any diachronic work. Further evidence of the diachronic evolution of the different meanings considered is needed to prove the derivational links between them.

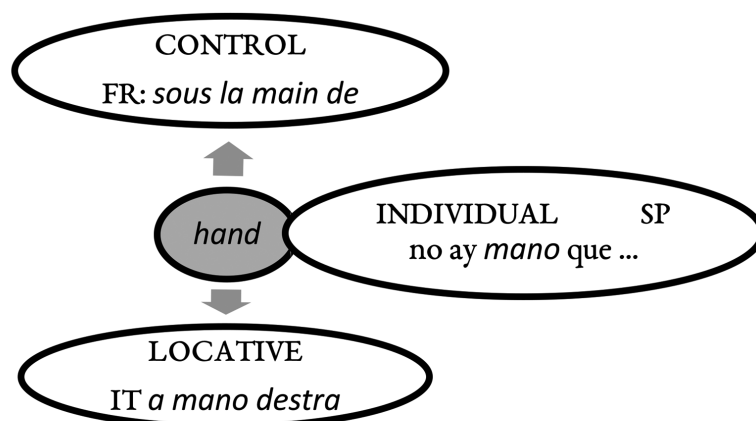


Fig. 3. Core metaphorical and metonymic values of 'hand'.

Figure 3 has to be read synchronically: from the core meaning of the concrete value of the lexeme *hand*, three main meanings develop, i.e., 'control' and 'locative' values (which develop by means of a metaphorical shift), as well as 'individual' (which comes from a metonymic shift, thus it is represented as a contiguous value).¹⁸ From the semantic viewpoint, these values can be considered as the most central ones, to which all the others semantically are related. To these main extended meanings, other additional values may be associated in turn. Figure 4 shows the hypothesised relations between the 'individual' meaning and other extended values. It is important to notice that this diagram has to be read synchronically, since the analysis driven in this paper does not prove a proper diachronic drift.¹⁹

18 Although it could be hypothesised that the synchronic pattern can be associated with a diachronic drift, diachrony is not considered here at all. Therefore, it cannot be stated that the diagram also represents the diachronic drift that led to the entrenchments of the different meanings.

19 This could only be hypothesised in this work. This point represents a very important issue from a diachronic viewpoint, and still deserves an in-depth analysis.

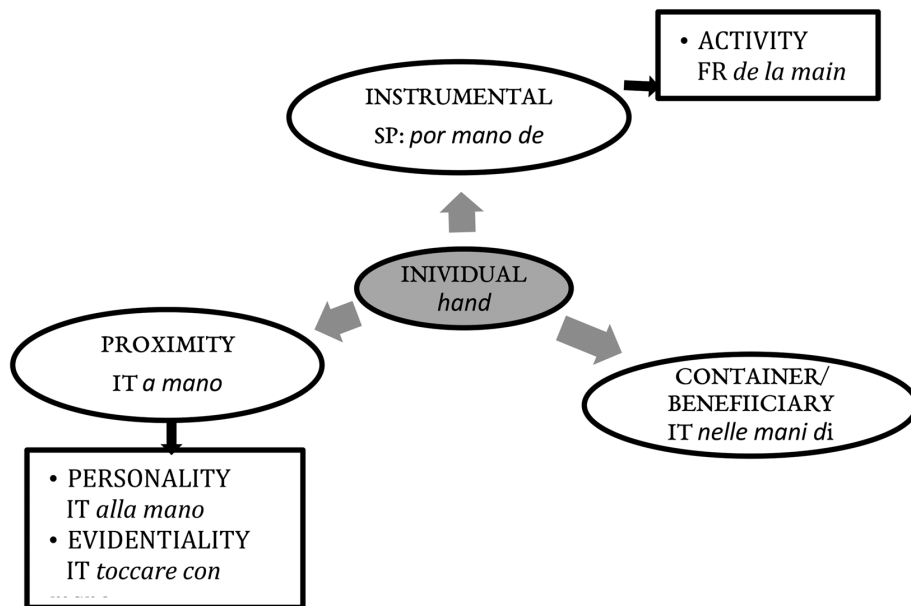


Fig. 4. Interaction between the different values of individual ‘hand’.

For instance, we may hypothesise that the value of ‘individual’ relates to other metaphorical meanings such as i) ‘instrumental’ (to which the meaning of activity is connected), ii) ‘container/beneficiary’, and iii) ‘proximity’, to which the ones of ‘personality’ and ‘evidentiality’ are linked. In the same way, it could be possible to hypothesise that the ‘locative’ value is linked to ‘possession’, which, in turn, is related to the ‘distributional’ and less productive ‘aspectual’ meanings (Figure 5).

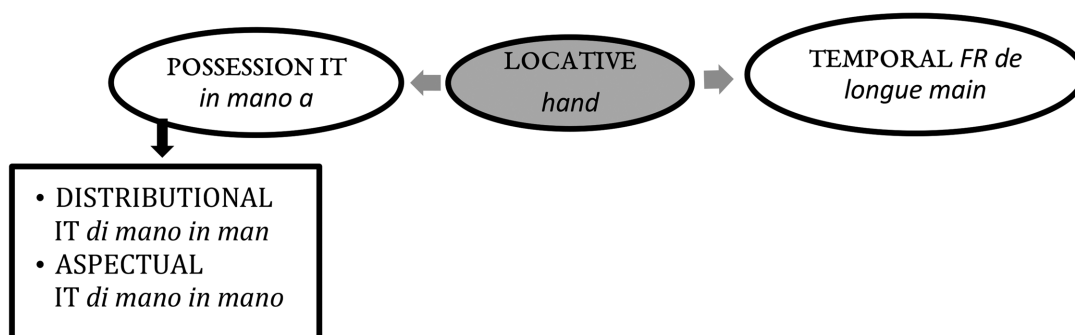


Fig. 5. Interaction between the different values of locative ‘hand’.

As far as the quantitative dimension is concerned, one may wonder which are the most represented values in the languages and texts considered and, therefore, which are the most productive meaning shifts. To answer this question, data have been normalised according to the total of occurrences and the sum of the percentages of use of each value was calculated. Table 6 shows the individual percentages of occurrence of each target meaning for the languages considered, as well as the total amount of occurrences:

TARGET MEANING	FRENCH	ITALIAN	SPANISH	TOTAL
Concrete value	9,18%	12,24%	14,29%	35,71%
Control	11,56%	5,78%	5,78%	23,13%
Instrumental	1,70%	5,10%	6,80%	13,61%
Activity	4,08%	3,74%	4,76%	12,59%
Direction	0,68%	2,38%	0,68%	3,74%
Container	-	2,72%	0,34%	3,06%
Possession	2,04%	0,34%	-	2,38%
Individual	1,36%	0,34%	0,34%	2,04%
Temporal	1,36%	0,34%	-	1,70%
Proximity	-	0,34%	1,02%	1,36%
Evidentiality	-	0,34%	-	0,34%
Personality	-	0,34%	-	0,34%

Table 6. Normalised frequency of occurrence of hand in the three corpora considered.

From an interlinguistic point of view, it is very interesting to note a significant correspondence, in terms of frequency of use, between the different meanings. This means that, despite a slight difference in the sample and the fact that the selected samples are only partially representative of the language period considered, there is a crosslinguistic regularity in the use of the word 'hand' for the expression of abstract meanings. As it has already been illustrated in the analysis of each corpus, the most frequent value is the concrete one in Italian and Spanish. Among the group of extended meanings, however, the value of control has a very high frequency of use, which stands out with respect to the other meanings: it is, therefore, the most productive value amongst the extended meanings, and the most frequent one in the French corpus. This value is

followed, in terms of frequency, by those of instrumental and activity, which are common to all languages. All the other extended values are less significant from a quantitative perspective, even though, from the qualitative point of view they may play a major role in deriving, in turn, other extended meanings.

5. *Conclusive Remarks*

Body part nouns are frequently used to codify extended meanings by means of metaphorical or metonymic shifts. They are semantic schemas that can convey abstract meanings by means of highly referential lexemes.

This corpus-driven analysis has shown the kinds of extended values that is possible to associate with the word ‘hand’ in 1400-1600s texts of French, Spanish and Italian.

The qualitative perspective has highlighted the possible links between the different values and some hypotheses of derivational relationships have been proposed. The regular use of these kinds of cognitive mechanisms has some consequences on the languages’ lexicon, which increases its potential by exploiting available resources: “human language users have a natural propensity for making metaphorical extensions that lead to the increased use of certain items” (Bybee and Pagliuca 1985, 75). This is true for lexical items (cf. the examples of combinatorial units and patterns, such as collocations or multiword expressions), as well as for the grammatical ones. The latter point, in particular, is well illustrated by the different instances of complex prepositions, i.e., highly cohesive and lexicalised word units that have undergone a process of grammaticalisation, and “grammaticalization is also strongly motivated by metaphoric processes” (Hopper and Traugott 2003, 95). From this point of view, it might be useful to better investigate the evolution of the different meanings from a diachronic point of view, in order to highlight instances of meaning retention or entrenchment, as well as possible variations. Finally, the investigation of the cases of biunivocal metaphor *vs* multiword expression correspondence that have been identified in the corpora would deserve special attention. It might be interesting to examine the possible variations in the degree of productivity of the extended meanings, especially from a diachronic perspective.

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language**q**text culture•

MISCELLANEA

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Les langues gbè dans les premiers écrits européens

Abstract

This article looks at the early contacts between Portuguese and Spanish on the one hand, and the populations of the West African coastal area between eastern Ghana and western Nigeria on the other, and more specifically at the first two descriptions, in European languages, of the Gbe languages. The former date back to 1658; it bears no author's name and is entitled: *Doctrina christiana; y explicacion de sus Misterios, en nuestro idioma español, y en lengua Arda*. Our source is its reproduction in Labouret and Rivet (1929). The latter, by Antonio da Costa Peixoto, dates back to 1741 and is entitled *Obra nova de Lingoa Geral de mina traduzida, ao nosso Igdioma*. Our source is its reproduction by Silveira (1944). The article deals with the difficulties inherent in these writings, aside the historical interest they represent. The first text, which announces the language of Arda, confuses the glossonym with the name of the Kingdom of Allada, whereas the second text clearly identifies the glossonym. Furthermore, the transcription (segmental and suprasegmental) of the texts in the two documents studied is a source of semantic and syntactic disturbances. The lack of explicit transcription rules adds to the impossibility of highlighting them due to the irregularity of the transcriptions. The methods used are based on the search for semantic equivalents in several current Gbè languages.

Keywords: Gbè languages; European descriptions of Africa; spelling of African languages; interpretation of African languages

1. *Introduction*

Nous nous intéressons dans cette étude aux contacts entre les Portugais et les Espagnols au XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles d'une part, et les populations de l'aire côtière ouest-africaine située entre le Ghana oriental et le Nigéria occidental d'autre part. Cette côte correspond à l'aire linguistique du continuum dialectal gbè. Elle était dénommée par les navigateurs européens *Costa dos Escravos* / *Costa de los Esclavos* ou autre équivalent selon la langue. En effet, dès le XV^e siècle, des colonies portugaises se sont implantées sur cette côte et ont formé des sociétés métissées. Puis des trafiquants d'autres pays se sont également implantés, fournissant une grande partie des Africains asservis aux colonies d'Amérique. De nombreuses archives orales et écrites documentent cette époque et les chercheurs tentent de démêler les sources pour comprendre comment le contexte économique, politique et idéologique qui est à la source de la traite et de l'esclavage américain a pu perdurer de la moitié du XV^e siècle à la moitié du XIX^e siècle¹. Leurs travaux se penchent notamment sur l'histoire générale de l'Afrique (Williams 1944, Ki Zerbo 1972, Ogot 1999), sur l'organisation sociale des royaumes ouest-africains de la zone en question (Labouret et al. 1929, Law 1997), sur l'organisation des colonies d'Amérique latine (Alencastro 2006, Tardieu 2002), sur l'évangélisation des captifs avant ou après leur embarcation pour l'Amérique (Tardieu 1993).

Concernant les travaux sur les langues parlées en Amérique latine par les Africains asservis, on peut citer parmi d'autres ceux de Tardieu (1993) et de Fernandes (2012, 2015). Les chercheurs sont unanimes sur le fait que les esclaves n'étaient obligés de parler ni la langue européenne de la colonie ni un créole, contrairement à ce qui se passait dans les colonies d'Amérique du nord, mais ils parlaient parfois des langues africaines majoritaires. Les administrateurs coloniaux et les missionnaires utilisaient quelquefois ces langues pour échanger avec eux et ils avaient élaboré des documents didactiques pour faciliter l'utilisation de ces langues. Fernandes (2015) répertorie des documents catéchétiques dans des langues du Congo, de l'Angola, du Mozambique, du Togo et du Bénin actuels. Ces œuvres anciennes présentent un intérêt linguistique et sociologique important.

Nous nous penchons particulièrement sur deux manuscrits bilingues qui semblent les plus anciens répertoriés aujourd'hui pour les langues du Golfe

1 La traite d'êtres humains tout comme l'esclavage ne sont pas cantonnés à ces dates ni à ces lieux.

du Bénin. Le premier ne porte pas de nom d'auteur et a pour titre : *Doctrina christiana ; y explicacion de sus Misterios, en nuestro idioma español, y en lengua Arda*. Il comporte vingt-huit pages, dont deux pages de couverture. Il est édité par Domingo Garcia Morràs en 1658 à Madrid. Notre source est sa reproduction en photos dans l'ouvrage de Henri Labouret et Paul Rivet : *Le royaume d'Arda et son évangélisation au XVII siècle*, édité en 1929 par l'Institut d'Ethnologie de l'Université de Paris. Le deuxième a pour auteur Antonio da Costa Peixoto et s'intitule *Obra nova de Lingoa Geral de mina traduzida, ao nosso Igdiodia*. Il a été écrit dans le Minas Gerais (Brésil) en 1741. Notre source est sa reproduction par Luis Silveira de l'Agencia Geral das Colonias à Lisboa en 1943. Elle comporte vingt-quatre pages qui retranscrivent en caractères d'imprimerie l'œuvre originale, dont deux reproductions de pages manuscrites du Frontespicio et de l'Explicit de l'œuvre. Elle est précédée d'une présentation de quatre pages par Luis Silveira.

Les intérêts de ces deux textes anciens sont multiples : d'une part, ils nous informent sur les langues des captifs telles que perçues et systématisées par les missionnaires et administrateurs coloniaux. D'autre part, ils nous renseignent indirectement sur les sociétés africaines d'hommes libres et d'hommes asservis. Par exemple, les orthographes adoptées pour la langue dite *arda* de la *Doctrina Christiana*, traduite en espagnol, et pour la langue mina de la *Obra nova* traduite en portugais, nous donnent des éléments sur la phonétique et le découpage en mots. Leur explicitation de la grammaire nous montre la relative créativité du vocabulaire métalinguistique à travers le filtre de la grammaire des langues romanes. Enfin, les mots et phrases reflètent le lexique le plus utilisé dans les échanges. Par ailleurs, les travaux qui se sont penchés sur l'identification de ces deux langues sont assez confus. Nous proposons donc de discuter de leur identité en les confrontant aux langues gbè actuelles et en nous appuyant sur quelques apports de la sociolinguistique historique.

Aujourd'hui, une grande partie des langues parlées dans le Golfe du Bénin font partie du continuum dialectal gbè, qui a été mis en lumière par les travaux de Capo (1988, 1991) selon la méthode comparative historique. Les langues gbè font partie de la famille kwa qui s'étend dans la zone côtière et forestière, de la Côte d'Ivoire au Nigéria actuels, elle-même partie de la grande famille des langues Niger-Congo. Par la suite, Kluge (2005) distingue trois sous-groupes, selon une méthodologie basée aussi sur les similarités lexicales, avec un intérêt particulier pour la morphologie. Les variétés ouest sont localisées aux Bénin,

Togo et Ghana entre les fleuves Mono à l'est et Volta et Dayi à l'ouest, de la côte au Sud à Kpesi au Nord. Les variétés centrales sont localisées à l'intérieur du Togo et du Bénin entre les fleuves Mono à l'ouest et Couffo à l'est. Les variétés est sont localisées aux Bénin et Nigeria, entre les fleuves Mono à l'ouest et Yewa à l'est. Au centre, elles s'étendent au nord au-delà d'Abomey. Par rapport aux principales langues délimitées par Capo (1988), le premier sous-groupe correspond aux langues ewe et gen, le deuxième sous-groupe correspond aux langues aja, et le troisième aux langues fon et phla-pha.

Après un rappel du contexte historique et sociolinguistique des sociétés africaines et américaines concernées (2), nous expliciterons la méthodologie utilisée (3), puis nous examinerons tour à tour la langue Arda de la *Doctrina Christiana* (4) et la *Lingoa Geral de Minna* (5) dans leurs aspects graphiques et phoniques, morphosyntaxiques et sémantiques.

2. Contextualisation historique et sociolinguistique

Le contexte intercontinental dans lequel les deux textes ont été rédigés est d'une grande complexité historique et sociolinguistique. Nous nous limitons à évoquer ce qui est indispensable pour introduire l'étude linguistique qui suivra (voir points 4 et 5). Ces deux textes présentant des langues du continuum dialectal gbè, nous nous penchons ici sur l'aire linguistique en question. En outre, puisqu'ils ont été découverts en Amérique latine, nous contextualiserons aussi leur écriture en référence à cet autre côté de l'Atlantique. Enfin, l'un des textes étant un catéchisme, il nous faudra expliciter le contexte de l'évangélisation à cette époque.

Le continuum gbè recouvre une aire linguistique correspondant à des royaumes ouest-africains qui se sont développés à partir du X^e siècle suite à diverses migrations de l'ouest puis de l'est. Ainsi, après des migrations de populations Kwa de l'ouest du fleuve Mono vers l'est durant les siècles précédents, le royaume d'Allada se crée au XV^e siècle. Il obtient peu à peu la suprématie sur les royaumes voisins, jusqu'en 1724 où il sera vaincu par le royaume du Danxomè (Law, 1997). Dans l'Afrique du Moyen Age, l'activité économique était intense : agriculture, manufacture, commerce. Thornton (1998), par exemple, qui étudie l'industrie manufacturière précoloniale en Afrique, nie le «sous-développement» économique souvent dépeint pour cette partie du monde et atteste la fabrication d'objets métalliques (or, bronze, fer), de textiles, etc. en

Afrique de l'ouest. En outre, un commerce dynamique liait les différents Etats entre eux et avec ceux du Sahel, qui faisaient le relais avec l'Afrique du Nord. Les routes commerciales sont bien connues aujourd'hui, avec des points d'étape dans lesquels des coutumes étaient perçues par les Etats traversés ; des langues véhiculaires permettaient l'intercompréhension de peuples de diverses langues. La traite de captifs était présente sur ces routes, au profit de certains de ces royaumes et vers l'Afrique du Nord.

Toutefois, du XV^e au XIX^e siècle, l'histoire politique et économique ouest-africaine est fortement liée à l'histoire des relations commerciales avec les Européens sur les côtes au sud du Sahara. En effet, dès la Reconquista de la péninsule ibérique, le royaume du Portugal d'abord, puis celui de Castille, se sont lancés dans l'exploration du monde par les mers, pour un but avant tout commercial et politique. Avant la fin du XV^e siècle, les navigateurs portugais ont fait le tour de l'Afrique et commencé des raids de capture d'hommes sur les côtes de Mauritanie et aux alentours. Ils ont également développé des relations commerciales à partir du royaume wolof (Sénégal) jusqu'au royaume de Benin (Nigeria). Les îles du Cap Vert et de São Tomé deviennent colonies portugaises (milieu du XV^e siècle), avec une administration politique et religieuse. Sur les côtes, la diversité des produits apportés par les commerçants européens, les armes à feu, parfois le prestige des nouvelles pratiques religieuses, ainsi que les taxes perçues sur l'occupation du sol par les gouvernants africains, augmentaient considérablement le pouvoir des royaumes qui échangeaient directement avec eux. Comme le montrent Ebert (2008) et Thornton (1998), les Africains contrôlaient les termes du commerce, souvent commandaient les produits à importer de l'Europe ou d'autres ports africains, demandaient des taxes et un tribut pour la factorerie, et parfois déterminaient même la langue de la transaction.

Après la découverte de l'Amérique par l'Espagne, les Portugais acquièrent le monopole de l'exploration et du commerce sur les côtes africaines. Bien que les effractions à cet accord par les autres navigateurs européens aient été nombreuses, les Portugais établissent très rapidement un grand réseau de relations de la Mauritanie à l'Angola et jouissent d'une domination commerciale sur toutes ces côtes jusqu'au XVII^e siècle. De fait, ils ont créé des petites sociétés métissées qui assuraient le commerce autant à l'intérieur des terres qu'avec les navigateurs, propageaient la langue et certaines traditions chrétiennes (Hespanha, 2021). Ces sociétés et ces hommes ont continué à être appelés Portugais ; leur influence a été telle que les traditions qu'ils ont établi dans les relations

commerciales et culturelles se sont répercutées longtemps sur les échanges ultérieurs (Ijoma, 1982) et que toutes les langues des pays côtiers d'Afrique de l'ouest ont gardé des mots d'origine portugaise (Tougbo 2010 ; Gbéto, 2021 ; Adjeran & Bassabi, 2021).

Sur l'aire du continuum gbè, les relations commerciales commencent au XVI^e siècle, entre les Portugais et le royaume Houédah. Celles-ci se développent au XVII^e siècle, surtout à Ouidah qui devient vite une ville cosmopolite et riche, et dans une moindre mesure dans d'autres comptoirs de la région. Aux XVI^e et XVII^e siècles, entre le royaume Ashanti (Ghana actuel) et l'empire de Benin (Nigeria actuel), le royaume d'Allada, de langue ayizɔ, est sans doute le plus puissant. Cependant, l'important port de Ouidah ne lui appartient pas. Les tractations d'Allada avec les commerçants européens se font à Offra (Godomey) et Jaquin (Cotonou), comptoirs beaucoup moins importants. C'est aussi à la fin du XVII^e siècle que des migrants Gã-Adangbe et Fanti (langues kwa) sont venus de l'ouest suite à des conflits participent à la construction de la ville d'Aneho (anciennement Petit Popo) au Togo actuel (Agbanon II, 1991), et à la naissance dans cette zone de la langue gɛngbè, aujourd'hui appelée aussi mina².

La traite humaine est une partie essentielle des échanges des comptoirs africains du XV^e au XIX^e siècle, même si de nombreux produits matériels sont échangés aussi (Ki-Zerbo 1972 ; Ogot 1999). À l'aide de sources nombreuses et disparates, les chercheurs tentent d'évaluer la quantité de captifs selon les zones du continent, de captifs embarqués sur les côtes africaines, et de captifs débarqués en Europe et en Amérique selon les zones coloniales et les périodes, leurs escales, etc. Nous nous centrons sur deux aspects qui nous permettent d'introduire les deux textes que nous analysons : les langues des esclaves et l'évangélisation.

Concernant le premier aspect, nous rappelons que le type d'organisation socio-politique des sociétés agro-industrielles des colonies portugaises et espagnoles, basées sur l'importation massive d'Africains asservis et sur l'absence de contrainte qui puisse limiter le travail qui leur est demandé, a pour prototype les îles de São Tomé et Cap Vert en Afrique (Voir Williams 1944, Thornton 1998). Cependant, les langues créoles qui se sont formées dans ces îles laissent supposer que les esclaves devaient parler le portugais, alors que la configuration

2 Ce qu'on appelle aujourd'hui le mina est au sens strict le gen de Aneho au Togo, et au sens large une langue mixte en majorité de gen, ewe, et anglais, parlé comme véhiculaire notamment à Lomé.

des colonies d'Amérique latine permettait aux esclaves de parler une langue africaine (Alencastro, 2006 ; Bonvini & Taddoni, 1998). À l'aide d'études antérieures, Bonvini & Taddoni (1998) montrent que, pendant de longues périodes, les importations d'Africains provenant d'un même port étaient concentrées dans une même zone du Brésil. Cela leur donnait la possibilité d'interagir dans des véhiculaires régionaux ou koinè (*linguas gerais*).

C'est ainsi qu'au XVIII^e siècle, de nombreux déportés se retrouvent à travailler dans les mines d'or et de diamants de la province de Minas Gerais sur un espace limité :

[Cela a provoqué] la concentration d'environ 100 000 esclaves originaires de la côte du Bénin (désignée «Mina» et située, grosso modo, entre le Ghana et le Nigeria), accompagnée d'un renouvellement régulier d'esclaves sur une période d'environ 40-50 ans. Cette situation a donné naissance à un parler véhiculaire typologiquement proche des langues africaines de cette même côte, dont il conserve pour l'essentiel la grammaire et le lexique, aujourd'hui classées dans le groupe «gbè» de la sous-famille «kwa». (Bonvini & Taddoni 1998, 76)

Le deuxième aspect touche un trait particulier de l'époque moderne occidentale, qui se singularise par son projet paradoxal de fonder des sociétés esclavagistes à identité catholique. Le devoir d'évangélisation s'adresse donc aussi aux Africains. Pour que la catéchèse soit mieux comprise par les Africains libres et les captifs des comptoirs africains, comme par les Africains asservis des colonies, les missionnaires s'adressent à eux dans une langue africaine. Ils utilisent probablement pour cela un même manuel de référence de doctrine chrétienne et le traduisent dans plusieurs langues africaines (Fernandes 2015). Tardieu (1993, 2002) analyse plusieurs documents utilisés à partir du XVI^e siècle et montre qu'ils auraient pour source le même document jésuite préconisé lors du Concile de Lima en 1583, traduit ensuite dans plusieurs langues africaines d'Angola, du Congo, du Bénin, du Mozambique, etc.

3. *Méthodologie*

Les questions qui se posent sur les deux textes étudiés tournent principalement autour des transcriptions déviantes des langues gbè qui y sont présentées. Les dites transcriptions présentent des problèmes graphiques, morphosyntaxique et sémantiques. Cela vient-il de leur compréhension défailante par les auteurs ? Les

textes décrivent-ils une langue qui était déjà très simplifiée du fait des mélanges de populations parmi les esclaves d'Amérique du Sud ? Notre méthodologie tient compte des circonstances d'écriture de ces deux textes, très différentes pour chacun d'eux, même s'ils ont tous deux été découverts en Amérique.

Le premier texte intitulé *Doctrina Christiana* a été écrit à Madrid. En effet en 1658, le roi d'Allada envoie un émissaire, dénommé dans les récits européens Bans ou Vans, à Madrid avec un interprète du portugais, pour demander au roi d'Espagne des missionnaires et pour lui offrir un nouveau marché, notamment de traite humaine, sur ses ports. Les deux envoyés se font catéchiser et baptiser à Madrid. Mais le roi n'accède qu'à la première demande et missionne douze religieux capucins, qui partiront en 1660. Pour préparer leur mission, certains d'entre eux, avec l'aide de l'interprète, élaborent collectivement le document *Doctrina Christiana* (Labouret & Rivet 1929, 19-20 ; Souza 2016, 7-8). La mission de 1660, sans les débouchés commerciaux attendus, sera un échec. Les Capucins sont mis à l'écart par le roi d'Allada et certains meurent de maladie. Ceux qui restent sont embarqués pour Caracas quelques mois plus tard, avec la *Doctrina Christiana*, mais d'autres hommes décèdent pendant le voyage. En 1661, un des deux survivants José de Najera (ou Naxera ou Naxara selon les sources) est appelé en Espagne pour rendre compte de la mission. Celui-ci restera comme l'auteur de la *Doctrina Christiana* qui sera utilisée dans les colonies espagnoles d'Amérique du Sud. Ce document est jugé assez mauvais par Labouret & Rivet (1929), dans des termes qui manifestent par ailleurs les représentations coloniales de leur époque (*espagnols vs Nègres, expressions indigènes vs propositions espagnoles...*) :

Composé par des prêtres espagnols qui conversaient en Portugais avec des Nègres, comprenant mal un dialecte corrompu de cette langue [portugais], il ne renferme, pour ainsi dire, aucune phrase gè qui soit correcte et le plus souvent les expressions indigènes ne correspondent pas aux propositions espagnoles qu'elles sont censées traduire. (Labouret & Rivet 1929, 35)

Le deuxième texte que nous analysons, intitulé *Obra Nova*, tente de traduire en portugais des mots, des nombres et des phrases de la langue dite mina. Fernandes (2012, 31-32) déduit à partir des pages préliminaires de la *Obra Nova* que l'auteur Costa Peixoto est « traducteur/interprète des esclaves mina » et qu'il vend ses manuels de langue. Il précise qu'il le fait sans se donner en modèle pour la langue portugaise, mais dans un but pragmatique. En effet,

Costa Peixoto exprime lui-même son motif, que Silveira (1943, 7) souligne aussi dans sa présentation :

Car il est vrai et certain, que si tous les maîtres d’esclaves, et même ceux qui n’en ont pas, avaient connu cette langue, il n’y aurait pas tant d’émeutes, de ruines, de dommages, de vols, de morts, et enfin de cas atroces ; [...] il me semble que d’une certaine manière quelques-uns de ces malheureux événements auraient pu être évités, s’il y avait eu plus d’honnêteté et moins de paresse, chez les habitants et résidents de ces pays ». (Peixoto 1741, Prologue, dans Silveira (1943 : 13))

Par ailleurs, Fernandes (2012 : 33-34) présente la langue de la *Obra Nova* comme celle des Africains embarqués à São Jorge de Mina (Elmina, Ghana), mais sa tentative n’est guère plus convaincante que celle des précédents linguistes qu’il évoque, qui oscillent entre le fɔn, gen (jeje), gùngbè, alada, ewe, ‘et d’autres’ glossonymes.

Il ressort des différentes tentatives d’identification de la langue transcrite dans les deux textes – la *Doctrina Christiana* et la *Obra Nova* – que les langues appartiennent toutes au continuum dialectal gbè. Partant, nous faisons l’hypothèse que les linguistes évoqués n’étant pas des locuteurs natifs de l’une des langues identifiées se sont fiés à l’introspection du chercheur pour proposer une/des langues qui seraient celles utilisées dans les deux textes convoqués. Or, ils ignorent certainement que les langues évoquées partagent une forte intercompréhension due à leur appartenance à un même continuum dialectal. Aussi, le caractère véhiculaire du gen dans l’aire côtière ouest-africaine située entre le Ghana oriental et le Nigéria occidental a-t-il fait écran à la langue réellement parlée dans le Royaume d’Allada au XVII^e siècle et à celle parlée au Brésil par les mineurs du Minas Gerais au XVII^e siècle, transcrites dans les deux textes. C’est du moins le constat qui ressort des langues identifiées par les auteurs qui y ont consacré des travaux et qui admettent le gen comme l’une des langues transcrites dans les deux textes.

Pour parvenir à identifier la ou les langues réellement convoquées dans les textes, nous avons adopté deux techniques qui impliquent les locuteurs natifs du mina, du fɔn et du ayizɔ, langue parlée aujourd’hui dans la ville d’Allada. La première a consisté à retrouver le mot ou la phrase à partir de la sémantique contenue dans les deux textes, que nous avons interprétée à travers la traduction en portugais ou en espagnol. Cette approche a le mérite d’aider à reconstituer les unités segmentales et suprasegmentales des mots utilisés d’une part,

et la construction syntaxique des phrases d'autre part. La deuxième a consisté, à partir de la langue en question et des sens contenus dans les deux textes, à reconstituer les unités segmentales et suprasegmentales des mots utilisés. Ces deux étapes permettent de confronter, dans les sections 4 et 5 qui suivent, les textes anciens et les langues actuelles. Elles sont précédées d'un entretien avec un dignitaire de la cour royale d'Allada, dans lequel celui-ci donne l'origine de la langue d'Allada :

(1) « Allada, connu sous le nom d'Adànhunsa, est la capitale du royaume des Fɔnnù, locuteurs natifs de la langue fɔn. Ils sont les autochtones rejoints plus tard par les Aja venus de Tado. Le contact des deux langues serait à la base la création du ayizɔ parlé par certains habitants de la ville aujourd'hui.³

Nous insistons sur l'avantage méthodologique de l'articulation des techniques utilisées avec les informations de sources orales pour fonder la notion d'authenticité des données analysées. Ces considérations permettent de situer notre approche sur les relations entre les contextes et les lieux d'emploi de la/des langues convoquées dans les deux textes et de préciser, *in fine*, la/les langues réellement utilisées.

Enfin, du fait qu'il n'existe quasiment pas de travaux sur les langues gbè classiques (XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles) dans la littérature linguistique historique, notre travail permettra des comparaisons pertinentes pour des travaux sur la diachronie des langues gbè.

4. *La langue dite Arda de la Doctrina Christiana, traduite en espagnole en 1658*

La langue d'Arda de la *Doctrina Christiana* mérite d'être clarifiée : tantôt dite la langue d'Arda ou langue d'Allada, tantôt le gen dans Labouret & Rivet (1929)⁴, alors que la langue d'origine d'Allada est connue pour être le fɔn. Les sous-sections qui suivent analysent quelques données de la *Doctrina Christiana* (1658) et des annotations de Labouret & Rivet (1929).

3 Entretien avec un dignitaire de la cour royale d'Allada en novembre 2022.

4 Labouret et Rivet (1929, 4) précisent avoir recueilli l'avis de Maurice Delafosse qui a identifié la langue «gè», ou «popo» ou mina.

4.1 Aspects graphiques, phoniques et sémantiques des textes

Le tableau 1 reproduit un extrait des données telles qu'elles sont transcrites dans la *Doctrina Christiana* (1658), recopiées et glosées par Labouret & Rivet (1929, 36-37) et les confronte à leur transcription actuelle dans la littérature linguistique.

NUMÉROTATION	(c1)	(c2)	(c3)	(c4)
(a)	cu	kú		mourir
(b)	da	dà		peser, jeter, bénir
(c)	de	dè		enlever
(d)	di	dî		croire
(e)	do	dɔ̀		dire
(f)	eite	jɛ̀ tɛ̀		descendre
g ?(h)	gu	hù		tuer
(i)	gua	wá		venir
(j)	gua	tùn	nyuèn	savoir, connaître
(k)	guan	gbà	gbàn	casser
(l)	gvanuque	gbàkpé	gbànkpé	se propager, se répandre
(m)	gue	dá-hwè		juger
(n)	gui	jî		naître
(o)	gure, xure	hwénlén	hlwen	sauver, préserver, protéger
(p)	hèè	hèn		tenir
(q)	na	ná		donner
(r)	po	kpón	kpó	regarder
(s)	pran	kpónlón	kplá	enseigner
(t)	re	jɛ̀ xá	jè	être convenable
(u)	ru	dù		manger
(v)	se	sè		entendre, écouter
(w)	sondome	hòn sín dɔ̀ mè		déterrer

Tableau 1. Transcriptions comparatives des textes de la *Doctrina Christiana* (C1) et des transcriptions littéraires actuelles du fɔn (C2) et du gen (C3), avec la traduction des gloses de la *Doctrina Christiana* (C4)

Le tableau 1 permet de formuler les remarques suivantes :

- les données proviennent de différentes langues d'un même continuum dialectal gbè ;
- les Espagnols transcrivaient les données linguistiques à partir de l'alphabet de l'espagnol puisque les langues du continuum dialectal gbè n'étaient pas dotées chacune d'un alphabet propre ;
- la correspondance graphie/phonie de l'espagnol donne des indications sur la perception des langues gbè par les scripteurs espagnols ;
- une partie des problèmes graphiques et phoniques observés proviennent de l'éloignement de la langue des transpositeurs – les Espagnols – des langues gbè transcrites.

Les déviations graphiques et phoniques se situent aux niveaux segmental et suprasegmental. A ce dernier niveau, les langues du continuum dialectal gbè, comme la plupart des langues africaines, étant des langues à tons, l'absence du marquage ou un mauvais marquage du ton peut induire des variations aussi bien phoniques que sémantiques. C'est le cas de na (Tableau 1, C₁, q) qui, sans ton propre est un morphème du futur employé comme un verbal, différent de ná (donner) et de nà (princesse).

En nous fondant sur la première technique qui a consisté à retrouver le mot (C₁) à partir de la sémantique extraite par Labouret & Rivet (1929) de la *Doctrina Christiana* (C₄), nous avons reconstitué les données des langues transcrites et nous avons identifié la présence de deux langues : le fɔn et le gen. Avec la deuxième technique qui a consisté, à partir de la langue des mots en question et des sens contenus dans les deux textes, à demander à des locuteurs natifs en fɔn et en gen de reconstituer les unités segmentales et suprasegmentales des mots utilisés, nous avons obtenus des listes dont nous donnons un extrait dans les colonnes C₂ pour le fɔn et C₃ pour le gen. Les locuteurs ont pu identifier les données des lignes (k), (l), (r), (s) et (t) comme des unités lexicales du gen.

De l'observation de C₁, C₂ et C₃, l'on peut noter qu'aucun mot de C₁ n'a été correctement transcrit même si quelques unités segmentales sont proches de la transcription attendue comme c'est le cas des lignes (b), (c), (d), (q) et (v). Les autres transcriptions s'éloignent de celles attendues, notamment du fait de l'éloignement de l'espagnol. Les transpositeurs étaient phonologiquement sourds aux consonnes /gb/, /kp/, qu'ils ont entendu et transcrit <gu>, <qu>.

<p> en (k), (l), (r) et (s). Ce constat est généralisable à l'ensemble des données transcrites par Labouret & Rivet (1929).

Les traits phoniques révèlent quelques spécificités du *gen* qui corroborent les résultats des tests avec les locuteurs natifs. En effet, à partir des textes de la *Doctrina Christiana*, on peut constater des traits de nasalités (orthographiés Vn) caractéristiques de certaines unités linguistiques de cette langue (comme en k et l) et qui la distinguent du *fɔn*. Nous retenons, de ce fait, l'identification formelle du *fɔn* et du *gen* dans les textes transcrits dans la *Doctrina Christiana*. En revanche, aucun mot du *ayizɔ* n'a été formellement identifié dans le texte à travers les tests. Les résultats lèvent donc le doute sur la présence du *ayizɔ* dans les textes de la *Doctrina Christiana* en dépit de sa pratique dans l'actuelle commune d'Allada qui regroupe encore plusieurs localités de l'ancien Royaume d'Allada, mais confirment les *Fɔnnù* comme la communauté linguistique autochtone, présente pendant cette période de l'histoire du Royaume d'Allada.

4.2 *Aspects syntaxiques des textes*

Les aspects graphiques, phoniques, avec des implications sémantiques, des textes ne sont pas sans conséquences sur le plan syntaxique. Les transcriptions faites dans la *Doctrina Christiana* révèlent qu'il serait quasiment impossible pour un locuteur natif ou un simple locuteur, de reconstituer les contenus sémantiques des phrases transcrites en se fondant uniquement sur les données segmentales. Il en ressort qu'aucune analyse syntaxique sérieuse n'est envisageable à partir des données telles qu'elles sont transcrites. Pour fonder ce constat, nous avons procédé au test avec la première technique qui a consisté à retrouver la phrase à partir de la sémantique contenue dans la *Doctrina Christiana*, que nous avons interprétée à travers la traduction en espagnol. Le test a abouti à des résultats concluants et a aidé à reconstituer les unités segmentales et suprasegmentales des mots utilisés d'une part, et la construction syntaxique des phrases d'autre part. La deuxième a consisté, à partir de la transcription des phrases en question et des sens contenus dans la *Doctrina Christiana*, à reconstituer les phrases proposées. Les résultats se sont avérés non concluants. C'est le cas des exemples suivants extraits de la Fol. 1 de la *Doctrina Cristiana* (1658), pour lesquels Labouret & Rivet (1929, 40) ont proposé d'autres traductions en

gen. Nous reportons leur écrit avec leur explication, mais nous introduisons une cinquième ligne (en gras) avec le texte transcrit en gen actuel :

(2) « A la première ligne, le texte espagnol ;

la seconde, le texte arda de 1658 ;

A la troisième, le texte gē moderne rétabli autant qu'il était possible ;

A la quatrième, la traduction française. [...]

1. <i>Todo fiel Christiano</i>	3. <i>a tener deuocion</i>
<i>Mippo Sebody,</i>	<i>hèè, devoción</i>
<i>me popo se bodu</i>	<i>ben e devoción</i>
<i>Personne fidèle loi assemble</i>	<i>tient lui dévotion</i>
kiristo bé gbejí nɔ tó	ḡó lɔnlɔn kɔkwE& gán
2. <i>es muy obligado</i>	4. <i>de todo coraçon</i>
<i>ete, enuaco,</i>	<i>nique, tuegi,</i>
<i>et e e nua co</i>	<i>nu ke tu eji</i>
<i>c'est sur son cou (il est obligé)</i>	<i>chose qui pousse cœur »</i>
é ḡó lá wɔè	kú eji blíbo

L'extrait (2) montre que les transcriptions proposées par Labouret & Rivet sont très proches de celles contenues dans la *Doctrina Christiana* mais loin des phrases en gen. La nuance entre les deux transcriptions réside dans la séparation des unités segmentales par Labouret & Rivet, mais celle-ci n'est pas suffisante pour parvenir à leur compréhension.

5. *La Obra Nova de Lingua Geral de Mina, traduite en portugais par Antonio da Costa Peixoto en 1741*

La notation des langues africaines a posé des problèmes de transcription aux premiers analystes européens qui s'y sont intéressés aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles. Ces difficultés de transcription ont une influence autant sur les aspects graphiques que phoniques des textes, et par conséquent, sur les aspects sémantiques et syntaxiques. Les sous-sections qui suivent mettent en lumière les difficultés relatives à la langue gen (mina) transcrites dans la *Obra Nova de Lingua Geral de Mina*.

5.1 Aspects graphiques, phoniques et sémantiques des textes

Partons d'une observation comparative des données telles qu'elles sont transcrites dans la *Obra Nova* de *Lingua Geral de Mina* (Silveira 1943, 15) et telles qu'elles sont graphiées en gen actuel. Le tableau 2 extrait une partie de ces données en reproduisant la mise en page de Silveira (1943, 15) et en donnant les mots correspondants en gen actuel ainsi que les équivalents sémantiques français. Suivant la convention orthographique actuelle du gen, les tons sont notés ; l'absence de marquage du ton sur une voyelle indique que cette voyelle est porteuse du ton moyen.

Num.	Mots et leur traduction de la <i>Obra Nova</i> (en gras le gen actuel)	Equivalents français
L1	da (a. eɔ̀à) — cabelo // ta (b. eɔ̀à) — cabessa // jòzim (c. jò̀zì) — lendias	cheveux // tête // lentes
L2	jô (d. eǰ) — piolhos // dábâ (e. eɔ̀à) — cabeleira // agom gou gou (f. ahɔ̀nhɔ̀n ou tagbó) — miollos	poux// cheveux // cervelle
L3	vtou (g. eɔ̀ó) — orelhas // hum dá ma (h. aɔ̀abà fú) — sobrancehas	oreilles// sourcils
L4	anucum (i. nkúví) — olhos // ahótim (j. awɔ̀ntín) — naris // num (k. enù) — boca // adú (l. aɔ̀ũ) — dentes	yeux // narines // bouche //dents
L5	èdê (m. aɔ̀ě) — lingoa // numquom (n. ngónú) — a testa // numplou (o. esikíki ó) — os beissos	langue// le front // les bisous
L6	bàchuhê (p. nkúmè) — o rosto	le visage
L7	a tam (q. ègèn) — barba // végame (r. vègómè) — garganta	barbe // gorge
L8	cô (s. eko) — pescosso	cou
L9	ano (t. anó o) — mamas // ajáme (u. axamè) — as costellas	seins // les côtes
L10	choume (v. podô) — barriga // vgom (w. ahǰnví) — embigo // adô (w. aɔ̀víví) — tripas // tum (x. èjí) — coração	ventre // nombril // tripes // cœur

Tableau 2. Traductions et transcriptions comparatives des gloses de la *Obra Nova* de *Lingua Geral de Mina* (Silveira 1943, 15) avec le gen actuel (en gras)

Le tableau 2 permet de formuler certaines remarques spécifiques, tandis que d'autres remarques sont identiques à celles du tableau 1 :

- les données proviennent réellement du *gen* ;
- l'auteur de la *Obra Nova*, portugais du Brésil, a transcrit les données linguistiques à partir de l'alphabet du portugais puisque les langues du continuum dialectal gbè n'étaient pas dotées chacune d'un alphabet propre ;
- la correspondance graphie/phonie du portugais donne des indications sur la perception des langues gbè par le scripteur et les lecteurs portugais brésiliens ;
- contrairement aux transcriptions proposées dans la *Doctrina Christiana*, celles contenues dans la *Obra Nova* présentent quelques constances susceptibles d'orienter le spécialiste-locuteur dans la lecture des textes.

Les transcriptions de la *Obra Nova* révèlent qu'il serait quasiment impossible pour un locuteur natif ou même pour un simple locuteur de reconstituer les contenus sémantiques des unités linguistiques transcrites en se fondant uniquement sur les données segmentales de (a) à (x). Toutefois, sur la base des transcriptions proposées en gras dans le tableau 2, nous remarquons des constances susceptibles d'orienter le spécialiste-locuteur avisé dans la lecture des textes. Certaines transcriptions très proches des transcriptions actuelles de la langue, donc moins problématiques, ne sont pas suffisantes pour lever les difficultés observées : **L1-a**, **L1-b**, **L1-c**, **L4-j**, **L4-l** et **L7-r**. Pour les exemples (a) et (b), la transcription de la *Obra Nova* a pris en compte les données de discours spontané. Dans un style soutenu, les voyelles initiales ne sont pas élidées comme on peut l'observer dans les transcriptions actuelles en **L1-a** et en **L1-b**.

Tout comme dans la *Doctrina Christiana*, la défaillance de la transcription des unités segmentales et le non-marquage des tons ou leur marquage erroné se rajoutent aux difficultés de reconstitution du sens de chaque unité linguistique (Voir L3, L6, L8, L9 et L10). Nous fondant sur les transcriptions du tableau 2, nous avons dégagé quelques clés de lecture des textes de la *Obra Nova* :

- <ô> doit se lire [ɔ] comme dans les exemples **L1-c**, **L1-d**, **L1-** et **L10-v** ;
- <e> doit se lire [E] comme dans les exemples **L7-r** et **L9-u** ;
- <im> doit se lire [in] comme dans les exemples **L1-c**, **L1-d**, **L1-s** et **L10-v** ;
- <c> suivi de <u,o> doit se lire [k] comme dans les exemples **L4-i** et **L8-s** ;
- <j> doit se lire [x] comme dans les exemples **L4-i** et **L8-s**.

Toutefois, ces clés ne s'appliquent qu'aux transcriptions très proches des transcriptions actuelles du gEn. Par ailleurs, certains graphèmes correspondent à plusieurs sons comme dans les exemples en **L1-c** józim (**c. jǒžìn**) - lendias et **L9-u** ajáme (**u. axamè**) - as costellas, où la lettre <j> se lit tantôt [dZ] tantôt [x].

Au niveau sémantique, il va de soi qu'il est difficile de retrouver le sens des mots à partir de leur transcription dans la *Obra Nova* (deuxième technique) à cause des déviations observées au niveaux segmental et suprasegmental. Ce n'est qu'à partir des traductions en français (première technique) que les mots (a) à (x) ont pu être retrouvés. Les textes comportent quelques confusions lexicales, comme en **L10-v** ou choume (**cu≡mEЭ**) signifie « omoplate » et non « ventre ».

5.2 Aspects syntaxiques du texte

La plupart des remarques faites en 4.2 s'appliquent aussi aux textes de la *Obra*. Les deux mêmes techniques ont été utilisées et ont abouti aux mêmes résultats : le premier test qui s'appuyait sur des traductions a permis de construire les unités segmentales, suprasegmentales, lexicales et de reconstruire la syntaxe des phrases. Cependant, le deuxième qui s'appuyait des transcriptions de la *Lingua Geral de Mina* n'ont permis de reconstituer ni les phrases, ni le lexique gen. Les résultats obtenus ne sont pas surprenants en ce sens que les constats sur les aspects syntaxiques confortent ceux sur les aspects graphiques et sémantiques (5.1).

Dans le tableau 4, les exemples L2 à L6 (Silveira 1943, 23) montrent que les amalgames segmentaux opérés dans la *Obra Nova* excluent la possibilité de distinguer les constituants des différentes phrases. Toutefois, dans de rares cas, même si les amalgames lexicaux et la défaillance des transcriptions n'ont pas permis de reconstituer des phrases bien formées en gen (deuxième technique), les phrases construites en gen à partir des traductions (première technique) manifestent des similitudes avec les transcriptions de la *Obra Nova*, comme dans les exemples L26-27 (Silveira 1943, 27).

L2-3	hiháboutó mématimaguam (ahwa mú le yovódé o) — terra de branco não tem guerra	le pays des Blancs n'a pas de guerre
L4	maguméréhá (nyɛ mú hù amɛdɛ ò)	je n'ai tué personne
L5-6	humgu meru pou (mu hu amɛdɛ) — matey hua pessoa // megutõ (amɛhutõ) — matador	j'ai tué une personne // tueur
L26-27	nàmenumre'màdu (nǎ mù (e)núdé má dǔ) — dame algua couza p.a comer	donne-moi quelque chose à manger

Tableau 4. Traductions et transcriptions comparatives des gloses de la *Obra Nova de Lingua Geral de Mina* (Silveira 1943, 23 & 27) en gen actuel

L'amalgame segmental et lexical de la *Obra Nova* est tel qu'aucune constante pouvant guider une analyse syntaxique ne peut être extraite. Ce constat est applicable sans exception à toutes les phrases contenues dans les textes de la *Obra Nova*. Il est remarquable que l'auteur n'a pas cherché à découper des unités syntaxiques, et n'a pas non plus discerné des régularités dans la syntaxe des phrases du mina ou gen.

6. Discussion et conclusion

Nous nous sommes penchés sur les dynamiques sociales et linguistiques propres au XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles sur la côte ouest-africaine et sur les plantations esclavagistes des colonies européennes. Nous avons présenté comme résultat de ces dynamiques deux anciennes descriptions des langues gbè en espagnol et en portugais.

Les difficultés inhérentes à ces premiers écrits sur les langues gbè sont de deux ordres. Le premier est lié à l'identification de la ou des langues qui ont fait l'objet des transcriptions de la *Doctrina Christiana* et la *Obra Nova*. Concernant le premier texte qui annonce la langue d'Arda, nous avons remarqué une confusion entre le glossonyme et le nom du Royaume d'Allada⁵. Cette connaissance approximative de la langue est révélatrice d'une démarche méthodologique peu rigoureuse couplée des barrières linguistiques. Au XX^e

5 Labouret & Rivet créent une langue mais aussi une ethnie Arda « les Arda » (1929 : 4).

siècle, Labouret & Rivet (1929) ont désigné cette langue par le mina ou le gen. La confusion de ces auteurs comme des auteurs ultérieurs est sans doute née de leur méthode de travail basée sur l'introspection. Ceux-ci semblent se fonder sur l'idée que des communautés linguistiques qui se comprenaient parlaient donc la même langue. Sur l'observation de quelques mots, ils déduisent que la langue parlée dans le Royaume d'Allada au XVII^e siècle, transcrite dans la *Doctrina Christiana*, est le gen. Or, d'une part la présence du fon est notable dans la *Doctrina Christiana*, d'autre part, le fon et le gen appartiennent au même continuum dialectal gbè et partagent une intercompréhension et des réalisations phonétiques proches. Il n'est pas étonnant que les interprètes, au XVII^e siècle, aient fourni aux Capucins des mots de plusieurs langues de l'aire linguistique gbè pour élaborer la *Doctrina Christiana*. Dans la *Obra Nova de Lingua Geral de Mina* en revanche, le glossonyme est clairement identifié : il s'agit bien du mina ou gen.

Le deuxième ordre de difficultés est en rapport avec la transcription (segmentale et suprasegmentale) des textes dans les deux documents étudiés. Le manque de pertinence de la démarche adoptée par les auteurs de la *Doctrina Christiana* et la *Obra Nova* a induit des difficultés graphiques et phoniques sources de perturbations sémantiques et syntaxiques. L'absence de règles de transcription a rendu les textes inexploitable à partir des gloses qui y sont proposées. Par ailleurs, nous ne rejoignons pas Fernandes (2015, 60) pour qui les diacritiques sur certaines voyelles indiquent un ton. Or le marquage des tons aurait permis la distinction des unités linguistiques et plus de précision pour le sens ainsi qu'une étude plus approfondie de la syntaxe.

Au regard des divers niveaux de difficultés dans l'interprétation des textes de la *Doctrina Christiana* et de la *Obra Nova de Lingua Geral de Mina*, nous retenons qu'il y a eu une négligence des objectifs basiques de l'écriture d'une langue : l'explicitation et la fidélité à des règles claires de transcription. Au-delà des conventions arbitraires, l'écriture pouvait être un moyen pour une meilleure conservation des textes, mais elle a été aussi partiellement un obstacle.

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“Nice Blighty!”
The linguistic representation of the First World War soldier
in *The Trench*

Abstract

Trench talk, the slang used by British soldiers during World War One, has numerous complexities and nuances still unexplored. This article seeks to investigate the linguistic representation of this jargon in the film *The Trench* (1999). By analysing the linguistic features attributable to trench talk, the present study enquires into how these contribute to the fictional representation of the British soldier in this film. The use of trench talk in this case study fulfils different filmic functions such as “character revelation” and “adherence to the code of realism” (Kozloff, 2000).

1. *Introduction*

World War One (WWI) was a pivotal moment in modern history, and the image of a soldier lying down in the trenches is etched in the collective memory of many countries (see Fussell 1975). Men fighting in this war have been fictionally represented on screen since the time of the conflict itself, when the audiovisual industry was at its dawn. Studies such as Kelly's (1997) and Copping's (2020) addressed the topic of the First World War as a shared cultural experience, and the subsequent representation of its main protagonists – soldiers – on screen. Nevertheless, issues concerning the fictional representation of their language seem to be scarcely investigated. Various studies (Doyle and Walker 2012; Winkowski 2017; Walker 2017) strived to pinpoint the main characteristics of the historical ‘slang’ used by anglophone soldiers on the frontline, soldiers pertaining to the British armies (including Irish, Canadian, Indian and

troops from other parts of the Empire) and at a later point the American army. These works show the complex system of nuances and references present in this linguistic phenomenon and highlight the social and psychological context in which it emerged and took shape. Concerning audiovisual studies, several works (see Hall 1997; Kozloff 2000; Ranzato and Zanotti 2018) analysed how the representation of any linguistic variety is not passive, but possesses a transformative role which influences its perception, and ultimately the variety itself. This can be true not only for the representation of regional or social dialects *sensu stricto*, but also for other forms of register (in the sense intended by Agha 2004). The use of WWI soldiers' slang in audiovisual (AV) representations can fall under this definition.

The character of the WWI soldier has received great attention through time, and his representation is loaded with connotations, though in different ways – depending on period and ideology – as noted by Kelly (1997). A form of fictional language – deriving at least partially from historical trench talk – plays an important role in many of these depictions. Lippi-Green (2012) noted how linguistic stereotypes are reinforced by audiovisual products and media; detecting them in WWI soldiers' fictional speech can be useful to outline how collective memory registers and portrays a massive historical event such as the Great War, and how memory itself is reshaped and 'enregistered' by these representations. Ranzato and Zanotti (2018, 1) state that representation is always the result of an act of selection. This selection is usually restricted to a limited number of stereotyped characteristics to make the characters recognizable by the audience (Gross 1991).

Kozloff (2000, 47) states that "adherence to expectations concerning realism" is one of the fundamental elements of fictional dialogue. According to Kozloff, 'realism' is achieved when a text "adheres to a complex code of what a culture at a given time agrees to accept as plausible, everyday, authentic" (Ibid.). Therefore, when this study refers to 'realism', it is always intended as 'realistic for an audience'. Moreover, this sense of realism often relies on stereotypes – defined by Giddens (2006) as preconceived opinions of the members of a group towards the members of another group. In WWI soldiers' speech, this adherence to realism is given by using terms and expressions that are perceived to be historically collocated in that specific period by the audience, and therefore give a sense of plausibility to the fictional text.

A certain amount of linguistic realism, however, is required to match viewers' expectation of spontaneity and spoken fluency, thus ensuring their suspension of disbelief and immersion in the world represented on screen [...]. Media enjoyment, in fact, is strictly bound to plausibility as audiences become immersed in the fictional representation through realistic characters and settings, but also, we may add, credible dialogues. (Pavesi et al. 2014, 10-11)

Moreover, this (perceived) linguistic precision must be kept in balance with intelligibility for the audience. This process is described by Pavesi (2009) as 'selective mimesis', where linguistic elements with culture-specific pragmatic meanings are used to recreate a sense of realism in fictional dialogues. Therefore, detecting the linguistic elements deriving from trench talk that are used in AV fictional representations and the frequency of their use can outline how big a role language plays in the reconstruction and renegotiation of WWI memory in British culture. These dynamics of cultural memory (see Erll and Rigney 2009) help the modern British cinema audience to deduce the degree of intelligibility of historical trench talk terms.

The aim of this work is to conduct a linguistic analysis of the WWI British soldier's fictional representation in the film *The Trench* (1999). Produced in Britain with the coproduction of French companies, this film was written and directed by the British author and screenwriter William Boyd, at his directing debut (BFI 2012).

The film was chosen as a case study as the plot is entirely set in the trench warfare context, providing an 'all soldiers' context and numerous instances of daily life and communication in the trenches and therefore, offers the possibility to analyse many of the characteristics attached to British WWI soldiers in audiovisual products.

By drawing on the aforementioned studies on trench slang, this article seeks to investigate how big a role language plays in the on-screen characterisation of soldiers, by detecting the use of lexical elements that are historically marked, and therefore contribute towards strengthening the sense of 'realism' of these fictional characters.

2. *Trench talk*

According to Walker, "By the end of 1914 the trench had become a clear locus of terminology" (2017, 204), a fertile ground for a 'trench slang' to develop in various aspects of their daily life in that context. This 'slang' presents a wide

variety of lexical elements, for instance names for technical roles, objects, actions, and states of health (Ibid.: 205). ‘Trench talk’ is an umbrella term used by some scholars (see Doyle and Walker 2012; Winkowski 2017) to designate these lexical elements of soldiers’ language. The present study follows this definition.

For this analysis, trench talk will be considered as a ‘register’. The term was first coined by Reid (1956), and further developed by various scholars including Agha (2004) who defines it as: “a linguistic repertoire that is associated, culture-internally, with particular social practices and with persons who engage in such practices.” The process of how linguistic forms become part of a register, and how they are ‘indexical’ to the people and the characteristics associated with them (Agha 2003, 2004, 2005), is of paramount importance when observing WWI trench language. This process, called ‘enregisterment’, makes a set of values and behaviours, which are differentiable from other cultures, linked to a specific community and their linguistic variety (Agha 2003, 2007). In this light, what was termed ‘trench society’ forms the social ingroup, and trench talk is assumed to be the linguistic register in which this ingroup expresses its perspectives and values. The conscious recognition of a set of values can be shown by ‘Indexicality’, defined by Silverstein (2003) as the degree of relationship between a linguistic form and its socio-cultural meaning; it is divided into three orders. The first order of indexicality is created by the simple association of a linguistic form and a social category, while in the second order the linguistic form comes to have a social meaning linked to it, and a pragmatic meaning is conveyed. In these first two orders of indexicality, conscious recognition of the association by the speaker/casual listener is not required. The third order indicates the highest level of indexicality, when the linguistic form, linked to a specific social meaning or category, becomes the subject of overt and conscious comment. The association has also become more complex and has acquired additional meanings, linked to subtle aspects of the original association.¹ Even though Walker (2017) does not refer to indexicality directly, his studies show the high level of self-awareness soldiers had of their peculiar talk, together with the fact that it received great interest by the British media in the home front (Ibid.), for instance through the use of ‘trench glossaries’ (Ibid., see also Laugesen 2020). Therefore,

1 As stated by Joan Beal in her lecture ‘Dialect literature as evidence for historical enregisterment’, in the conference ‘Them and [uz]-accents and dialects in fictional dialogue’, 28th February 2019 - Sapienza Università di Roma.

under this point of view, trench talk has reached a third order of indexicality since almost from the beginning of the First World War, as it can be considered a register that received comment both by the ingroup (entrenched soldiers) and an outgroup (civilians at the home front in the UK), and that presented a complex system of associations and nuances.

Strictly speaking, trench talk is primarily a lexical phenomenon, and its vocabulary has heterogeneous semantic roots. Although a significant part of its terms are neologisms invented by soldiers during WWI (see Walker 2017, 47-54), others were already part of the British Army slang since the 19th century: these are mostly calques from colonized languages, such as Hindi, Urdu, and Arabic (Doyle and Walker 2012, 238-49). For instance, the iconic term 'Blighty' is a calque of *biliayati*, the Urdu word for 'foreigner' (Walker 2017, 49). Furthermore, the terms of trench slang widely circulated during the conflict (Walker 2017; Walker and Doyle 2012) thanks to the existence of the aforementioned trench glossaries and dictionaries (Laugesen 2020), and trench journals such as the popular 'The Wipers Times' (Walker 2017; this journal has been recently reprinted by Osprey Publishing in 2015).

To provide a brief overview of trench talk terms and their use, a short illustrative list is here presented. The examples included are taken from the aforementioned works by Doyle and Walker (2012) and Walker (2017), and also from a dictionary of WWI slang compiled by Fraser and Gibbons (1925). The terms are divided into categories by the author to facilitate the overview:

- Calques from French (usually puns, wordplays): '*napoo*', from 'il n'y a plus' (there's no more); '*toot the sweet*', from 'tout de suite' (swiftly), and its development in '*the tooter, the sweeter*' (the faster, the better).
- Calques and loans from languages of the different British colonies (most of them entered in the army slang during the 19th century): '*blighty*', from Urdu 'bilati/biliayati' (stranger, foreigner), in trench talk with the meaning of 'England / Britain' or generally 'home'; '*cushy*' from Hindi 'kush' (comfortable); '*pukka*' (true, real).
- Terms for illnesses and health problems: '*trench fever*'; '*trench foot*' (damage by moisture); a '*blighty wound*' or a '*blighty touch*' (a non-lethal wound that allowed a soldier to go back home to receive treatment).

- Terms for weapons (names were given, for example, to various kinds of bombs and grenades, according to their shape, sound, etc...): ‘*whizz-bang*’; ‘*flaming onion*’; ‘*shrapnel*’; ‘*Wipers express*’; ‘*Bertha*’; ‘*Minnie*’.
- Persons, actions, places: ‘*suicide club*’ (a machine-gun or bombing company, whose men had very short life expectancies); ‘*temporary gentlemen*’ (a volunteer promoted to officer for the duration of the war); ‘*stand to*’ (when all troops mounted the guard on the trench parapet twice a day, at dawn and at sunset); ‘*no-man’s-land*’ (the land between the two opposite trenches); ‘*to go over the top*’ (to charge the enemy’s trench, crossing no-man’s-land).
- A particular category of words belonging to trench talk is made of place names, for instance towns and villages, located in the proximity of the front and that were affected by troop movements. The communication necessities were hampered by the fact that these localities had French or Flemish names, which were difficult to pronounce or read for most of the British soldiers. The solution was presented by mangling these names according to their pronunciation or their orthography, and these ‘new’ names eventually reached a certain level of standardisation among the British troops (Walker, 2017:99-102). The most iconic one was ‘*Wipers*’ (Ypres), but others were present (Ibid.): ‘*Tee-ay-val*’ (Thiepval), ‘*Primrose Hill*’ (Przemysl), ‘*Mucky Farm*’ (Mouquet Ferme), ‘*Arm In Tears*’ (Armentières), ‘*Eatables*’ (Ètapes), ‘*Plugstreet*’ (Ploegsteert), ‘*Ruin*’ (Rouen).

This partial list suggests the widespread use of trench talk in different semantic fields of daily life at the front – in the case of this analysis, the Western Front. Nevertheless, these scholars are at pains to underline that the *raison d’être* of trench talk should not be intended only in its practical daily use, but also in the social and psychological role it played for men in the trenches. In fact, the peculiar positional nature of this conflict created its own rules and rituals, a sort of ‘trench society’, very distant from civilian life and completely detached from the ordinary psychological constructs. Fussel (1975, 191), called this environment the ‘Theater of War’: “The most obvious reason why ‘theater’ and modern war seem so compatible is that modern wars are fought by conscripted armies, whose members know they are only temporarily playing

their ill-learned parts”. Under a certain perspective, trench talk can be seen as the linguistic reflection of this change of context. Taking this psychological aspect into consideration is pivotal to understanding the more nuanced aspects of this slang, such as the humorous nature of a substantial part of its terms. Walker specifies how humour helped soldiers to cope with the reality of the conflict, and its paramount importance in the spontaneous creation of trench talk (2017, 102):

Humour no doubt helped both soldiers and civilians get through, and is an essential part of the record of language; [...] The range of humour recorded is an indicator of people finding, and significantly wanting to record, an experience away from the casualty lists, the squalor and degradation of the Front, the fear, the anger and the hopelessness.

Together with humour, Walker also detects avoidances as another cornerstone of trench talk. By ‘avoidances’ the scholar means euphemisms and abbreviations used by soldiers to “make things a little less real by not naming them” (Ibid.: 81). Both humour and avoidances share the same function: to ease the stress caused to soldiers by trench warfare. It is arguably not by chance that these avoidances and their euphemistic substitutes are one of the most prolific aspects of trench talk. Through this operation, soldiers lightened the psychological burden evoked by certain words, or the image behind them. This process can be observed for instance by looking at the words identifying German soldiers. The concept of ‘enemy’ certainly embodied a tremendous emotional load, especially at the front line, where the enemy was a physical presence often at limited distance and also with uncertain lethal proximity. Trench talk coped with the situation by not calling Germans by their proper name, or even not naming them at all. Quite well-known is the creative use of pejorative names the British attached to Germans, like ‘Boches’, ‘Huns’, ‘Jerries’, ‘Alleyman’, or simply, through a process of depersonalisation, ‘Them’ (Walker and Doyle 2012; Walker 2017; Winkowski 2017). In addition, vulgar language should be considered an integral part of this language. Swearing, in fact, had a lightening effect, and its use was far more accepted in trenches, compared to the rigid British society of the beginning of the 20th century; various sources attest the widespread use of swear words among all the ranks in the army (Walker 2017, 113-21).

The linguistic aspects of trench talk are therefore closely related to the social and psychological environment that existed in the distinctive situation of

daily life in the trenches, and how this environment was perceived by civilians at that time. It is in the author's opinion, according to the considerations hitherto exposed, that a well-balanced analysis – which takes all these aspects into consideration – can define more precisely the importance of trench language for that specific historical period. Moreover, it can clarify how trench talk is attached to the experience of WWI, as well as to the traces left by this language on the soldiers and on the British collective memory thereafter.

3. The Trench

The Trench tells the story of a platoon composed by young men from different parts of the UK, in the forty-eight hours before the tragic beginning of the Battle of the Somme on July 1st, 1916. This was one of the fiercest moments of the war, in which almost 60,000 British soldiers were killed or wounded in the first day of the attack (Sheffield 2003, 41-69).

In this film, although a certain kind of collective experience is depicted, the plot is centred around a soldier in his teens, Billie MacFarlane (Paul Nicholls), who lies about his age in order to volunteer in the army with his elder brother. The platoon is commanded by the harsh sergeant Telford Winter (Daniel Craig), who becomes a sort of reference point for the young Billie. The film depicts the shared feelings of soldiers, and how they coped with the tension, the fear, and the boredom of being entrenched. As the title suggests, this film is entirely set in the trenches and provides a representation of a 'trench society'. It is interesting, for the purposes of this study, to see how the characters' language is represented in an 'all soldiers' context, namely, to what extent trench slang is part of this representation.

The use of linguistic elements borrowed from trench talk constitute a part of the soldier stereotypisation in this film. For example, when Billie is worried thinking about his brother, who has previously been hit by a sniper and sent to a field hospital behind the lines, another soldier tries to comfort him:

Sorry about your brother. Think about it: that could be a stroke of luck! Nice Blighty!

He is trying to boost Billie's morale by suggesting him that his brother had a so-called 'Blighty touch' (Doyle and Walker 2012, 195-7), a non-fatal wound

that could allow him to go back home, in a safe environment far from the front line. This line is not central to the plot – the character that utters it is in fact a side character, and it can be considered a representation of a casual conversation occurring in the trench context. It could be remarked that the topic of this conversation – a wounded soldier being lucky to go home – is not uncommon in war films, regardless of the historical period represented. As pre-1999 instances of war films are copious, the influence of a pre-existing cinematographic narrative tradition cannot be excluded. Nevertheless, this additional layer of analysis is beyond the scope of this study, as it focuses on pinpointing the specifics of trench talk and its use in the audiovisual representation. As shown in this instance, the use of terms belonging to trench talk contributes to foregrounding the historical localisation and strengthens the ‘adherence to the code of realism’ (Kozloff 2000, 47).

In another scene, a haughty colonel – a very high and rare rank to be found on the front line – is about to give the troops an ‘uplifting’ speech in front of a recording camera. In this speech he focuses on the general prediction that, after days of tactical bombing, the German resistance to the attack would be minimal:

I want to ensure you men, that after the bombardment you’ve seen you’ll be able to go over the top with a walking stick.

‘To go over the top’, an idiomatic expression today, was one of the key phrases of trench talk. It means to climb over the trench parapet and attack the enemy on the other side of no-man’s-land. This phrase has a symbolic import because the action of climbing over was deeply symbolic for soldiers. Fussell (1975) detected in the boundary of the trench parapet something perceived by soldiers as the end of the ‘known’ world, while Doyle and Walker state that going over the top “was to be a pivotal experience in the life of a Great War soldier” (2012, 183) and therefore one of the most iconic trench terms of WWI. In fact, the whole plot of *The Trench* is centred around inexperienced fellow soldiers waiting for this event, framed in the historical context of the British aggressive strategy known as ‘The Big Push’ (Ibid.: 227). The term is used again by sergeant Winter himself when he talks with Billie before the attack and states that “when you go over the top, you’re in another world”; with the same meaning, a young soldier uses the term ‘going over’.

Among the objects present in the trench context, food was not exempted from having nicknames (Walker and Doyle 2012, 144). In one scene, Winter's superior, and platoon commander Lt. Harte (Julian Rhind-Tutt) asks his aide, Pvt. Bone (Tim Murphy) to make him a sandwich:

Um...I'll have a sandwich please, Bone, and anything you like. Anything you want, except for...except the Bully Beef.

'Bully Beef' was the name troops gave to canned corned beef. Walker and Doyle (2012, 146) note how the origin of the term is obscure, but it likely came from the French term 'bouilli' ('boiled'). Fraser and Gibbons seem to confirm this etymology (1925, 30), adding that the term originated in the Navy slang. The fact that Harte refuses to eat Bully Beef could be a historical reference to its predominance in soldiers' nutrition despite its questionable quality. Harte uses another term belonging to trench talk while informing Winter about the planned attack:

Harte: Seven thirty.

Winter: Seven thirty... but that's broad daylight!

Harte: All to do with the timing of the barrage. Been the same for the past six days. Can't change it.

'Barrage' comes from French with the sense of 'barring the way' (Doyle and Walker 2012, 162), and in the army the term was used to identify a barrier created by a concentrated bombardment on the German lines, in the case of this scene seen as a strategic weakening of German defence.

As underlined in section 2, the 'creative' mangling of French names of geographical places of interest, such as towns and villages was a fertile aspect of trench talk (Walker 2017, 99). For instance, when sergeant Winter reassures Billie that his brother is safe and that he is receiving treatment at the hospital located in Étaples, this was a major nerve centre for French-British troops on the Western Front. The original French pronunciation of the town's name is [e'tapl], while sergeant Winter pronounces it with something closer to 'eatapples' [itæp:əls]. This pronunciation was testified at the time by some observers, as shown by Fraser and Gibbons (1925, 64): "Eatables (also Eat Apples): Army

vernacular for the name of the town of Etaples” [bold type in the original]. The use of this pronunciation by the character is therefore not casual, but rather historically marked. Another noteworthy example of how WWI soldiers named places is shown at the very beginning of the film, when the main protagonist Billie is presented; he asks Bone where his brother is, who replies ‘Pettycoat Lane’. The habit of naming trenches with famous street names was partially ironic, but in actuality it served as a way for soldiers to orient themselves (Doyle and Walker 2012, 91). This element is also present visually in the film, as signboards indicating directions are visible in some scenes; these signboards were widely used during the war and some of them even survived the conflict and are now part of war museums (Ibid.: 92).

The words and phrases analysed so far are among the more historically marked. Nevertheless, the representation of WWI soldiers in *The Trench* presents other linguistic elements that have a connection with trench talk, namely the use of euphemisms and avoidances. In one scene Billie is about to stand night guard with a comrade. His curiosity brings him to peep through the trench loophole, only to be immediately stopped by sergeant Winter. The dialogue is reported in its entirety:

Winter: Oi, MacFarlane! Keep your head down. [pause] Right, you two, listen. No smokin’... no sleepin’.

MacFarlane: Sarge? Uhm... How far off are they, like? ‘Cos I can’t see anything from up there.

Winter: About 400 yards. But they’ll be watching you, my friend. Last lot here had nine picked off.

MacFarlane: Picked off?

Winter: Snipers. Why do you think they dug these trenches so fucking deep? They’ll have a sniper rifle fixed on that loophole. Every time they see it move, they’ll just loose off a shot. Listening’s more important. So, don’t play silly buggers.

MacFarlane: Alright, sarge.

Winter: You got jocks to the left of you... micks to the right. That’s all you need to know for now.

MacFarlane: Sarge? When's uhm... when's the attack, like?

Winter: I'll let you know in plenty of time. [pause] Billy... put one up.

Firstly, it is possible to observe the presence of euphemisms. As previously said, the use of avoidances was one of the main characteristics of trench talk. Walker (2017, 133) points out how this aspect largely occurred when the topic related to being killed (or about death in general) and that different ways to speak of death in an indirect, depersonalized way were used by soldiers. In the scene currently analysed, the phrasal verb 'picked off' is used instead of 'getting killed', and it is so vague for Billie, not accustomed to this language, that he is forced to ask his superior about its meaning. His sergeant only replies with the word 'snipers', which could be considered another avoidance, as the answer is related to the question in an oblique way. Lastly, at the end of the scene, Winter suggests Billie to 'put one up', meaning to keep his rifle loaded. In addition, the phrasal verb 'loose off', meaning 'to shoot a bullet', can be considered a euphemism, and part of trench slang. Other euphemistic terms are used throughout the whole film, for instance verb phrases like 'to cop it' or 'to get it', both relating to getting hit by a bullet. These terms were frequently used by WWI soldiers (Ibid.).

Moving to other elements of soldiers' speech, vulgarity and offensive words played a key role in trench talk. Its use, as previously said, was part of the everyday language at the front, among soldiers of every rank, or geographical and social origins (Walker 2017, 113). An instance of bad speech can be retrieved in the scene analysed, where sergeant Winter asks Billie why he thinks 'they dug these trenches so fuckin' deep'. The use of the term 'silly buggers' fits in a similar way the characterisation. Furthermore, he uses the terms 'micks' and 'jocks' to define Irish and Scottish comrades respectively. The terms are pejoratives, but in this case, they are used to linguistically emphasize the stereotype of team spirit among men. The character of sergeant Winter seems to be accustomed to using vulgar speech, especially when he talks to his subordinates, for instance in a scene where the so-called 'stand to' is represented. Doyle and Walker define 'stand to' as standing on the defensive, armed ready and waiting for an attack. Moreover as "those attacks most commonly came at dawn or dusk, in the trenches, Stand to also came to be associated with these respective times" (2012, 140).

Sergeant Winter wakes up the soldiers at dawn, kicking them and yelling the order to Stand to; he uses some ironic language ("wakey-wakey!") and

calls them “dirty smelly bastards”, though the soldiers do not seem to care. His physical presence, steadfastness and rudeness fit the image of the experienced veteran; in fact, he is the only professional soldier in his platoon. The substantial use of swearing in his idiolect contributes to strengthening this stereotype.

The soldiers under Winter’s command are not less accustomed than their sergeant to the use of vulgarity, which is shown for instance in a scene where two Irish soldiers, Ambrose (Ciarán McMEnamin) and Rookwood (Cillian Murphy), are telling the other men how they survived an attack to their former platoon:

Soldier: No, but what actually happened?

Ambrose: Well... They were marching us over this hill, right? About... fuck, about a mile behind the lines, eh? That right, Rag?

Rookwood: That’s right, yeah. About a mile. You could actually see the German lines. We were just... walking along, chatting like. Next thing...

Ambrose: Bang, out of the blue. Boys start screaming, falling over, dying.

Soldier: Jesus wept...

Rookwood: couldn’t hear a fucking sound. Bullets just whizzing by.

Ambrose: Boys just... screaming, running everywhere.

MacFarlane: And what was it?

Ambrose: Jerry. Fuckers seen us marching over the hill. Put a Machine gun at high elevation. [makes the gesture of a shell falling] Good night.

Rookwood: Over a mile away, that’s why we couldn’t hear the shots.

Dell: Fuck me.... What d’you do?

Ambrose: Me and Rag here just ran like hell, isn’t that right?

Rookwood: We were lucky. A lot of boys got it that day. Fucking lot of boys.

Ambrose: We were fucking lucky.

Firstly, two terms from trench talk are used. One is ‘Jerry’, which is a pejorative term used by Britons to name German soldiers (see section 2); while the other one is the verb ‘whizzing’, an onomatopoeia describing the sound of a stray bullet, as in the synonym word ‘whizz-bang’ (Doyle and Walker 2012, 167-8). Nevertheless, it is the recurrence of the word ‘fuck’ with some variations (‘fucking’, ‘fuckers’) that constitutes the most linguistically marked element of soldiers’ slang in this dialogue. As exemplified by a letter written to *The Athenaeum* in 1919, the word ‘fuck’ came to be a symbol of the soldier’s identity, even though beyond the trenches it was often referred to in hidden terms (*The Athenaeum*, 1st August 1919, p. 695; in Walker 2017, 114):

But, as you know probably, the one word that won the war was the well-known obscenity containing four letters. From generals downwards everyone used it, and everyone was comforted by saying it. No dialogue pretending to represent military conversation ever rings quite true because this essential word is omitted. Of course, in public writings it can’t be very well referred to, but only those who have soldiered out here realized what a companion in adversity that little word has been. (CLAUDE SISLEY, 2nd Lt.)

Swear words, especially the words ‘fuck / fucking’, were so common in the trenches that they came to have a performative power (as intended by Austin 1962), to the point that “when you were ordered to ‘get your fucking rifles’ this was considerably less urgent than the order to ‘get your rifles’” (Doyle and Walker 2012, 158). It is arguably a case that the scenes in which trench language is mostly used are the ones in which a representation of daily activities is sketched.

Even though the use of humour, euphemisms, and bad speech may appear less marked compared to the use of words and terms historically unique to the trench context – for instance mangled French names – this study has shown that, to a certain extent, their use was considered integral part of trench talk. It is possible to infer that the presence of these terms in the screenplay has the specific purpose of strengthening the sense of realism for the audience, and that they are equally part of a possible linguistic stereotype attached to the figure of the British WWI soldier. Nevertheless, knowledge of historical trench talk is required to fully understand their marked nature.

5. *Conclusions*

Many studies have been carried out on how linguistic elements contribute to the representation of social stereotypes in audiovisual products. This article has sought to contribute to this area of study by analysing the role of language in the reconstruction of the WWI soldier as a fictional character. The war slang that developed in trenches during WWI, primarily of a lexical nature and called trench talk by some scholars, is an important linguistic aspect in the AV characterisation of the WWI soldier, as shown in *The Trench*. This film presents a plot where all the characters are soldiers located in the context of trench warfare, and thus provides numerous elements that are useful to the analysis of WWI soldiers' language in fictional representation. Many of the most specific terms are used to give a stronger 'flavour' of the trench context to the audience. Nevertheless, it seems they appear more sparingly compared to other marked elements – probably for the sake of intelligibility – and are part of the process that Pavesi (2009) calls 'selective mimesis'. Other elements of trench talk, such as avoidances and euphemisms, contribute to the representation of the psychological environment of tension and fear experienced by soldiers. Even though the meaning of these expressions can be inferred without knowledge of trench talk, this knowledge becomes necessary when a linguistic analysis is undertaken to fully grasp their historical markedness. Similarly, while the extensive use of certain offensive and vulgar speech can serve what Kozloff (2000) calls the function of 'character revelation' – for instance in the case of sergeant Winter's idiolect – it also reinforces the function of 'adherence to the code of realism', as it is a use of language that fits the stereotype associated with the historical context which is being represented. In any case, the use of trench talk in fictional dialogue tends to bring the audience closer to a perception of reality, what Guillot (2012, 106) defines as "fabricated discourse and make-believe speech". As some of the linguistic elements of trench talk entered common use after the war (Walker 2017; see also Wilson 2015), anglophone audiences can arguably detect the connotation and link it to WWI.

In conclusion, it should be borne in mind that representation is an act of simplification, and fictional representation is not to be considered completely faithful to real life experience, particularly when an intense historical event such as the Great War is taken into consideration. In other words, fictional representation of soldiers' language and historical – 'real' – trench talk can-

not be considered as two perfectly overlapping lexical fields. Research must be conducted on this topic to better outline this difference. Moreover, through the study of their fictional language, future research can allow to delve deeper into the AV characterisation of WWI soldiers, and possibly outline the stereotype(s) which have inspired these characterisations.

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L'ornitologo visionario.
Lo sperimentalismo ecologico di Paolo Volponi

Abstract

This article first reconstructs the presence and functions of ornithological figures in Volponi's entire *oeuvre*, and then focuses on the character of the "Imitator of the Songs of All Birds", from *Il pianeta irritabile* (1978), offering a meta-artistic interpretation of his role, supported by the comparison with potential literary models (from St. Francis to Leopardi) and philosophical sources (particularly Marcuse). After having formulated such hypotheses, I analyze the dialectic between language and the body in *Il pianeta*, that is, the oscillation between the rejection of verbal communication and the goal of its refoundation, already partially achieved by the author through a 'materialistic writing', innovative both stylistically and thematically. In an effort to elude (political) repetition, Volponi thus creates a narrative text that experiments with literary structures and genres – an uncanny, 'unthinkable', and highly relevant ecological romance.

I. *Ornitologia volponiana*

Gli uccelli sono figure molto ricorrenti e rilevanti all'interno del *corpus* volponiano, tanto in prosa quanto in versi. Già in *Memoriale* troviamo varie occorrenze, talvolta connotate positivamente, talaltra di segno marcatamente disforico. Per esempio, guardando gli "uccelli, che viravano sempre verso l'alto", l'io-narrante associa la fabbrica (pur statutariamente ambivalente) a una sensazione di chiusura carceraria: "era proprio un muro, che mi faceva sentire prigioniero e con una

1 Il presente articolo nasce dalle mie ricerche sui narratori idiosincratici nel romanzo italiano finanziate dal Fonds national suisse (FNS) con una borsa Postdoc.Mobility.

gran voglia di viaggiare”.² Albino, afflitto da manie di persecuzione, tenta perciò di sottrarsi ai “lacci” predisposti dai medici aziendali, supportato nelle sue istanze libertarie dal dialogo coi volatili (spia di un più ampio ‘ritorno del superato’), con “quegli uccellini” che, “in silenzio”, gli “dicono” di non poter né “vivere in gabbia”, né “fare la tomografia”. Quando apprende di essere costretto a curarsi in sanatorio, Albino rivolge allora lo sguardo ai “passeri”, trovando “incredibile” che quegli emblemi di bontà naturale siano “così vicino alla cattiveria umana, a quella infermeria, a quegli strumenti” (medici o di tortura?), che non siano “spaventati” dalle “parole” dei suoi aguzzini e che non fuggano “lontano da quella fabbrica di ferro”. “Incredibile” gli pare anche, una volta tornato al lavoro, che “qualche passero [...], sbilanciato dal vento”, venga a “posarsi sul tetto della fabbrica”. Tale apparizione viene dunque interpretata come un “confortante [...] segno di gioventù e di libertà”; d’altronde, l’io si era altrove paragonato a un “uccellino di primavera che sbanda vicino alle fratte, curioso di ogni foglia”.

Tuttavia, il medico che riveste, ai suoi occhi, il ruolo di principale antagonista ha un cognome chiaramente parlante, quello di dott. Tortora: difatti, durante la prima visita, egli sporge il “petto sotto il camice [...] proprio come un piccione”, e successivamente gli ausculta la “schiena con l’accanimento di un animale” che debba “scavare una buca”, una trappola o una tomba. Albino, perciò, decide di “mangiare” in fretta, con “accanimento”, proprio per “sconfiggere” i nemici che complottano a suo danno: per “avere più lena”, anzi, immagina che Tortora stia vicino al “vassoio”, come un “piccione vorace” che “minacciasse di beccare” il suo “pranzo e di entrare nei piatti a sporcare tutto con le zampe e le ali”. In questa scena, al *fil rouge* dell’animalizzazione innescata dall’onomastica si aggiunge, a mio avviso, un ricordo classico, quello delle Arpie, che – dalle *Argonautiche* all’*Encide*, fino all’*Orlando furioso* – rubano il cibo e insozzano i deschi. Grazie a un’accurata rete di intertestualità interna, troveremo un’immagine molto simile – inconsapevole anticipazione dei flagelli biblici che infesteranno *Il pianeta?* – nella conclusione del libro. Albino, dopo aver letto un volantino sindacale in cui “due parole” fanno capolino “sull’orlo come certi passeri alla sera sul filo dell’orto”, decide inaspettatamente di contribuire al successo di uno sciopero indetto dagli operai; per questo, gli viene in ultimo comminato l’allontanamento definitivo dalla fabbrica. Non a caso, questo amarissimo e rassegnato *explicit* coincide con i “giorni senza uccelli”, con quel periodo dell’“anno” in cui il cielo è vuoto, “non vi sono più

2 Al riguardo, cfr. il primo monologo di Sigismondo in *La vida es sueño* di Calderón de la Barca.

averle o quegli altri amici” leopardianamente “pensierosi sui paletti, con le code bianche e nere”; insieme alla “lettera” di licenziamento, però, “arriveranno gli storni, a branchi aguzzi, i tordi ingordi e quegli altri devastatori con il becco come un’ accetta; dilanieranno le file delle campanule” tra i filari ormai spogli, “faranno un gran chiasso e imbratteranno tutte di sterco le foglie dei vigneti” (Volponi 1962, 58, 61, 79, 207, 168, 35, 60, 82, 226, 231-2).

Anche in *Corporale* gli uccelli sono ripetutamente evocati: dalle fantasticherie di Aspri/Murieta sul toponimo “Ca l’ala”³ alla sovrapposizione della sua “emotività” con un “ornitos’, con ali strette, colori incerti, testina irrequieta”;⁴ dalla visione degli “uccelli” nelle gabbie dello zoo, “appollaiati [...] come morti [...], con le teste a penzoloni”, al suo consiglio di decorare le pareti di una pizzeria con degli “uccelli in volo”.⁵ Come notato da Forni (1995), poi, nelle *Mosche del capitale* si segnalano i vari scambi tra Saraccini e il suo canarino (intercalati talvolta dalle notizie televisive), mentre Tecraso paragona il movimento operaio ormai votato alla sconfitta a “uno stormo di passerini... sparati in gabbia a spiedini, fulminati sui cavi elettrici fra gli alberi”.⁶ Significativamente, l’immagine di volatili avidi e sordidi riemerge nella raffigurazione dei manager come “brutti merli pesanti, quasi del tutto impediti al volo”, ma soprattutto come “voraci mosche”, che – coi loro “voletti” – “ronzano dappertutto, [...] per andare a sporcare e a succhiare” (Volponi 1989, 130, 162).

Molto indicativa è pure la parabola delle figure ornitologiche nella poesia volponiana. Come evidenziato da Zinato (2001, 75), inizialmente gli uccelli sono connessi alla campagna urbinata, al paesaggio e alla civiltà dell’Appennino, ma anche al mondo classico,⁷ dove veniva loro attribuita una “funzione ora-

3 Volponi 1974, 800: “e volare tutt’insieme come branchi domestici”.

4 Ibid.: 561: “Poi questo uccello può avere vari nomi, che possono essergli dati proprio da chi lo caccia o dalla società dei cacciatori”.

5 Ibid.: 570, 992: “non passerini né rondini, che danno subito una nostalgia domestica, tanto più in Urbino, ma uccelli sconosciuti e librai [...]. Procura che gli uccelli non diano l’idea del branco ma che ogni avventore [...] possa distinguere il suo”. Per questo primo paragrafo, cfr. Forni 1995.

6 Cfr. Fenoglio 2001, 843: “Stanno facendovi cascare come passerini dal ramo. E tu, Johnny, sei l’ultimo passero su questi nostri rami [...]’ ‘Io sono il passero che non cascherà mai. Io sono quell’unico passero!’”.

7 A questo proposito, cfr. Pomarici 2022 (in cui viene peraltro analizzata la traduzione volponiana della *Lisistrata*; quanto all’ornitologia, non saranno dunque da escludere possibili reminiscenze).

colare” (*ὄρνις* significava anche “augurio”, “auspicio”), e alla lettura delle opere pascoliane, in cui si caricavano tanto di armoniche “evangelic[he]” quanto di tonalità “funebri”. Viceversa, nelle raccolte più tarde si assiste alla scomparsa di qualsiasi alternativa naturale e al neocapitalistico trionfo dell’artificiale. Se in *Foglia mortale* un “passero” si “butta / a morire” sul “parabrezza” dell’io, “infagottato dall’inverno” delle sue “stesse ripetizioni” (Volponi 2001, 155), è *Con testo a fronte* (1986) a segnare un netto ribaltamento di paradigma. Nel *Pomeriggio di un dirigente*, “the black-bird” (proveniente da una lirica di Stevens, con intertestualità insistita e inserti alloglotti) diventa “il nome / di un presidente [...] / seated [...] / in the branch-veins”, che “becca” nella “mente / e scacazza” nel “grembo” del locutore (Ibid.: 208-9); in *Insonnia 1971*, poi, l’immagine di un “branco di tordi sui pali del giardino” vicino a un sito industriale piemontese pare “fuori posto”, quasi fosse l’“inutile raggio / di un tempo perduto a salire in macchina / per andare in ufficio” (Ibid.: 257); in altri componimenti, invece, gli uccelli appaiono “vittime predestinate di un macello economico e tecnologico mondiale” (Zinato 1999, 11). Ma il testo più emblematico di questa stagione è senza dubbio *Detto dei passeri*, in cui l’autore mette in scena un’esplicita palinodia. In passato, infatti, credeva che i “passeri rappresentassero” una “democrazia comunale / uguali e insieme”, che confortassero le fatiche dei campi, anzi che “fossero contadini operai poeti, / progettisti fervorosi umili e lieti”; ora, invece, deve constatarne il carattere di “uccello invadente vorace cattivo”, simile piuttosto ad “alati capi prezzolati / e duri spietati carrieristi” (Volponi 2001, 312, 314-5). Nemmeno le paronomasie e i giochi di parole afferenti alla sfera erotica (“passera”)⁸ e alla speranza in un indefinito futuro (“passerà”) prospettano delle vere soluzioni, dato che si tratta soltanto di sogni fatti per non “destarsi”; nella realtà ormai determinata dal “linguaggio industriale” (forse sulla scorta degli *Uccellacci* pasoliniani), “falco è un dirigente accanito”, mentre “aquila” indica “il presidente il capo / il più potente e scaltro” (Ibid.: 320, 316). Gli uccelli, insomma, hanno ormai “cessato di farsi messaggeri dell’alterità naturale” (Zinato 1999, 11), mentre le arpie neocapitaliste banchettano alla “tavola / della cattiveria” (Volponi 2001, 319) e del cinismo, tra cocktail e whisky. D’altronde, già in un articolo dell’84 Volponi (1999, 127) aveva narrato lo scontro, nei cieli di Urbino, tra i piccioni di antica urbanizzazione e delle cornacchie arrivate di recente, così innaturali da sembrare “di ferro e di meccanica:

⁸ “Uccello”, d’altronde, in Volponi indica spesso l’organo sessuale maschile.

ali di latta, petto di ghisa, becchi e artigli di acciaio”; la loro logica è quella della sopraffazione violenta (“non vogliono nessuno intorno”), e la “battaglia” è a tal punto impari che gli “stessi cittadini” tacciano di stupidità i piccioni, colpevoli di non essersi ancora arresi.

2. *L'imitatore del canto di tutti gli uccelli*

Ma veniamo al *Pianeta*, che costituisce il principale oggetto di studio del presente articolo. Anzitutto, va detto che uno dei protagonisti, Plan Calcule, è un uccello: nonostante alcune ambivalenze e il suo finale affrancamento, per buona parte del testo l’oca rappresenta – coerentemente con quanto appena esposto a proposito di *Con testo a fronte* – la tecnocrazia al servizio del potere. Si incontrano, inoltre, “stormi di piccioni” mostruosamente “grossi”, che s’“ingozza[no] rapidamente” dei cadaveri delle “pantegane” uccise dai protagonisti, accanendosi con ferocia ancora maggiore sui “ratti feriti”: la scena è così raccapricciante che il “nano” Mamerte, unico umano tra i quattro protagonisti, nasconde la testa “tra la sabbia” per “non sentire gli strilli”. Il fatto che la mitezza e il candore attribuiti, dalla Bibbia ai nostri giorni, ai “colombi” (Volponi 1978, 365-6) vengano qui totalmente stravolti è indizio di un più ampio “sovvertimento” e “pervertimento” della natura, in seguito alla “catastrofe atomica” (Zinato 1998, 1305).

Tuttavia, nel *Pianeta* permane, a mio avviso, una connotazione positiva dell’ornifauna, in relazione alla vicenda di una figura misteriosa e sfuggente, quella del “giovane” uomo conosciuto come l’“imitatore del canto di tutti gli uccelli”.⁹ “Idelcditu” (in assenza di un antroponimo a noi noto, è così che questo “benefattore” viene ribattezzato da Mamerte, assemblando “le iniziali della sua qualifica ufficiale”)¹⁰ aveva lavorato da ragazzo come minatore; poi, avendo vinto un concorso, era stato assunto come “tecnico” in un “grandioso centro elettronico”, in cui si conservavano “cassette, nastri, microfilms” dei secoli pre-

9 Questo personaggio, peraltro, non è mai attivo ‘in diretta’ sulla scena, bensì soltanto nei racconti analettici del narratore o dei personaggi.

10 Nel testo si dà un inspessimento quasi materico del suono di “questo bellissimo nome”, nella pronuncia consentita a Mamerte dalla sua bocca devastata: “arrivava autonomamente a staccarsi dalla volta del buco la curva del ‘cd’ con una cucchiata che ben volentieri egli accoglieva sul pezzo di lingua e deglutiva” (Volponi 1978, 327, 376).

cedenti. Qui scopre con grande “emozione” e “curiosità” una “piccola scatola”, la cui etichetta recita “Canto degli uccelli – 1998-(2)198” (Ibid.: 308, 327, 315-6). Tali sentimenti sono dovuti alla quasi totale estinzione dei volatili:¹¹ Mamerte, per esempio, ne ha “visti pochissimi in vita sua”, e “solo nelle gabbie degli zoo e degli uffici dei potenti”, come “canarini” dirigenziali o “pappagalli” ormai incapaci di cantare, al punto da emettere un “frigolio”, uno “stridio” sofferente, sinistramente simile agli “strilli” dei “sorci” che “scorrazzavano per le città”. Idelcditu, dunque, capisce che quella è la “sola occasione” per sapere, “unico al mondo e per sempre” (date la rovina imminente su “tutto il baraccone”, allegoria di un’apocalissi naturale e culturale), “che cosa fosse stato il canto degli uccelli” in epoche ormai remote. Trovandosi in una società totalitaria e distopica, in cui non c’è spazio per la privacy e la libertà, deve escogitare vari escamotage (tra cui il volo in solitaria) per fruire illegalmente di quelle registrazioni. Riesce, finalmente, ad ascoltare di nascosto – commuovendosi fino al pianto – i versi di numerose specie, sciorinate in una lunga enumerazione (“passero, fringuello, cormorano, tarabuso, allodola, averla”, “usignolo”, “tortora”), che include la nomenclatura binomiale (“*Oriolus chinensis*”, “*Tumix suscitator*”, “*Rhynocetus jubator*”), ‘tradotta’ o meno in linguaggio non-scientifico (“tucano (*Ramphastus mefuratus*)”), e una serie di sostantivi accostati per la loro somiglianza fonica (i rimanti “verzellino, cardellino, lucherino”) (Volponi 1978, 314, 321). In una redazione intermedia del *Pianeta*, seguiva – per un errore di catalogazione – il canto “dell’uccello padulo, l’uccello che vola all’altezza del culo”, eseguito durante un “seminario sull’impresa” per “dirigenti smotivati”, che nella loro carriera hanno “visto e anche preso il padulo”, piegandosi parimenti alla “legge del Menga” (“chi ce l’ha in culo – se lo tenga”) (Volponi 2002, 2:744). Se tale variante era interessante per il rimando polemico alla degenerazione dell’industria, non è senza significato che Volponi la cassi, preferendo giustapporre ai versi degli uccelli non più quella “cantilena di volgarità” (Martignoni 2002, 743),¹² bensì il “grido di avviso di gruppi di scolari ribelli” milanesi,¹³ ugualmente fuori posto, ma meno scurrile e acidamente sarcastico (oltre che più gradito al personaggio).

11 Cfr. Carson 1962 e Volponi 1974, 602: “Tu non le hai mai viste le mosche. Sono state sterminate”.

12 La citazione è volponiana.

13 Si notino i rimandi all’Italia e alle proteste giovanili, su cui torneremo.

Avendo ormai la “testa” piena di “uccelli” che “sfrullano” come in una gabbia, di “pensieri” ad essi “simili per varietà, stranezza, impeto”, Idelcditu comprende – con una lucida, dura “coscienza”, “contro il morbido di quelle penne” – di essere entrato in possesso di un “immenso tesoro”, di una “materia molto più grossa della sua possibilità di comprenderla”, che deve condividere con altri, donando sì un’“infinità di gioie”, ma al costo di “altrettanto infinite sciagure”. Confidando nell’intimità massima offerta dall’eros, si apparta – dopo gli obbligatori esami di compatibilità e previa prenotazione – con una ragazza, a cui svela il proprio segreto, imitandole il fischio del “merlo italico” (Volponi 1978, 321, 329, 331-2).¹⁴ Tuttavia, la ragazza (che è di “lontana origine italiana”) a quel suono ritrova di colpo la “rabbia” precedente a una “recente operazione” di lavaggio del cervello: inizia perciò a piangere disperatamente, e poi corre ancora nuda (tragico e comico, qui, si mescolano di continuo)¹⁵ a denunciare il giovane tecnico alla polizia. Ne consegue una condanna ai lavori forzati per “spionaggio” e “diserzione”; su consiglio di un “vecchio” incontrato in “carcere”, però, Idelcditu – improvvisatosi ‘incendiario’ – riesce a “fuggire oltre la frontiera” su una sorta di *bateau ivre*, ispirandosi ai ‘propri’ uccelli per scegliere la direzione da seguire, e così passando dai *liberals* (l’Occidente) all’“Ulp, unione dei liberi popoli” (l’URSS). Qui si accorge che il canto degli uccelli non è vietato, anzi viene insegnato nelle scuole ad alunni felicemente incantati, sebbene per mezzo di un “vecchio disco” rovinato e gracitante. Dopo varie peripezie, Idelcditu prende a esibirsi nei circhi, ottenendo però un “successo”, un “favore popolare” così “strepitoso” da “preoccupare la polizia” del nuovo stato. È proprio nel circo che Idelcditu conosce i protagonisti del *Pianeta*, da cui viene lodato per il suo sapere, la sua “bravura e generosità”; l’elefante Roboamo, inoltre, sostiene che egli è stato tra i pochissimi a rendere visita, con affetto e *pietas*, a

14 È possibile che il merlo sia stato scelto anche per la sua monogamia. Cfr. Calvino 1983, 25 (“sono due, certo una coppia, forse la stessa [...] di tutti gli anni a quest’epoca”), e Stevens 1954, 93 (“A man and a woman and a blackbird / Are one”, da *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird*).

15 Altri esempi sono la disquisizione pseudo-erudita da operetta leopardiana (“un giudice molto colto aveva ricordato” che “gli uccelli venivano accecati perché non cantassero; ma poi fu colto dal dubbio”) e l’equivoco, lo scambio di ‘persona’ (“– Idelcditu! Idelcditu! – gridò [Mamerte], abbracciando così stretta Plan Calcule per il collo che questa si mise a starnazzare terrorizzata”) (Volponi 1978, 332-3, 390).

Mamerte – elargendo doni e accarezzando gli animali –, dopo che quest'ultimo era stato sfigurato con l'acido da un collega. Eppure, l'imitatore era stato dato per morto, “ucciso” o meglio “fucilato sotto il carro dei torroni” (Ibid.: 332-3, 305, 334, 309).

Proprio Mamerte, durante il percorso in compagnia dei tre animali (l'elefante, l'oca e la scimmia Epistola, in funzione di capo), evoca spesso Idelcditu, come se questo acronimo-antroponimo fosse una “preghiera”, una forma di “speranza” e di resistenza contro il Male (Ibid.: 376).¹⁶ Anzi, la polisemia di “Idelcditu” è tale da indicare, per il nano, prima dei fiori benefici, poi il “viaggio” stesso, i suoi compagni di avventura e i paesaggi ancora da scoprire: “un nome che significava tutto”. Nel finale, Mamerte confessa dunque a Roboamo di aver continuamente aspettato – un po' come in *En attendant Godot* – l'imitatore, “lui che era migliore di me”, nell'auspicio che “fosse vivo” e che, prima o poi, avrebbe “raggiunto” e “incontrato” i quattro protagonisti. A questo punto, l'elefante svela che Idelcditu effettivamente li aveva seguiti; si era però mostrato apertamente – “tutto coperto di penne, buffo e spaventoso” (Ibid.: 327, 443-4)¹⁷ – soltanto in un momento in cui il nano era separato dal resto del gruppo. In quell'occasione, aveva dispensato consigli su come ripararsi dal freddo e sopravvivere tra i ghiacci; Epistola ricambia fornendogli del cibo, ma decide di non ammetterlo nella compagnia (in quel frangente dimezzata), malgrado dubbi e ripensamenti. Si instaura, cioè, un interessante rapporto di vicinanza e “distanza”, di aiuto reciproco pur nella distinzione e nell'autonomia: “che facesse la sua strada, libero! Libero anche se avesse deciso di continuare a seguirci. Anche l'imitatore mi disse che non si sarebbe unito a noi”. Idelcditu, inoltre, informa Epistola che li avrebbe comunque abbandonati “prima del deserto delle tre lune” (il luogo in cui si concluderà la narrazione); dopo, infatti, “o sarebbe morto, o avrebbe trovato la sua strada in direzione della luna più grande”. La scimmia, in risposta, scuote la testa, “per significare che quello non poteva fare altro che sbagliare”; ma l'imitatore, sorridendo “nel triste modo dei perdenti”, rivendica (con una sorta di relativismo ‘di specie’) che “ognuno fa gli sbagli che vuole”. L'epilogo, infine, conferma l'alone di mistero che circonda questa figura: Roboamo suppone

¹⁶ Cfr. Ibid.: 385 (“non poté non pensare a Idelcditu! e quindi non deporre presto le corone di re cumulo e di regina ombra”).

¹⁷ Non è qui da escludere una reminiscenza del costume di Papageno in *Die Zauberflöte*.

che sia stato proprio Idelcdu a “sabotare il sommergibile”, nel lago, durante lo scontro decisivo tra i protagonisti e il governatore Moneta, “nemico universale” e trasparente allegoria del neocapitalismo. Le ipotesi sul movente di questo possibile gesto sono varie: necessità di proseguire il cammino; irata reazione alle “stronzate” e ai “proclami” di Moneta; o ancora, nella prospettiva di Mamerte, deliberato e altruistico sacrificio (“consapevole di doverci morire sopra, per aiutare noi!”) (Ibid.: 444-5, 448). Idelcdu, così, scompare di scena, con un decesso probabile, ma ancora una volta non sicuro.

3. *Una lettura meta-letteraria*

Molti elementi inducono a supporre che le vicende di Idelcdu abbiano uno spiccato valore metaletterario, tali da sviluppare un’implicita riflessione sull’arte. Anzitutto, egli supera il concorso dimostrando particolare bravura nella “recitazione e nel commento di brani poetici”; per questa ragione, viene addetto ai “reparti” di “scienze umane”. Trasparente, poi, è il gioco sul nome del centro elettronico presso cui è impiegato: in “Parnasonic”, difatti, vi è un richiamo alla Panasonic (ironica allusione all’industria culturale e all’informatizzazione delle *humanities?*), ma soprattutto un’evidentissima evocazione del Parnaso caro ad Apollo e alle muse. Il centro, inoltre, è un archivio in cui vengono conservati “tutti i reperti storici e culturali del passato: monumenti, [...] biblioteche e gallerie, canti di ogni epoca, proverbi, usanze e dialetti” (Volponi 1978, 315). Ma il punto fondamentale è che l’associazione tra canto degli uccelli e lirica è un *topos* attestato fin dall’antichità, come dimostrato da Bettini;¹⁸ in più, secondo Macé (2022, 238-324), gli uccelli fungerebbero da tramite tra gli uomini, il paesaggio e la poesia: il lessico ornitologico, spesso di natura onomatopeica, promuoverebbe così un incontro della lingua con sé stessa (un potenziamento della funzione poetica, per dirla con Jakobson),

18 Cfr. Bettini 2008 (capitoli e paragrafi quali “Versi di uccelli, cinguettii di poeti”; “Il canto dei poeti uccelli”; “Stonati imitatori”; “Il *milvus*: uccello contadino”; “Uccelli che parlano o ‘sono parlati’”; “Musiche in ‘style oiseau’”; “Uccelli che cantano miti”; “Me l’ha detto l’uccellino”). Sui legami tra ornitologia e musica, basti citare il *Contraponto bestiale alla mente* di Banchieri, *Le chant des oiseaux* di Janequin, il *Catalogue d’oiseaux* di Messiaen, oltre alla *Pastorale* beethoveniana.

con le proprie potenzialità e i propri limiti.¹⁹ Una volta ascoltati e memorizzati i canti, Idelcditu prova sia una sensazione di spossamento e oltrepassamento del sé, che ricorda alcune concezioni dell'ispirazione artistica, sia un bisogno quasi fisico di espressività chiarificatrice (“solo fischiandoli avrebbe potuto [...] riconoscerli e dipanarli da quella matassa accanita che ancora gli gonfiava le tempie”), di una liberazione però mediata dalla formalizzazione (“*sfogare* e poi *ordinare* la simultanea presenza di tanti uccelli dentro la propria testa”). In più, una volta raggiunto un livello sufficientemente alto di padronanza della materia, egli aggiunge al rispetto della tradizione il gusto per esperimenti, ibridazioni, innovazioni personali: “era scrupolosamente fedele seppure qualche volta azzardasse delle variazioni. Arrivò addirittura a pensare che uno degli uccelli si congiungesse con un altro dando vita [...] a un canto nuovo, che lui componeva fondendo tutti i motivi della coppia e ottenendo effetti nuovi e bellissimi” (Volponi 1978, 330-I, corsivi miei).

Secondo le direttive delle autorità dei *liberals*, i reperti custoditi nel centro non devono “essere mai aperti al pubblico” né “tanto meno messi in esercizio”; viceversa, come accennato, nelle scuole dell'Ulp si cerca di tramandare attraverso l'insegnamento le pur inaffidabili testimonianze del canto degli uccelli. Ed è proprio un ideale di condivisione, di ri-uso pubblico e collettivo del sapere, a guidare le scelte di Idelcditu, che sente di dover “esprimere la nuova sapienza non solo nel proprio interno, ma soprattutto verso l'esterno, nel confronto e nella pulizia dei limiti sociali e degli adattamenti. Solo così la sua bravura sarebbe potuta diventare [...] una vera festa possibile per tutti”. Anche l'anziano saggio incontrato in carcere gli raccomanda di “far fruttificare nella socializzazione la cultura che ormai possedeva” (Ibid.: 315, 329-30, 333), cioè di non rintanarsi in un privilegiato “rifugio” individuale, solipsisticamente posseduto *in interiore homine*, bensì di rischiare il contatto con la “determinatezza storica” (Carlino 1995, 63) e il dialogo con l'altro da sé. D'altronde, come ricordato da Toracca (2020, 110), “individuare in un libro di poesia uno svolgimento anche verso l'esterno” era stato, per Volponi, il cuore della “lezione” di Pasolini e di “Officina”.²⁰ Idelcditu, una volta espatriato,

19 A partire dal titolo, l'autrice denuncia la progressiva riduzione dell'ornifauna e il rischio di estinzione di molte specie. Cfr. Stevens 1954, 94: “I know noble accents / And lucid, inescapable rhythms; But I know, too, / That the blackbird is involved / In what I know”.

20 Cfr. Volponi 2009, 126-7. Alla luce dell'interpretazione meta-artistica qui proposta, ingloberei l'ipotesi tiepidamente avanzata da Toracca (2020, 110) sull'“eventuale, seppur mi-

decide però di “guardarsi bene” dal “presentarsi all’università o all’Accademia pubblica delle Scienze”, e quando viene costretto a comparire davanti a una commissione di “dotti professori”, riceve un giudizio tecnicistico (“addussero ragioni di becco, gola, capacità polmonare, peso”) e in fondo limitante, dato il declassamento dal rango di imitatore a quello di “bravo musicista” (Volponi 1978, 334).²¹ In questo episodio, è forse possibile scorgere una diffidenza per certe rigidità istituzionali e per l’autoreferenzialità di un certo gergo critico (anche se le discussioni sull’arte come mimesi o come reinvenzione e superamento della natura sono alla base di secoli di estetica). All’ambiente accademico Idelcdu, perciò, preferisce quello del circo: eppure, da un certo punto di vista, questi spettacoli di basso livello, letteralmente ‘da baraccone’, sono una forma di degradazione dell’arte. Non per caso, Roboamo, pur sapendo recitare a memoria e commentare l’intera *Commedia* dantesca, non ha mai rivelato questa eccezionale dote, proprio per evitare di vendere l’anima, di prostituire le proprie conoscenze trasformandole in un prodotto sul mercato, anzi in uno *show*. D’altro canto, l’enorme successo di cui gode l’imitatore presso il pubblico può essere interpretato come la coerente conseguenza del suo impegno per la divulgazione del sapere, per la sua sottrazione a una delibazione elitaria in favore di una fruizione autenticamente popolare. Inoltre, dall’inezienza di questa vicenda – fatta di infrazione delle leggi, processi, condanne, evasioni, esili – emerge l’avversione per un’arte succube della politica ed encomiastica del potere: Idelcdu, difatti, contesta il militarismo e lo sfruttamento produttivo; sfugge all’irreggimentazione statale e agli apparati repressivi; oltrepassa confini e frontiere. Se ne ricava l’immagine di un “poeta migrante” (Bellia 2018, 281), di un artista libero anche perché nomade e marginale.

Allargando l’indagine ad altre prose autoriali, troviamo ulteriori prove del carattere metaletterario di questo personaggio. In un articolo del 1982, per esempio, dopo aver esposto il processo di introiezione della “natura” e degli “animali” –

nima, sovrapposizione tra Volponi e la figura dell’Imitatore” nel contesto della più ampia riflessione autoriale su caratteri e funzioni della letteratura svolta obliquamente attraverso la storia di Idelcdu.

21 Non è da scartare, al riguardo, l’idea che sul *Pianeta* agisca un qualche ricordo della kafkiana *Relazione per un’Accademia*, in cui una scimmia parlante racconta in prima persona la propria vicenda, dalla cattura alla prigionia in una gabbia, fino alla riconquista della libertà (concetto sul quale riflette a lungo) attraverso l’imitazione dei gesti e del linguaggio umani, poi esibiti negli spettacoli di varietà in compagnia di acrobati e artisti circensi.

che andrebbero dunque riconosciuti come “parte della propria identità” e recuperati nella loro “originaria vitalità” –, Volponi (1999, 165-6, corsivi miei) sostiene che i “poeti” sono coloro che “guardano all’interno di sé più degli altri”, proprio in quanto “custodi degli animali” e un poco animali essi stessi”, ovvero “interlocutori, osservatori, fratelli degli animali ancora esistenti al mondo” (cioè non ancora estinti), con “l’occhio e l’orecchio ai voli e ai canti degli uccelli”, alle loro “migrazioni” e alla loro “grazia”, oltre che votati a “distribui[re]” quella “bellezza”. In un altro scritto del 1983, poi, Volponi afferma che il “poeta” è un “trasgressore”, un “malato” che non va “curato” con “somministrazioni di denaro”, il cui “compito” consiste nel “custodire” e “svelare la natura” (Ibid.: 173). Tuttavia, in concomitanza con le “esplosioni atomiche del 1945”, e poi – in Italia – col *boom* economico degli anni Cinquanta-Sessanta, gli “uomini” hanno abbandonato “ogni rapporto con la natura”. Dato che tale “dominio dell’artificiale non concede che l’artificio ripetuto e moltiplicato”, per lo scrittore si pone un problema che definirei leopardiano, riconducibile al fatto che egli non può più “interpellare” direttamente la “natura”, essendo ormai costretto a “parlare la lingua della lingua” e ad essere “il poeta dei poeti” (Ibid.: 171-4).

4. I modelli

Proprio l’*Elogio degli uccelli* di Leopardi²² è uno dei possibili modelli: mentre la ricerca nel *Pianeta* di esatte tessere lessicali derivate dall’operetta darebbe risultati scarsi e dubbi – ci si dovrebbe accontentare, in aggiunta all’ovvio “canto”, di “diletto”,²³ “varietà” e “conforto” –, mi sembra più produttivo supporre un rapporto intertestuale meno stringente, ma più ampio. Oltre a suggerire un parallelismo tra la mobile agilità degli uccelli e la vivacità dell’immaginazione, in particolare quella del “fanciulli”,²⁴ Leopardi (2015, 454, 447, 449, 456, 451) sviluppa una riflessione sul “riso”, distinguendo quello umano – spesso provocato dall’“ubriachezza”, quindi dall’oblio del

22 Sul leopardismo del *Pianeta irritabile*, cfr. Papini 2004, che rimanda in particolare al *Dialogo di un cavallo e di un bue*.

23 Cfr. Volponi 1978, 327: “che grande diletto aveva sempre sparso intorno a sé!”.

24 Si ricordi, a questo proposito, che Idelcdu è “giovane” e che la sovrapposizione tra pensieri e uccelli è esplicitamente rievocata. Sul rapporto tra prima adolescenza e uccelli, cfr. Macé 2022, 115-20.

dolore – da quello degli uccelli, derivante dalla loro “contentezza e letizia” per un’esistenza ricca di esperienze sensoriali e armonicamente inserita nella “vita universale”.²⁵ Se Idelcdu riesce ad ascoltare di nascosto le registrazioni proibite approfittando proprio dello stato di ubriachezza di un ufficiale (che, “sorbiti i liquori più forti di quell’epoca non leggera, rideva da schiattare prima ancora di infilarsi la cuffia”) (Volponi 1978, 321), a colpire è soprattutto il parallelismo tra le aspirazioni divulgative dell’imitatore e alcuni passi dell’*Elogio*. Secondo Leopardi (2015, 446-7, 451), infatti, il nesso canto-volo sarebbe un “notabile provvedimento della natura” proprio perché permetterebbe di spandere all’“intorno per maggiore spazio” quelle “voci di gioia risonanti e solenni”, quelle “continue testimonianze, ancorché false, della felicità delle cose”, affinché quella “specie di riso” che è il canto degli uccelli “fosse pubblico” e “pervenisse al maggior numero di uditori”.

A un lettore italiano non possono, poi, non tornare alla mente la ricca ornitologia pascoliana (che ci ricorda come gli uccelli rappresentino spesso un tramite tra nascita e morte, aldiquà e aldilà),²⁶ con le sue onomatopee e il suo fonosimbolismo, e quella altrettanto significativa dell’opera sabiana, in versi (soprattutto, ma non solo, *Uccelli*)²⁷ e in prosa. Nel ’75, inoltre, era stato pubblicato *Il fischio del merlo* di Calvino (poi confluito in *Palomar*),²⁸ in cui si enumerano le “manifestazioni sonore le più svariate”, dai “cinguettii” a “trilli” e “zirli”, e si riflette – ammiccando a semiotica e filosofia del linguaggio – su successi e scacchi della comunicazione umana e animale. Una qualche somiglianza col *Pianeta* c’è forse nel finale, in cui il protagonista, “dopo aver ascoltato attentamente” il verso del merlo, “prova a ripeterlo, più fedelmente che può”, non arrivando però a capire

25 Cfr. Russo 2017. Bisogna aggiungere, inoltre, che nell’ultima lassa del *Canto notturno* (testo caratterizzato dalla ‘volponiana’ rima in “-ale”) il locutore avanza dubbiosamente l’ipotesi, infine “forse” scartata, che, se avesse “l’ale / da volar su le nubi”, allora sarebbe più felice. Peraltro, già nella recensione sul “Journal des Savants” da cui Leopardi ha tratto ispirazione si dava notizia del parallelismo istituito dai pastori kirghisi – spinto fino all’immaginosa sovrapposizione – tra la propria libertà di nomadi e il volo degli uccelli. Cfr. Albonico 2023.

26 Si potrebbe, di qui, discendere fino alle “folaghe” montaliane. Cfr. anche Pedroni 2013.

27 Cfr. *L’ornitologo pietoso* (Lavagetto 1989, 192-200). Molti sono gli zoonimi ornitologici attestati sia nel *Canzoniere* sia nel *Pianeta*: oltre ai più comuni (merli, canarini, colombi, usignoli ecc.), segnalano “averla” e “lucherino”. Una fonte da cui Saba ha attinto numerose informazioni è Bacchi della Lega 1892.

28 Cfr. anche *L’origine degli Uccelli* (Calvino 1995, 15-27).

se il “fischio” che segue costituisce una risposta alla sua sollecitazione o un’emissione del tutto autonoma dell’animale (Calvino 1983: 29).²⁹

Al di là della letteratura contemporanea, è al grande modello di Francesco d’Assisi³⁰ che bisogna risalire, al santo che dialogava con le fiere e predicava agli uccelli, o meglio alle “sorores aves” (immagine dei più piccoli, poveri e umili, dal Duecento fino agli *uccellini* pasoliniani).³¹ Nel suo sermone, Francesco rammenta la generosità del Creatore nei confronti degli uccelli, manifestata non solo nell’averli preservati dall’estinzione al tempo del diluvio, ma anche nella “libertà” loro concessa di “volare in ogni luogo”. Gli uccelli, allora, levano i loro “maravigliosi canti” per lodare Dio, per esprimergli la propria devota gratitudine, e san Francesco “con loro insieme si rallegrava e diletta, e maravigliavasi molto di tanta moltitudine d’uccelli, e della loro bellissima varietà” (Davico Bonino 1983, 44-5). La tradizione francescana ha poi voluto istituire un parallelismo tra gli uccelli e i frati, che predicano in tutto il mondo, vagando continuamente senza possedere nulla; similmente, Volponi ammira i volatili per il coraggio e la forza delle loro migrazioni, e gli stessi protagonisti del *Pianeta* compiono un lungo cammino verso il “regno”. Già nel Vangelo, d’altronde, si ricordava come nemmeno un passero cada a terra all’insaputa e senza il volere del Padre (Mt 10:29; Lc 12:6), mentre nei Salmi il “passero” rappresenta sia chi sa resistere in mezzo alle avversità più dure, l’“afflitto” che si rivolge al Signore vegliando “solitario sul tetto”, insultato dai “nemici”, sia l’anima che cerca una “casa”, o meglio un “nido”, nelle “amabili” “dimore” del Signore (Sal 102 e 84).

Queste ultime annotazioni sullo spessore intertestuale, interdiscorsivo ed enciclopedico soggiacente all’ornitologia volponiana possono, almeno in parte, spiegare l’alone di eudemonia, grazia e persino sacralità che sembra circondare

29 Se Calvino esalta la “leggerezza e trasparenza” dell’“ordito” costituito dal canto dei diversi uccelli, Idelcitu da un lato ritiene di non poter “far scivolare” la propria “conquista nella leggerezza, in un diletto pressoché casuale”, dall’altro sparisce in mezzo al “ghiaccio che scintillava: trasparente anche lui, con tutte quelle penne”, sotto la leopardiana “luce” della “prima luna” (Calvino 1983, 24; Volponi 1978, 329, 446, corsivi miei). Sempre a proposito dell’idea di leggerezza, occorre ricordare l’iconico utilizzo di figure ornitologiche in varie pubblicità olivettiane (Lexicon, Lettera 32 ecc.).

30 Cfr. Volponi 2002, 2:699-701 (*Commento alla Regola non bollata di san Francesco* del 1982); Volponi e Leonetti 1995, 99.

31 Bonaventura da Bagnoregio 2010, 8.9. Cfr. Macé 2022, 324-49. Sul legame tra uccelli e ‘proletari’ o ‘popolo’, cfr. Ibid.: 120-30 (dove si cita, tra l’altro, *L’oiseau* di Michelet).

Idelcditu. Certo, non appena il tecnico pensa alla “chiesa” come all’“unico posto dove riuscire ad aprire la scatola”, subito il sarcasmo volponiano denuncia le connivenze opportunistiche e i giochi di potere legati alla (democristiana e filoatlantica?) “credenza di Roma e Dallas”, al punto che – come risulta dalle accurate statistiche diffuse dal “bollettino dei Santi Giovanni e Umberto” (Agnelli?) – “tutti coloro che occupavano i primi cinque livelli di ogni gerarchia” avevano soggiornato “sulle sacre palafitte”, per svolgervi un ritiro spirituale che funge da *conditio sine qua non* della loro brillante scalata carrieristica. Per di più, il mondo è stato devastato da una “guerra U.S. (ultima e santa)”; i magistrati complici del sistema sono “trist[i] e devot[i]”; e lo stesso Moneta fonda la propria violenza su un argomento teologico (“Dio è con me”). Tuttavia, già il parallelismo tra le urla di Moneta e il trillo di “oro e argento sopra il solenne bancone bancario, altare di marmo”, pare denunciare tra le righe che la religione imperante sia, in verità, quella del denaro (Volponi 1978, 317, 320, 438, 426, 435). Nel romanzo, inoltre, non mancano rimandi tendenzialmente positivi, per quanto straniati, al cristianesimo: come s’è detto, Mamerte – che anni prima aveva intessuto un intenso rapporto erotico con una suora – invoca il nome di Idelcditu come una preghiera, e vive continuamente nell’attesa della sua (messianica?) venuta; Roboamo è stato istruito all’apprezzamento di Dante da un ex prete (anch’egli esule e disertore); l’*explicit* del libro (su cui torneremo) è di chiara matrice eucaristica. Mi sembra dunque plausibile ipotizzare che la vicenda di Idelcditu segua un paradigma cristologico, dalla ‘prima’ morte all’enigmatica resurrezione, fino al possibile intervento nella battaglia contro il Nemico Moneta, che (secondo gli schemi interpretativi del nano) si configura come un sacrificio dell’agnello, come l’offerta della propria vita al fine di ottenere la salvezza di tutti.³² Inoltre, Idelcditu – che in una variante era un contadino (Volponi 2002, 2:730)³³ – eredita qualche tratto dei “santi appenninici”, venerati per la loro “bravura”, “bontà” e “follia” dal ‘marchigiano-tipo’, definito da Volponi come “religioso e piuttosto panteista”, invaso da “vecchi terrori contadini”, mosso sì da una “vocazione alla trascendenza”, ma verso un “assoluto” che è “siderale più che divino” (Volponi 1999, 103). Infine, non è da

32 L’aiuto di Idelcditu si pone in ideale antitesi alla conclusione di *Memoriale*, in cui Albino – che però in precedenza aveva ricevuto soccorso da un misterioso barcaio, proprio su un lago – comprende che nessuno potrà ormai arrivare in sua difesa.

33 Cfr. Volponi 1978, 433, dove Moneta si scaglia contro un ipotetico “ostinato contadino delle leghe rosse”.

escludere che nella gentilezza cristologica e nella creaturale fraternità francescana di Idelcditu – artista processato, condannato, perseguitato – agisca il ricordo dell'opera e della vita di Pasolini, caro amico e maestro di Volponi, ucciso soltanto tre anni prima l'uscita del *Pianeta*.³⁴

5. “*Desiderio*” e “*canto*”

Per Volponi, come s'è detto, l'allontanamento dell'uomo dalla natura è soprattutto un fenomeno novecentesco; tuttavia, egli sembra talvolta retrodattarlo, scorgendone i prodromi già nella crisi del paganesimo di fronte all'irrompere del cristianesimo, se non addirittura negli albori della civiltà occidentale (e del suo relativo disagio). A un dato momento storico, sarebbe avvenuto “un taglio immenso, un grande svisceramento”, coincidente con la morte del “Dio Pan”; l'animale, allora, avrebbe cominciato ad apparire “del tutto diverso dall'immagine di Dio”, e quindi tendenzialmente “diabolico, coperto di orridi peli, e soprattutto della coda”: una coda che, tra l'altro, è trasparente figura dell’“organo” sessuale “maschile”, spesso simboleggiato da “animali rapidi, guizzanti, [...] duri, irrequieti, robusti”. Di conseguenza, si è arrivati ad asservire l'animale, a trasformarlo in “un ostaggio, uno schiavo” soggetto alla propria “superiorità”, in un “testimone” della propria “capacità di controllo e di dominio”. Se la “natura è stata stravolta”, gli uomini starebbero, così, condannando anche se stessi “a seguirne la fine”, perché “mutandola si stanno essi stessi mutando” (Volponi 1999, 160-1, 165, 168, 176): nel *Pianeta*, d'altronde, Moneta rappresenta proprio “l'uomo alla fine dell'uomo”, l’“uomo che ha snaturato e lasciato l'uomo” (Volponi 1978, 437-8). Al contrario, il poeta può entrare in contatto con l'animale interiorizzato da ognuno di noi – con la sua “voracità, il lampeggiare dei suoi occhi, il fremere del suo muso” –, cioè con l'energia del proprio Es. Il poeta, inoltre, si incanterà “davanti a una collina come davanti a un passero”, ma non “per smemorarsi o sparire nella natura”; ad essere “regressivi” e “nostalgici”, anzi, sarebbero coloro che tengono il più lontano possibile la

34 In una poesia scritta da Volponi proprio in ricordo di Pasolini, si parla di “compiacente / confortevole comunanza”, di “fraternale menzione: / non assoluzione, grazia” (Volponi 2001, 344). Oltre al già menzionato *Uccellacci e uccellini* e al *Vangelo secondo Matteo*, si rammenti un titolo come *L'usignolo della Chiesa Cattolica*.

“natura selvaggia”, relegandola al “solito spettacolo esotico” ed “estraneo”, a una *wilderness* “confezionata” in “dispense” e “flaconi” a buon mercato, in documentari televisivi da tarda serata sugli “orsi che pescano i salmoni”. Noi vivremo, pertanto, in un sistema socio-economico che “abbatte” tanto le “foreste” vergini quanto quelle della “fantasia, della voglia, della fioritura del desiderio, del canto, del rinnovamento all’interno, nell’animo degli uomini” (Volponi 1999, 163, 166-7).

Come si vede, “fantasia” e “voglia”, “desiderio” e “canto” (a specificazione di “foreste”) sono contigui, affini, strettamente e chiasticamente intrecciati. Non a caso, uno dei titoli provvisori del *Pianeta* era *Il desiderio di Epistola*: questa scimmia irruente e iperdotata rappresenta, cioè, la prorompente vitalità di una pulsione erotica istintuale. E sarà pure significativo, allora, che Mamerte leghi “teneramente” nei propri pensieri “l’imitatore a Epistola”; Idelcditu, d’altronde, è un uomo buono anche perché imita gli animali, li rispetta ed è loro amico. Se questa equazione Desiderio : Epistola = Canto : Idelcditu è convincente, diventa ancora più interessante il fatto che l’imitatore si accosti al babbuino e vi collabori, mantenendo però un qualche “distacco”, come a indicare l’impossibilità o la contrarietà a “sciogliersi” totalmente nella “pura animalità” (Bellia 2018, 282). Inoltre, in un’ottica di ‘giustizia poetica’, bisogna rilevare come nella conclusione dell’opera muoiano tanto il ‘cattivo’ Moneta, quanto Epistola: in questo modo, tramonterebbero sia il “potere” sia il suo “doppio bestiale” (Zublena 2015, 463);³⁵ non è del tutto certo, invece, che la scomparsa di Idelcditu coincida con la sua morte definitiva. Fuor di metafora, il desiderio non va né represso, né degradato consumisticamente, né sfrenato senza alcun limite;³⁶ la “spinta animale” deve essere “guidata, riconosciuta dagli intenti coscienti” (Zinato 1999, 14) e riconciliata con l’uomo, grazie alla poesia e a una scienza finalmente affrancata dagli interessi del capitale. Volponi (ponendosi sulla scia della scuola di Francoforte) propugna, perciò, un “sistema più aperto sulla realtà di quanto non sia il sistema della ragione”, una “chiara fantasia” (Volponi e Leonetti 1995, 41), una “razionalità diversa”, che oggi può sembrare irrazionale, mentre va anzitutto interpretata come “critica” dell’attuale razionalismo “burocratic[o]” (Porta 1978). C’è, insomma, un “nesso forte” (Fichera 2013) fra poesia, natura e animale, non istituito dal solo Volponi, bensì già attestato in

35 Il riferimento è a Derrida.

36 Sul “furore giovanile” e lo “smodato desiderio” di Epistola, cfr. Volponi 1978, 288-9.

Schiller (1996, 31), secondo cui “i poeti sono ovunque, e per definizione, conservatori della natura”.³⁷

Tali riflessioni volponiane, suffragate dal nome di Schiller, sono fruttuosamente confrontabili con alcune celebri pagine di *Eros e civiltà*: anche secondo Marcuse (2001, 183-5), lo sforzo di prefigurare una “cultura al di là del principio di prestazione” è, per certi versi, “irragionevole”, poiché tenta di oltrepassare l'equivalenza tra ragione e “costrizione”, “repressione degli istinti”, stigmatizzazione del “pernicioso” mondo dei “sensi”. Questo dominio è, però, stato contestato dalla “fantasia (immaginazione)”, che avrebbe protetto le “aspirazioni a una realizzazione integrale dell'uomo e della natura”, conservandole nel “folclore e nelle favole, nella letteratura e nell'arte”. Mentre Prometeo sarebbe “l'eroe civilizzatore della fatica, della produttività e del progresso”, le figure archetipiche di un opposto “principio di realtà” sarebbero rintracciabili nei dionisiaci Orfeo e Narciso.³⁸ Essi, infatti, delineano uno scenario di “gioia” e “compimento: la voce che non comanda ma canta” (non Moneta, ma Idelcdu); il “gesto che offre e riceve” (come nell'*explicit* eucaristico-comunista del *Pianeta*); la “liberazione dal tempo”, che “unisce l'uomo al dio” e alla “natura” (nel *Pianeta*, il tempo non è umanamente misurabile, e pare arrestarsi dopo la sconfitta di Moneta); la fondazione di un nuovo ordine, baudelairianamente libero dal peccato originale. Ne emerge il quadro di un “mondo che non va dominato e controllato”, bensì “liberato” (*Liberare l'animale* era un titolo provvisorio di *Corporale*), redimendo il “piacere”, la sensualità, il gioco, e sciogliendo i freni dell'“Eros”. Pertanto, le immagini legate a Orfeo e Narciso sono “essenzialmente irreali” e “poetiche”, votate (proprio come *Il pianeta*) non a riprodurre mimeticamente e confermare, bensì a contestare e distruggere l'attuale realtà “non-erotica”: il canto orfico riconcilia gli animali tra loro e con l'uomo, emancipando anche la

37 Cfr. Volponi 2001, 385: “Sono comunista per spirito di conservazione. / Ripeto spesso a me stesso questo verso di Pasolini”.

38 Una simile concezione pare condivisa da Volponi nella poesia *Intinto*, in cui è appunto menzionato Prometeo (Volponi 2001, 396). Nel *Pianeta*, invece, “Prometeo” è uno dei tanti soprannomi di Mamerte, dovuto alla sua padronanza del fuoco, che però viene spesso e volentieri adoperata per distruggere le superstiti vestigia antropiche. In *Detto dei passeri*, infine, dietro al divino *trickster*, stavolta connotato positivamente, sembra nascondersi una controfigura autoriale: “Aquila nell'industria è anche colui / che [...] mangia il fegato / di Prometeo incatenato, / onesto dirigente dalla cultura stessa fregato, / dall'ardimento di sottrarre il fuoco” (Ibid.: 316).

natura da “oppressione, crudeltà e dolore”; l’Eros “risveglia” le “potenzialità” latenti nella materia “organica e inorganica”. Tutti gli esseri, “animati e inanimati”, diventano, così, “liberi” di “non essere altro che quello che sono”; il loro *telos* viene a coincidere con l’“esserci” e con l’“esistere” (Marcuse 2001, 185, 187-9). È difficile, allora, non pensare al protagonismo metamorfico, all’esuberante autonomia performativa della *natura* dinamicamente *naturans*³⁹ del *Pianeta*, e al proposito finale dei protagonisti di pervenire alla “mancanza vera, pulita, di qualsiasi intenzione”, di ogni “ragione che non si esaurisse liberamente in se stessa, cioè nell’esistere” (Volponi 1978, 442).

Quanto al “narcisismo”, Marcuse (2001, 191) ribalta l’accezione comune, che ne fa un sinonimo di “isolamento egotistico”, se non di “autoerotismo immaturo”. Nella psicologia freudiana, difatti, il narcisismo primario costituisce una fase precedente al “rapporto antagonistico” tra “Io e realtà esterna”, considerato adulto e “normale”; in altri termini, prima di distinguere, di staccare il sé dal resto del mondo, l’Io abbraccia e include tutto ciò che percepisce, in una “connessione inseparabile” che potrà poi riemergere come “senso oceanico”, come impressione di un’“estensione senza limiti”, fino all’“identità con l’universo” (Ibid.: 190-1, con varie citazioni dal freudiano *Disagio della civiltà*). Sublimando in modo non più repressivo, bensì espansivo la “carica libidica” e corporea dell’Io, diverrebbe possibile “generare un ordine esistenziale comprensivo”, basato sull’“affinità fondamentale” tra gli esseri, sul “rifiuto” della “separazione”, sul superamento dell’“opposizione tra uomo e natura, soggetto e oggetto”. Tale “riunione” di ciò che finora è stato allontanato permetterebbe di far coincidere la “realizzazione dell’uomo” con quella di “alberi”, “ruscelli” e “animali”, non più sottoposti a “violenza”, bensì “amati e curati”, pacificati “non con la forza ma col canto” (Ibid.: 191, 188, 192). Non siamo distanti dal ‘paradigma confusivo’ di certo pensiero ecologico (cfr. Scaffai 2017, 16-7), a cui sembrano accostarsi (seppure dialetticamente) anche alcuni passi del *Pianeta*; in fondo, i protagonisti superstiti (tre esemplari maschi di specie diverse, posti all’alba di un nuovo mondo o piuttosto sull’orlo dell’estinzione?) paiono realizzare alla lettera un celebre motto di Donna Haraway (2016): “make kin, not babies”. Ma è l’intero impianto del libro a privilegiare una sconvolgente relazionalità (fatta di alleanze inter-specifiche) a un più tradizionale approccio familistico (fondato su sangui-

39 L’allusione va ovviamente alla filosofia di Spinoza (influyente anche su Leopardi). Cfr. Barad 2017.

nari legami di sangue), a puntare sull'*Unheimliche* piuttosto che sul 'familiare', sulla rigenerazione piuttosto che sulla 'riproduzione'.

Per Marcuse (2001, 93), d'altronde, il paradigma orfico-narcissico "protesta contro l'ordine repressivo della sessualità procreativa": non per nulla, Idelcdu è costretto a sottoporsi ad "accertamenti psicologici, analisi mediche, confronto dei segni zodiacali, verifica delle buste paga, prove" di durata, prima di potersi apparire in una "cabina sessuale isolata" alla quale le coppie hanno "diritto per un certo numero di ore alla settimana" (Volponi 1978, 332). Viene, così, mostrato come la sessualità sia accuratamente "programmata" e "imbragata" dai "poteri totalitari", incanalata a "scopi riproduttivi come qualsiasi altra parte della catena di montaggio" (Forni 1995, 120) (catena che, si rammenti, Mamerte e Roboamo fanno addirittura esplodere). Infine, l'"intima connessione tra piacere, sensualità, bellezza, verità, arte e libertà", tra "canto", "gioco" e "contemplazione", spinge Marcuse (2001, 193-4, 213-5) a occuparsi della "dimensione estetica", concepita come "conciliazione" tra principio del piacere e principio di realtà, "sensi e intelletto". Affinché possa sorgere una nuova, migliore civiltà, sono ugualmente necessari la "degradazione" delle "facoltà 'superiori'", cioè l'abbassamento di una ragione esaltata fino alla "tirannide", e l'"autosublimazione della sensualità", ossia l'innalzamento delle "facoltà 'inferiori'", pienamente riabilite e, dunque, "passibili di cultura": solo grazie a questa "unione" uomo e natura potranno finalmente armonizzarsi.

6. *Lingua e corpo*

Le teorizzazioni marcusiane appena illustrate implicano una serie di polarità e tensioni che, in effetti, innervano l'opera volponiana. Mamerte, per esempio, paragona la propria ricca attività intellettuale – con cui abitualmente viene giustificata la pretesa superiorità dei *sapiens* – alle incessanti emissioni diarroiche dell'oca; ma già l'io di *Corporale*, secondo Ferretti (1972, 70-1), avvertiva la "precarietà e inutilità dei 'pensieri', la loro impotenza a 'liberare l'uomo'", in quanto "schemi di questa società". Solo dai 'sensi' e dalla 'sensualità' dell'uomo può nascere un nuovo 'forte pensiero'. Anche a questo si ricollega la contro-*Bildung* del nano, il suo "divenire-animale deleuziano" (Raveggi 2015, 251),⁴⁰ la sua

40 Oltre a quello di Deleuze, in relazione agli *animal studies* vengono qui fatti i nomi di Agamben ed Esposito.

aspirazione a immergersi nella dimensione biologica della vita e a non definirsi più in opposizione ai propri compagni di avventura. Pur parlando, infatti, si dice ben diverso dagli uomini al seguito di Moneta; anzi, dialogando con Roboamo, assicura: “sono come voi, [...] con voi...; ma l’oca è oca e tu sei elefante. Vuoi tagliarmi l’ultimo pezzo di lingua?”; per poi ribadire: “sono più animale di voi!”. A questa orgogliosa dichiarazione, il saggio pachiderma risponde, però, ridendo: “Va bene, va bene... Guarda solo di non volerlo essere in modo diverso dal nostro” (Volponi 1978, 411-2).

Tali scambi di battute, oltre a testimoniare una certa oscillazione tra ‘paradigma distintivo’ e ‘paradigma confusivo’, rivelano che una delle questioni centrali del libro risiede nel valore da attribuire al linguaggio umano. Quanto si è visto a proposito di Idelcditu va, infatti, corretto con la lettura di altri episodi, a cominciare dall’“idillio” a-verbale e “radicalmente antiromantico” (Mobili 2007, 130) tra Mamerte e una suora-infermiera di Kanton (dedita, peraltro, a una devota “adorazione dell’uccello”) (Volponi 1978, 302). La comunicazione tra i due personaggi avviene esclusivamente tramite “scambi scatologici”, peli, gocce di umori, secrezioni varie, cioè tramite un codice ‘creaturale’, in cui si realizza la “coincidenza di corpo e segno” (Mobili 2007, 130). Tale “abbassamento” carnale, tale “figurazione grottesca” dell’amore e dell’eros garantirebbero, “come in Beckett”, un “residuo d’innocenza”, proprio perché affrancati dalle parole e dai moduli “stereotipat[i] ed inautentic[i]” che esse veicolerebbero (Inglese 2008, 354). Tuttavia, al momento del commiato, la suora regala a Mamerte una poesia, dunque un testo che esalta al massimo grado le potenzialità creative e formalizzanti del linguaggio, sebbene sia scritto in un idioma a lui incomprensibile. Inoltre, l’intera vicenda ci viene narrata in analessi, seguendo i nostalgici ricordi del nano: si tratta, perciò, di un “esercizio di *memoria* – gesto per nulla carnale, ma anzi assolutamente cerebrale e linguistico” (Mobili 2007, 130).

Un altro episodio rilevante riguarda la lettera che Mamerte trova sul corpo di un nemico, un “biondo aviatore liberal” schiantatosi a terra a bordo di un razzo, conservandola poi di nascosto come un “messaggio” importante, da consegnare a “qualche Idelcditu” auspicabilmente “incontrato” lungo il cammino. È interessante, allora, che nel finale questa necessità e questa attesa vengano esplicitamente rinnegate (“cercava di non cercare”), al punto che il nano strappa la lettera (seppure a fatica) senza leggerla, anzi senza nemmeno aprirla, liberandosi così da ogni “rimpianto” umano: “– E perché? [...] Aspettiamo messaggi? Raccolse la busta e tentò di lacerarla. Dovette adoperare e applicare

tutta la propria forza e bravura contro la resistenza dell'oggetto [...]: la busta si gonfiava o si ritirava [...]. Mamerte fece ricorso più volte alla convinzione di dovere compiere quel fatto [...]. Alla fine non mostrò alcun rimorso” (Volponi 1978, 343, 327, 442, 450). Il cenno a “qualche Idelcditu” non è affatto casuale, dato che i rapporti tra l'imitatore e i protagonisti animali, per quanto amichevoli, non sono semplici, soprattutto se messi in triangolazione con i dubbi e le speranze del nano. Mamerte, infatti, a un certo punto teme erroneamente che il “nemico universale” individuato dai compagni sia proprio Idelcditu, e in più occasioni si chiede se avrebbe abbandonato o meno il gruppo, avendo a disposizione una compagnia umana; d'altra parte, come accennato, Epistola tentenna a lungo sull'opportunità di accogliere l'imitatore nella propria schiera. A questo riguardo, va evidenziato che la scimmia, capo della spedizione, è “del tutto digiuna sia di lettere che di calcolo” (Raboni 1979, 8938), così che il suo nome, allusivo di una nobile tradizione classica e rinascimentale, sarebbe antifrastico, cioè leggibile come “riferimento – ironico – alla sua totale estraneità al linguaggio verbale”, e dunque alla sua viscerale “pulsionalità” (Zublena 2015, 463)⁴¹ e alla sua “esasperazione del codice gestuale”, vista come ricerca di “vie di comunicazione” alternative a una “parola” ormai corrotta dal “mondo capitalista” (Marchionne Picchione e Piccione 1980, 82).

La scena più importante, però, è senza dubbio quella dell'*explicit*, in cui Mamerte – con mani ormai tramutate in zoccoli – rinuncia al proprio segreto, fino allora gelosamente custodito, condividendo con i superstiti Roboamo e Plan Calcule l'effetto personale a cui era più legato, ovvero la poesia donatagli dalla suora. I tre, così, mangiano il foglio di riso su cui è vergato il testo, interessandosi solo al valore nutritivo del suo supporto fisico; insieme alla nefasta “proprietà privata”, in questo gesto di distribuzione comunista sembrerebbe “estinta” pure l'idea di “formalizzazione estetica a vantaggio del ‘bene comune’” (Zinato 1998, 1313). Ciò che conta, insomma, è la “materialità della parola che da consolatoria e nostalgica si fa utile cibo” (Forni 1995, 119); una volta raggiunto lo stato del puro e semplice “esistere”, della “totalità, integra e presente, dell'esistenza” (Volponi 1978, 442), priva di ordinamenti e gerarchie, si avrebbe una salutare e “totale negazione dei valori della civiltà” (Zinato 1998, 1313). Data tale rinuncia “definitiva e irrevocabile”, il libro deve necessa-

41 Cfr. Volponi 1978, 288: “Epistola come pistola e pistola come [...] quel prepotente e sproporzionato organo sessuale”.

riamente finire, poiché il seguito “non potrà più essere narrato nei termini di un linguaggio umano” (Mussgnug 2003, 27) (anche se non vi è alcun narratore omo-/auto-diegetico). Dopo non c’è nulla di raccontabile, o forse non c’è proprio nulla: a rimanere fuori del romanzo potrebbe essere il regno dell’utopia, ma anche quello della desertica scomparsa di “ogni senso” (Colonna 1995, 103); d’altronde, in un’altra prosa volponiana si dichiara che le “ultime battaglie e la fine non sono mai state descritte” (Volponi 1999, 194).

Eppure, come anticipato, la scena in cui si metterebbe in atto il rinnegamento della lingua e della civiltà è paradossalmente modellata su un fortissimo modello culturale, quello dell’eucarestia cristiana, come a dimostrare l’“impossibilità costitutiva” (Mobili 2007, 128) di un rigetto completo; similmente, l’intero libro, pur con tutte le sue “prospettive antiletterarie” o anti-intellettuali, si regge sul “mito letterario dell’apocalisse”, confermando l’“impossibilità di una ripresa da zero”, di una vera e propria *tabula rasa*, e l’ambivalente rapporto di “odio-amore” nei confronti del “passato” (Marchionne Picchione e Picchione 1980, 82-3). Un’ulteriore dimostrazione è data da Roboamo, che rifiuta sì il “ridicolo” delle esibizioni, ma rimane pur sempre un elefante parlante, anzi un coltissimo dantista: se giustamente resiste all’ammaestramento umano (già emblemizzato nell’“oltraggio [...] che era stato commesso contro di lui e tutta la elefantinità” con l’adamitica e iniqua “imposizione del nome”) (Volponi 1978, 411, 292), cioè a una totale colonizzazione dell’Inconscio, non per questo rinuncia a declamare alcune esatte terzine incatenate.

Insomma, se in apparenza la “tenzone tra corpo e linguaggio” si conclude con un’icastica “fagocitazione” del secondo nel primo (Mobili 2007, 132), la questione si rivela invero più complessa e aperta. Già il Mamerte scolaro diffidava di una “scrittura” avvertita come “più compatta del pavimento”, anzi era terrorizzato dalla sua bidimensionale simbolicità (“non può nemmeno essere bagnata, o morsicata come un cuscino”) (Volponi 1978, 358). Il potere del linguaggio (a maggior ragione di quello scritto) risiede, infatti, nella sua capacità di distanziamento e astrazione rispetto alla fisicità di oggetti ed esperienze, nel *débrayage* dall’*hic et nunc*, a favore di un’ampia trasmissibilità spazio-temporale del messaggio. Portando fino in fondo il ragionamento, si potrebbe ipotizzare che tale “rinvio ad un altrove” (Inglese 2008, 355), tale scissione fondativa tra significante e significato sia in qualche modo comparabile alla strutturale allegoricità di Moneta (denunciata, però, in un romanzo fondato sull’allegorismo!), cioè al denaro come equivalente universale, come segno vuoto che sta

per qualunque altra cosa; al valore di scambio contrapposto al valore d'uso; alla speculazione borsistica come ipostatizzazione dell'irrealtà. È rivelatore, allora, che il governatore imprechi contro un "contadino ribelle! Un negatore della civiltà, un barbaro, un materialista, un comunista", e specularmente che Mamerte gli rimproveri la sua innaturale artificialità di oro tesaurizzato e di "merda moneta", ben distinti dall'"oro metallo utile per i denti" e dal fertile "concime". In opposizione alla volatilità della finanza, i protagonisti si ripropongono non di "spender[e]" la "moneta", bensì di "fonderla" e "liquefarla" (Volponi 1978, 434, 438, 429), così come nelle *Mosche* si auspica di ridurla a "non significare più niente, nient'altro che la sua patacca rotonda" (Volponi 1989, 186). Similmente, nei vari episodi di tensione all'a-verbalità sopra ricordati (Epistola, la suora ecc.), si adotta una sorta di "scrittura organica" priva di mediazioni, data la "totale e prelinguistica coincidenza di codice e referente" (Colonna 1995, 99), di "parola e materia", anzi di "escremento e linguaggio" (Mobili 2007, 125).⁴² Secondo Mobili, oltre all'innegabile "piacere" provocato dalla carnevalesca detronizzazione del "razionale", gettato nell'"infimo regno" delle "deiezioni", si avrebbe qui una riemersione di ciò che Kristeva chiamava l'"abbietto", ossia di quell'"oscura dimensione di fluidi corporei" che, per Lacan, afferirebbe al Reale, a quanto precede l'ordinamento simbolico e linguistico. Tuttavia, alla "morte del linguaggio" celebrata nell'*explicit*, a quell'eclatante "logofagia", rischia di non sopravvivere "niente".

A ben vedere, perciò, la ricchezza del *Pianeta* sta nella sua "fluttuazione" tra esaltazione dell'"escremento" a detrimento di "mente e linguaggio", da un lato, e "celebrazione" delle "possibilità liriche e demiurgiche" di una parola rinnovata dal contatto con la corporeità, dall'altro: anzi, accettare questo "dissidio" e questo "conflitto" senza risolverli univocamente costituirebbe un "gesto" estremamente "vitale". Volponi, così, si proporrebbe di superare ogni netta dicotomia tra "mente e materia", lasciando intravedere la possibilità di un uso rinnovato e creativo del linguaggio (Mobili 2007, 123, 125, 134). Il punto centrale è, dunque, la contraddizione tra la stigmatizzazione di un *logos* che avrebbe lacerato l'unità della biosfera, creando fratture dentro e fuori di noi,

⁴² A questo proposito, va ricordato che, in una spettrale città sotterranea, Mamerte assiste a una rabelaisiana materializzazione dei suoni: "la volta che volle provare a gridare, il suono della sua voce schizzò via come un sasso. I pezzi delle sue canzoni volavano via in formazione" (Volponi 1978, 385).

e l'esplorazione delle potenzialità ludiche, poetiche e rigeneratrici della lingua: forzando e semplificando un poco, è proprio questa la tensione tra Epistola e Idelcditu. Se, per Volponi, il mondo non è certo postmodernamente ricondotto a una combinazione di codici, l'affrancamento totale dal linguaggio rimane una meta asintotica, impossibile da raggiungere. Di conseguenza, la scena eucaristica sopra evocata, piuttosto che la condanna definitiva della civiltà umana, potrebbe rappresentare la sua necessaria "ricongiunzione con la materialità dell'esistenza" e il "recupero" di un suo "valore d'uso comunitario" (Zinato 1998, 1318).⁴³ Invece che essere distrutta, la cultura sarebbe 'comunicata' e assimilata, "metabolizzata" come un "nutrimento" energizzante (Carlino 1995, 63; cfr. Bellia 2018, 282-3), incorporata nell'esistenza, e sarebbe finalmente messa in comunione, distribuita equamente in base alle necessità collettive. In fondo, si realizzerebbero così appieno (seppure in modo irricognoscibile) i propositi divulgativi di Idelcditu (oltre che di Schiller, Marcuse, Fortini ecc.):⁴⁴ è per questo che la sua morte nella nuova società eco-comunista non è affatto sicura (l'imitatore, d'altronde, ha già dimostrato una volta di saper 'risorgere'). La scelta di porre in bocca a Roboamo la citazione dell'*incipit* del *Purgatorio* potrebbe, pertanto, valere come obliqua sintesi delle riflessioni appena sviluppate, sebbene il doveroso rito di 'purgazione' non possa non assumere, nel *Pianeta*, un significato anche scatologico: "e canterò di quel secondo regno / dove l'umano spirito si purga / e di salire al ciel diventa degno. / Ma qui la morta poesia resurga" (Volponi 1978, 373).

7. "Una scrittura della materialità". Stile e temi

In *Corporale*, l'io prefigura un avvenire in cui ognuno dovrà "mutare" i propri "pensieri" e la propria "natura", dunque anche il proprio "diario" (Volponi 1974, 736); anzi, più avanti nel romanzo, precisa che continuerà sì a scrivere finché gli sarà concesso, ma "non per fare un diario: anche perché il diario interessante sarebbe dopo: quello impossibile. Sarà davvero impos-

43 Per Leopardi, d'altronde, la parola dava corpo e fisicità alle idee.

44 Reputo perciò troppo *tranchante* la seguente affermazione del pur ottimo saggio di Pischetta (2004, 290): "nel doppio percorso di Zuppa e dell'Imitatore, Volponi emblemizza un'alternativa assoluta".

sibile assistere e scrivere: occorrerà manovrare occhi, lingua, mani, dentro la fusione” (Ibid.: 936). In un certo senso, *Il pianeta* accetta la sfida di tale impossibilità e cerca di superare operativamente le contraddizioni esaminate nel precedente paragrafo attraverso la “messa a punto di una scrittura della materialità” (Cataldi 1997, 16). In altri termini, Volponi raggiunge una “rinovata vitalità” e una sorprendente espansione di “orizzonti espressivi” per mezzo della “somatizzazione del linguaggio”, causata dall’incontro – fatto di mimesi e trasfigurazione, “controllo e anarchia” – tra lingua e corpo, dall’“alleanza di parola ed escremento” (Mobili 2007, 123, 126). Come affermato da Morante in una lettera a Volponi del 3 marzo 1974, il tutto-pieno del “Caos è il contrario della Bomba, la quale ovviamente fa ordine e pulisce tutto di tutto” (Volponi 2002, 1:1160); anche per questo, Volponi propende per una soluzione plurilinguistica e pluristilistica, “getta insieme e mescola [...] elementi della tradizione colta e della cultura di massa” (Zinato 1992, 29), in una paratassi tanto sintattica quanto ideologico-ecologica. In questo organismo in “perpetua metamorfosi” (Zinato 1998, 1309), il comico si compenetra al tragico, l’ironia convive con il raccapriccio, l’insulto volgare e le “iperboli colorate alla brava” (Pischedda 2004, 296)⁴⁵ con l’accensione poetica: un po’ come accade ai quattro protagonisti, il registro alto è costretto a condividere il cammino con quello basso, tra scarti e cozzi, momenti di insofferenza reciproca e altri di gioiosa mescidazione.⁴⁶ Come intuito da Bollati, gli “scoppi d’ira”, i labirintici “incubi della materia infetta” e le “invettive di sconvolgente violenza” sono sì sorretti dall’“elementarità millenaristica” del dettato, dalla sua “follia” e “disperazione”, ma sono altresì “assistiti da alta sapienza letteraria” e da una raffinatissima “cultura figurativa” (Ibid.: 2:754; cfr. Cesari 1991, 165). Anzi, se innegabilmente nel romanzo “domina il grottesco”, è anche vero che vi persiste un “sublime residuo” che, pur dovendo “lacerarsi contro l’accumulo devastante” (e devastato), si ostina a salvaguardare e riproporre l’utopica luminosità della “Speranza” (Zinato 1992, 28).

45 Lo studioso analizza, tra l’altro, quei “veri equilibrismi stilistici” in cui un “vocabolario liricamente prezioso” converge su “immagini sconce”, dando esiti quali “gocce d’orina rilucenti” e “madreperla di sperma” (Ibid.: 301).

46 Va ricordato che, a un certo stadio redazionale, il nano, denominato Fioretto (o Sanguinello), parlava un romanesco ‘pasoliniano’; è possibile, allora, che la direzione variantistica seguita dall’autore intenda espungere il rischio di cedere a una creaturalità populista-borgatara (Volponi 2002, 2:731).

In effetti, l'“accumulo caotico del periodare”, talvolta rafforzato da una deformazione espressionista, oltre a supportare la requisitoria di Mamerte, potrebbe configurarsi come il “corrispettivo retorico” di una “disarmonia” anti-rinascimentale e anti-idillica (Rocchi 2004, 272), di una terra desolata e di un pianeta mostruosamente infetto, devastato da esplosioni, terremoti, calamità. Tuttavia, la distruzione dell'ordine vigente ha un valore ambivalente, dato che Volponi ha sempre cercato di rompere la realtà, piuttosto che confermarla, di scalfire lo *status quo* come “blocco di senso compatto” e “granitico”: quelle liste disordinate e squilibrate potrebbero allora costituire, insieme alle metafore, le “armi” del “poeta”, i mezzi con cui stabilire un contatto con la “natura” e l'“animale” interiorizzati. Quei “piccoli smottamenti linguistici”, così, alluderebbero e ci preparerebbero a ben altri crolli, valendo come strumenti “apocalittic[i]”, che stravolgono le norme stilistico-testuali dando nello stesso tempo vivacità e nuova organizzazione ai “detriti” lasciati da tale deflagrazione (Fichera 2013). L'enumerazione caotica, inoltre, mi sembra rispecchiare il tentativo dei protagonisti di rendere ‘ecumenico’, di trasformare in *òikos*, quell'ammasso di macerie, di residui organici e inorganici, quell'affastellamento di orlandiani oggetti desueti e antifunzionali; di rifondare una società migliore su inedite prossimità, collaborazioni inusuali, contaminazioni e assemblaggi stupefacenti, su un'eguaglianza priva di vertici e capi assoluti.

Fin dalla prima pagina del romanzo, inoltre, emerge lo straniamento connesso a un punto di vista non (sempre né totalmente) antropocentrico: “ogni cosa intorno, vegetale o minerale” (Volponi 1978, 283). Ciò risulta subito evidentissimo nella “vertiginosa analessi” (Scaffai 2017, 205) su uno straordinario leccio, un “prodigio vegetale” (Volponi 1978, 284) la cui esistenza plurisecolare viene rapidamente ripercorsa adottando una focalizzazione e una temporalità non-umane. Le singole biografie e addirittura il destino della nostra specie vengono trascesi da una più ampia vicenda di vite e morti, disfacimento e rigenerazione: il seme di quell'albero, difatti, era stato piantato da una nobildonna appestata e ‘concimato’ con bacilli, sperma, vomito, sputi. Tale straniamento, oltre a veicolare la sensazione di un mondo così mutato da essere irriconoscibile,⁴⁷ traduce in procedimento letterario il prospettivismo insito nell'idea di *Umwelt*, nella constatazione che ogni membro della biosfera “può immagina-

47 Cfr. Ibid.: 371 (“sembrò distintamente a ciascuno dei quattro che tutto il loro universo fosse ruotato”).

re e abitare” un medesimo “spazio comune in base a distinte categorie sentimentali, culturali, assiologiche” (Scaffai 2017, 155). Il narratore, quindi, alterna i differenti punti di vista dei quattro personaggi: pur privilegiando nettamente quelli di Mamerte e Roboamo, si registrano degli interessanti tentativi di entrare nella mente della scimmia e persino dell’oca; è rivelatore, per esempio, che Epistola acconsenta a mandare in perlustrazione il nano, a lasciarlo “partire per quei duri giri senza senso o il cui senso non appariva certo a lui” (con una *correctio* limitativa pienamente ‘ecologica’). Anzi, pure gli esseri inanimati sembrano qui dotati di *agency* e intenzionalità: “le lune per potere risaltare si erano spalmate lungo il cerchio e sul mento una crema verdastra”.

Nel romanzo, poi, troviamo scene di questo tenore: “Epistola [...] aveva iniziato a masturbarsi [...]. Il getto del suo seme ottenne sulla cenere l’effetto degli altri liquidi e la scimmia si chinò a nutrirsi della nuova poltiglia”; “[Mamerte] tracannò altri alcolici [...], si arrestò contro il culone di Roboamo e prima di abbandonarsi alla digestione e al sonno sospirò: – Oh! immortalità selvaggia. Si accamparono disordinatamente in preda all’alcool, alla nausea e alla diarrea [...]. Defecavano dappertutto senza ritegno, sulle cose stesse che ancora mangiavano o bevevano” (Volponi 1978, 414, 300, 341, 342).⁴⁸ Sulla pagina, cioè, si accampano ‘senza ritegno’ tutte quelle azioni elementari, quelle esigenze biologiche (dormire, mangiare, urinare, eiaculare ecc.) tradizionalmente censurate, o al massimo evocate con allusioni e perifrasi, dal *novel* borghese di buone maniere: “il sesso, gli escrementi, [...] la fame, la sete, il freddo, la stanchezza, sono i modi in cui i quattro eroi interagiscono col mondo” (Zinato 1998, 1309). Si intende, così, “sovertire la logica convenzionale delle funzioni corporee” (Mobili 2007, 128) e la relativa gerarchia dei sensi, dando nuova dignità alla dimensione estetica, alla ricchezza delle percezioni fisiche:⁴⁹ non per nulla, Mamerte, avendo la vista compromessa – vista che è, forse, il più sublimante e distanziante tra i sensi, tanto da essere linguisticamente associato alla conoscenza razionale (*ιδέα*, *ιδεῖν*, *οἶδα*) –, sviluppa e acuisce tatto, gusto, olfatto.⁵⁰ Grande importanza è

48 La citazione da Leopardi (“immortalità selvaggia”) è posta anche in esergo al volume; ed è pienamente leopardiana la stigmatizzazione della barbarica ‘snaturatezza’ della civiltà contemporanea.

49 Sull’utilizzo non-simbolista della sinestesia, cfr. Pischetta 2004, 298-9.

50 Cfr. Volponi 1978, 286, 296-7, 412, 443 (non sempre riferite al solo Mamerte): “la pioggia confonde la vista, ma in compenso accresce l’olfatto”; “batté con le nocche, ma non ottenne alcuna risonanza. Passò allora la lingua a più riprese per trovare almeno un sapore che lo

poi accordata alla “merda”, che da “scarto”, da rifiuto per antonomasia, viene innalzata a utilissima e preziosa “materia polifunzionale” (Colonna 1995, 93; cfr. Marchionne Picchione e Picchione 1980, 75-6). Non si tratta soltanto di esporre quanto l’“estetica classica” bollava come “brutt[o]” e “oscen[o]”: da un lato, infatti, la metafora digestiva e organicista regge l’intero libro (un pianeta irritato come un intestino, a causa della bulimia neocapitalistica, e dunque bisognoso di un più equilibrato metabolismo socio-ecologico); dall’altro, questa “liturgia della merda” rappresenta il “cuore ideologico del romanzo” e si riallaccia (forse consapevolmente) all’interpretazione bachtiniana di Rabelais, in cui il “basso corporeo” costituisce il polo “positivo”, vivificante e collettivo, poiché connesso con l’“universalità” e l’“unità del popolo” (Zublena 2015, 472-3).

Nel ribaltamento carnevalesco, si sa, all’innalzamento del basso corrisponde un abbassamento dell’alto: Volponi, infatti, parodizza nel *Pianeta* i linguaggi ufficiali della burocrazia, del potere, del *management* e della finanza (mentre a proposito del “lessico sindacale” e di quello “astrattamente ideologico del partito” la “condanna” non è ugualmente “assoluta”) (Ibid.: 469). Il linguaggio è ideologia (come ribadito dalla Neoavanguardia) e l’in-segnamento è trasmissione di una certa semiotica, di una ben determinata assiologia: per questo i protagonisti si imbattono in una scuola abbandonata, posta accanto a una fabbrica ipogea e dominata da un grande ritratto, violentemente minaccioso nonostante il sorriso. Mamerte, in più, percepisce che in quel luogo “qualcosa di molto importante per tutti dovesse essersi distorta e perduta. Quale verità? Le scuole poi gli avevano sempre messo paura”. Se le lettere dell’alfabeto si tramutavano, per lui, in esseri mostruosi, ciò avveniva anche perché quel sistema educativo mirava soltanto a formare soldati e operai obbedienti, poiché era asservito a un sistema politico-economico e militare che si reggeva sull’esclusione, l’iniquità, lo sfruttamento, la carneficina. Il nano, infatti, “a scuola veniva appeso per i polsi e con i pesi ai piedi perché crescesse, o almeno si allungasse fino alla misura della leva, piuttosto che istruito... e su testi storici o d’economia, poi!”.

Sono bachtiniane, allora, anche la desublimazione della retorica bellicista e la demistificazione del gergo delle aziende (qui allegorizzate dal circo), che dietro a formule come “condirettore generale” cela una dura realtà lavora-

illuminasse”; “il nano non riusciva a guardare e sceglieva i punti più freschi della catena da leccare”; “il suo udito era sottile e delicato e sentiva anche per gli occhi”; “a forza di annusare e leccare”.

tiva, fatta di “merda”, “sudore” e “rifiuti” da pulire (Volponi 1978, 357, 361, 349). Il gruppo dei quattro protagonisti forma, è vero, un piccolo drappello militare, capace persino di azioni efferate, ma almeno in apparenza piuttosto simile a un’improbabile armata Brancaleone. La loro epica (molti gesti sono ripetuti “tre volte”) è stravolta e grottesca; nelle loro vittoriose battaglie il ribrezzo ‘tragico’ del nano si mescola a un abbassamento anti-eroico. Anzi, in aggiunta all’a-moralità della fiaba e all’estremismo apocalittico dell’allegoria, nelle iperboliche scene di massacro potrebbe agire il modello di Pulci e dell’eroicomico (fino ai *Paralipomeni della Batracomiomachia*), condito con un pizzico di *splatter*: “mulinava le sbarre distribuendo bene il fiato, anche per il terrore: vedeva i denti e le lingue dei ratti più grossi e feroci che gli si buttavano addosso e sentiva gli schizzi del loro sangue su tutta la pelle”. Come se l’effetto non fosse abbastanza perturbante, Volponi aggiunge a questo impasto l’immaginario e i tecnicismi della produzione industriale: “[Roboamo] impazzì, menando e cadendo di qua e di là; pestando batteva quell’orlo immondo come una cucitrice elettronica. Ne scaraventava per aria interi merletti e gomitoli soltanto soffiando. I ratti che scampavano oltre, [...] venivano colpiti sul cranio dal becco dell’oca, abituata alla ribaditura delle piccole serie pungenti” (Ibid.: 364-5). Pure nello scontro supremo, quello contro Moneta e il suo esercito, si nota una componente carnevalesca, visto che alle cannonate e alle micro-bombe i protagonisti rispondono con le loro semplici armi, ma ancor prima con un’incontenibile risata (“il nano si mise a ridere e continuò da non potere fermarsi più, presto imitato dall’elefante e anche dagli altri”) e con flatulenze di dantesca memoria (“emise due peti”; “la trombetta gli rispose alzando il volume della nota”) (Ibid.: 429, 433). Insomma, persino quando, all’“apice del conflitto, la situazione richiederebbe un tono epico-tragico, il lavoro retorico del testo non si esime dal procedere verso il basso” (Muzzioli 2007, 192). Anche a questo pensava, forse, Raboni (1979, 8938), quando sosteneva che Volponi non volesse ammonire il lettore a proposito della “dissipazione ecologica” e del “fatale approssimarsi” della fine, bensì intendesse assaporare “in anticipo le delizie” di quella “catastrofe”, “abbandonandosi” a una “dilagante, contagiosa ilarità”. Ancora oggi, bisogna ammetterlo, il lettore ride talvolta di gusto, o almeno sorride, sebbene occorra chiedersi se, come e in che misura l’attuale consapevolezza della gravità e dell’urgenza delle questioni ambientali ha mutato la ricezione del romanzo.

8. “Nessun animale ripete”

Nella battaglia decisiva tra Moneta ed Epistola è, poi, significativo rilevare come le strumentazioni ipertecnologiche del primo – implementate nel suo corpo, tanto da trasformarlo in un cyborg quasi postumano – perdano l’“orientamento” di fronte all’“animale” loro contrapposto, certo non inquadrabile come un “problema di human relations” (Volponi 1978, 437).⁵¹ Similmente, le unità di cani-dirigenti doppiamente ‘cinici’, imbattutesi nel corpo deforme di Mamerte – incarnazione di un’identità multipla e ibrida –, sono costrette a confrontarsi con un “essere [...] del tutto sconosciuto”, la cui “immagine” non è riconducibile a “una qualunque delle 1827 figure di nemico”, “imprese” nel loro “cervello” per “illuminare” e guidare il loro “furente istinto assassino”. Nella loro sconfitta inciderà, cioè, il fatto di battersi contro avversari dalla “condotta tattica e tecnica di combattimento del tutto originale e imprevedibile” (Ibid.: 419-20), irriconoscibili e inclassificabili secondo i loro standard e le loro griglie ermeneutiche (Epistola, d’altronde, era letteralmente evaso dalla gabbia in cui era imprigionato). I protagonisti, difatti, si mostrano inclini a un “dinamico adattamento all’ambiente circostante”, rigettando la “rigidità univoca di assestamenti definitivi” e il “desiderio-trappola di radici fisse” (Marchionne Picchione e Picchione 1980, 75). Se Volponi lodava gli uccelli per le loro grandiose migrazioni,⁵² qui la mobilità dei personaggi è inserita in cronotopi essi stessi fluidamente metamorfici, in “luoghi” soggetti a repentina “modificabilità geografica” (Marchionne Picchione e Picchione 1980, 77), in accordo con quell’“epica della mutazione” a cui è votato l’intero libro (dimostrata anche dalla ricorsività di un lessico afferente dell’area semantica dell’“instabilità” e del “movimento”), diametralmente opposta a qualsiasi “calcificazione del senso” (Colonna 1995, 88, 93), a ogni significato cristallizzato e stabilito una volta per sempre.

51 Gli uomini armati di mitra al seguito di Moneta somigliano, invece, a raccapriccianti “conigli scuoiati” (Ibid.: 432).

52 Nell’*Appennino contadino*, però, l’autore istituiva un parallelismo tra le migrazioni degli uccelli e l’abbandono dell’Italia rurale, configurato (in termini quasi verghiani) come colpa, rimorso, e rinuncia a una soluzione collettiva: “come ladro parte chi lascia la campagna [...] / La famiglia che parte e ci saluta / è già lontana nella sua ribellione; / [...] Chi fugge salva solo se stesso / come un passero, se un passero / si salva fuori del branco. [...] / Forse qui è l’ordine diverso / per queste stesse cose” (Volponi 2001, 138-9, 143).

Tutto ciò, da un lato, può forse essere accostato alle più tarde pagine di Deleuze e Guattari⁵³ sulla deterritorializzazione e sullo scardinamento degli apparati di cattura; dall'altro, va sicuramente messo in relazione con la protesta giovanile del Settantasette, che grazie al movimentismo auspicava di sfuggire alla burocratizzazione partitica. Secondo Volponi (1994, 66), d'altronde, la loro contestazione era fomentata proprio dal timore che la "ripetizione avesse davvero un'altra volta vinto"; l'"immobilità", infatti, è "lo scopo essenziale del potere" (Ibid.: 78). Tuttavia, non si può contrastare un nemico con le sue stesse armi e il suo stesso linguaggio, condividendone assiologia e orizzonte mentale, altrimenti ci si condannerà ad essere uguali e contrari, come nel caso dello scontro tra Occidente filo-americano e impero sovietico: "il pianeta è dominato dall'atomica, è lei la vera padrona. Ha condizionato sia il sistema capitalistico sia quello del socialismo reale, rendendoli praticamente uguali perché entrambi sono esistiti solo per produrre la stessa cosa: la bomba" (Volponi e Leonetti 1995, 107). Bisogna, quindi, essere pronti a un cambiamento radicale, ad abbandonare conoscenze, parole d'ordine e valori pregressi.⁵⁴

Nel *Pianeta* quest'idea emerge piuttosto esplicitamente nel dialogo tra Roboamo e Mamerte: l'elefante, difatti, distingue la "grande memoria" di cui è notoriamente dotato (quella stessa memoria preservata e custodita da Idelcditu?) dalla "nostalgia", invitando l'umano a non "aver paura del futuro" e a fare un nietzschiano 'buon uso della storia': "pensa e adopera anche il passato, ma non farti legare dalle sue strisce". Il pachiderma, così, rimprovera ripetutamente il nano per il suo "attaccamento al mondo passato" e per la sua "scarsa fiducia nell'avvento del regno [...] della comunanza e dell'armonia". La "nostalgia" di Mamerte (che si va "tramutando via via [...] in riconoscenza per Roboamo") è emblemizzata dal cumulo di oggetti che egli si ostina a portare con sé, e di cui dovrà presto imparare a disfarsi: "il nano piangeva e andava avanti sotto il peso delle cose salvate senza potere voltarsi indietro. Una volta sola si voltò e la nostalgia di quella catasta di beni e di strumenti [...] lo vinse e lo piegò a

53 Ma cfr. già Deleuze 1968.

54 Cfr. Volponi 1974, 655: "anch'io ho paura che voi siate sempre uguali, che decidiate di creare dei mostri che vi servano [...] a rimanere sempre uguali. Io sono pronto a mutare: voi no. E così vi fregherà la bomba che avete prefabbricato: la quale esplodendo metterà in atto regole e reazioni diverse da quelle della vostra bella continuità". Non è da escludere che, in Volponi, vi sia una reinterpretazione dello stato di potenzialità dell'uomo-abbozzo e delle capacità adattive dell'inetto primonovecentesco, in particolare sveviano.

terra”. Nella conclusione, Mamerte finalmente “butt[a] via” la propria “merda”, e non più quella altrui, con un gesto di affrancamento dall’oppressione del sempre-uguale (adombrato, però, dall’ambivalenza dell’intero finale: “non mi dispiace che sia oltre che la prima anche l’ultima volta”): di fronte al catartico “mucchio esagerato della propria cacca”, egli riflette proprio su “come fosse difficile liberarsi del tutto dei ricordi...”, non solo per sé, ma “perfino per l’oca” (Volponi 1978, 309, 406-7).

D’altra parte, lo stesso Roboamo era ricorso agli omissis, a un’ellissi quasi iconoclasta, quando aveva tentato di prefigurare un avvenire totalmente altro, senza ricadere in schemi preesistenti: “la produzione di beni poi sarà quella che... – ma qui si fermò proprio per non ricorrere a nessun elemento che potesse riferirsi al passato” (Ibid.: 449). La vaghezza, anzi il vuoto con cui si delinea il futuro sistema socio-economico dimostra quanto sia complicato, per chiunque, immaginare il (dopo)domani senza attingere all’oggi, se non all’avantieri: per questo, il “‘regno’ [...] non viene mai definito in termini positivi, ma soltanto come la negazione” della storia antropocentrica/antropocenica (Mussgnug 2003, 27); la “pars construens”, cioè, coincide con “prospettive” volutamente “imprecisate”. A dire il vero, si potrebbe scorgere la “progettazione” di tale “nuovo mondo o Terra Promessa” (Marchionne Picchione e Picchione 1980, 64) nei disegni di Epistola, fatti con le interiora di nemici eviscerati, ma si tratta appunto di a-verbali grumi materici disposti da un capo assoluto che, come visto, deve necessariamente morire dopo aver rovesciato l’ordine esistente. Semmai, è importante sottolineare come il babbuino non possa coltivare il rimpianto verso un presunto e idillico stato di natura originario, un Eden perduto e post-apocalitticamente ristabilito, poiché è nato in cattività, nelle violente sperequazioni dello *show business* circense e in un pianeta già alterato da ripetute catastrofi.

È significativo, infine, che sia un animale a diffidare un *sapiens* dalla sclerotizzante iterazione del già noto.⁵⁵ Nella *Macchina mondiale*, difatti, si affermava che la “natura è sempre quella”, ciclicamente circolare, “e sempre tordi, lepri, anatre e tassi si comportano allo stesso modo” (Volponi 1965, 208; cfr. Baghetti 2022); ancora nell’82, Volponi (1999, 157) sostiene che “l’uomo è l’animale che ha saputo, sopra gli istinti e i [...] programmi proprio di tipo meccanico che una specie ha, organizzarsi e mutare, adattarsi, scegliere”. In quella stessa

55 Su tali questioni, cfr. Agamben 2002; Derrida 2006; Virno 2020.

pagina, però, l'autore elogia l'"animale" per la sua capacità di "andare al di là, di sfidare l'ignoto, l'esilio, la nostalgia", mentre nel *Pianeta* si era spinto fino a una formulazione icastica e, per certi versi, palinodica: "nessun animale ripete! Tienilo presente, anche se si è sempre detto il contrario" (Volponi 1978, 429). Contro i gesti mille volte ripetuti alla catena di montaggio, contro il trionfo della conservazione, contro gli automatismi del pensiero, occorre avere il coraggio di aprirsi a un pianeta "vivente" e "irritabile", diversamente "equilibrato", con "foreste vergini, vulcani, deserti, abissi / del tutto nuovi, noti alla sola invenzione"; un pianeta finalmente "senza moneta, senza mandati / Né prezzi; senza costi, senza banche" (Volponi 2001, 390-1).

9. *Una nuova forma di narrazione*

Tale esigenza di innovazione agisce, ovviamente, anche sul piano letterario: in *Memoriale*, Albino avvertiva che "era veramente l'ora di parlare in un altro modo" (Volponi 1962, 169); nella *Macchina*, Anteo si riprometteva di ordinare le parole "secondo il suono", componendo una "cosa sensata e nuova al di fuori del senso che ogni parola aveva prima per conto suo" (Volponi 1965, 30). Similmente, Volponi dichiarava di aver voluto "costruire", con *Corporale*, un "organismo" sperimentale, "mutante, pieno di incidenti e di stravaganze" (Volponi e Bettini 1995, 52): alla sua scrittura, così, sarebbe accaduto qualcosa di simile alla rigenerante, "mostruosa ibridazione" prospettata da Aspri nella sua "tana animale" (Toracca 2020, 88). Anche *Il pianeta*, perciò, presenta un tipo di narrazione per molti aspetti inusuale; a colpire è innanzitutto lo statuto del narratore, o meglio sono le caratteristiche del suo bagaglio di saperi, le coordinate della sua enciclopedia. Si tratta di un fenomeno in parte vicino al concetto di parallessi, a rigore però inapplicabile in questo caso, considerata la focalizzazione zero. Per esempio, a proposito dei nastri della Parnasonic ascoltati dai militari, si precisa che non sono "certo quelli della *Divina Commedia* o degli *Ossi di seppia*"; altrove si ironizza sui *designer* insigniti del prestigioso "compasso d'oro" (premio vinto numerose volte dalla Olivetti); in relazione a Venezia, non soltanto si cita l'"Harris Bar" (ironicamente trasformato dall'oblio in un "antico centro sperimentale, o arsenale galleggiante, o nave appoggio, o università marinara", di cui si è fortunatamente reperito un "prezioso cavaturaccioli o apribottiglia"), ma anche la "biennale", e persino le "vedute di Luca Carlevaris", il "grigio dolente di Francesco Guardi"

(Volponi 1978, 318-20, 348). Oltre al narratore, ciò riguarda gli stessi personaggi, che ascoltano e cantano Édith Piaf, Caterina Caselli e *Catari* di Di Giacomo (in aggiunta all'enorme cultura dantesca di Roboamo). Detto diversamente, siamo di fronte a un' "assurda 'escursione' temporale" (Muzzioli 2007, 188), a un'infra-azione cronologico-culturale segnalata dai costanti riferimenti al Novecento, troppo numerosi e precisi se parametrati a un'ambientazione post-apocalittica di tre secoli successiva, a un mondo che dovrebbe aver perso gran parte di quei ricordi e di quelle informazioni. Il testo, insomma, con una movenza quasi metalettica, ammicca chiaramente all'extra-testo, all'autore empirico (le esperienze nell'industria, la passione per la pittura ecc.) e, soprattutto, al presente di composizione e ricezione dell'opera. Questa incongruenza è **certo** legata al genere praticato e agli intenti perseguiti, ossia all'allegorismo politico e alla "critica provocatoria alla società dei nostri giorni" (Marchionne Picchione e Picchione 1980, 73) insita nell'impianto distopico/apocalittico del *Pianeta*; inoltre, questo gioco di rimandi così "espliciti e specifici" al "mondo attuale" fanno sorridere il lettore, inserendosi spesso in un "registro prevalentemente comico e satirico" (Mussnug 2003, 26). Tuttavia, volendo portare il ragionamento fino all'estremo, si potrebbe ipotizzare che in questo dispositivo vi sia un tratto anti-antropocentrico, tale da "schiude[re] la possibilità di un altro orizzonte", dato che "chi narra è plurimo" e "anonimo", "disseminato nelle cose, incistato nella materia" (Carlino 1995, 67). A mio avviso, cioè, si potrebbe trattare di un tentativo (certo parziale) di oltrepassare le convenzioni del *novel* moderno, che implicitamente distinguono la plausibilità delle informazioni in possesso persino di un narratore 'onnisciente' (o, meglio, libero di mutare focalizzazione), che più che essere davvero 'l'occhio di Dio' somiglia spesso a un'istanza, in qualche modo, situata e antropomorfa (sebbene dotata della facoltà di entrare nella mente altrui).

Secondo Mobili (2007, 124), inoltre, *Il pianeta* – che, come sopra esemplificato, indugia sovente su immagini scatologiche – dispiegherebbe una complessa dinamica (a suo dire postmoderna) di assunzione, digestione ed espulsione di storie e trame, archetipi e *topoi* letterari, rielaborati "perlopiù in chiave grottesca".⁵⁶ Se effettivamente il grottesco è una delle principali cifre dell'opera, a questo proposito si può aggiungere che la scomparsa della civiltà fondata sulla proprietà privata sembra implicare il superamento della distinzione tra parola propria e parola altrui, ossia la nascita di un discorso condiviso. Si può interpretare così la

⁵⁶ Mobili a sua volta dialoga con Dainotto 1994. Cfr. Carlino 1995, 67.

ricca, rigogliosa intertestualità inglobata nella pagina volponiana, su cui si è già soffermata la critica, che ha riconosciuto allusioni e aperte citazioni da Baudelaire, Shakespeare, Marx, Leopardi, Borges, Dante. Ma l'impressione è che si potrebbe aggiungere molto a quanto già trovato: per esempio, la parola "lazzaretto" e la provvidenziale cessazione della pioggia nell'*explicit* ricordano (nel secondo caso *e contrario*) Manzoni, mentre l'attraversamento di una palude su una zattera, sintagmi come "triangolo" e "imbuto triangolare", e lo svenimento in seguito a un picco emotivo sono ulteriori echi danteschi (Volponi 1978, 370-1, 373, 375).⁵⁷

Oltre alla gestione della voce, molti altri tratti suggeriscono che un "mondo profondamente cambiato" non può essere "facilmente descrivibile" e narrabile nei "nostri termini abituali" (Muzzioli 2007, 184). Anzitutto, secondo Muzzioli, la natura dei personaggi e della situazione diegetica renderebbe "impossibile l'immedesimazione psicologica" (Ibid.: 186); similmente, Carlino sostiene che la "diatesi [...] rigorosamente materialistica" di Volponi annullerebbe "ogni sovraesposizione psicoanalitica" (1995, 66). Anche in questo caso, sono possibili varie interpretazioni. Riguardo la bidimensionalità di alcuni personaggi, per esempio, occorre considerare l'influenza del genere fumettistico (per quanto soggetto a "violenta deformazione espressionistica") (Ibid.) e di quello favolistico-allegorico: Moneta è la macchietta del *villain*, oltre che una 'facile allegoria'. Inoltre, una lettura ecologica e/o post-strutturalista del *Pianeta* porterebbe ad evidenziare il rigetto delle dicotomie che dividono l'unità del vivente, il rifiuto di distinguere tra piani diversi, tra profondità e superficie, e di riservare ai soli umani il privilegio di un'auto-riflessività complessa e consapevole (cfr. Mobili 2007, 132-3). Di conseguenza, si sfavorirebbe l'immedesimazione romanzesca tra lettore e personaggio, quel rispecchiamento e quel coinvolgimento emotivo che sarebbero forse sintomi di una tendenza assimilativa, di una rischiosa riduzione a sé dell'alterità. Va notato, tuttavia, come sia quasi inevitabile riconoscere in Mamerte il protagonista del 'romanzo': data la struttura intrinsecamente linguistica della letteratura come strumento conoscitivo, e data la sua acuta capacità di investigare e rappresentare il mondo dell'interiorità umana, siamo portati a comprendere meglio il comportamento e i moventi dei *sapiens* (Ma-

57 A cui si aggiungono, forse, certi paesaggi ghiacciati da Cocito, la riflessione sulla presenza/assenza d'ombra e l'incontro con quattro robotiche 'fiere'. Inoltre, la costruzione di una scena in cui un personaggio cita (più o meno correttamente, e riflettendo sulla memoria) un passaggio dantesco in relazione a una situazione 'infernale' potrebbe rimandare al celebre episodio di Ulisse in Primo Levi.

merte, appunto, e Idelcdu) o dell'alfabetizzato e parlante Roboamo, piuttosto che quelli degli a-verbali Epistola e Plan Calcule.

Ad ogni modo, sono vari i livelli in cui si riscontra la suddetta tendenza a una costruzione narrativa 'ecologica', che compone il *récit* secondo logiche meno antropomorfe-antropocentriche, scegliendo cosa porre in primo piano e cosa sullo sfondo, cosa privilegiare e cosa trascurare. Se si è già parlato dell'*Umwelt*, della digressione analettica del leccio (§ 7) e dell'epica della mutazione (§ 8), si può ora aggiungere che lo straniamento e il metamorfismo sono fondativi e onnipervasivi, ossia posti alla base dell'intera opera, di questo libro "alieno" e "indigeribile", in cui è spesso "difficile orientarsi" (De Giuli 2019). L'ambientazione e il ritmo diegetico sono non solo fantastici, bensì fluidamente onirici, modellati più dalla logica simmetrica dell'inconscio che da quella diurna, al punto che si è potuto suggestivamente parlare (riecheggiando Bollati) di un'"avventura delirante all'interno di un incubo di piena marcescenza", di un "guazzabuglio di visioni", piuttosto che di "vicende", sciorinato in una "carrellata psichedelica" (Ibid.). Si scivola, in effetti, da un paesaggio e da un accadimento all'altro, senza soluzione di continuità, trasportati da un flusso cangiante che dà la sensazione di un'"accelerazione delle sequenze", di una "contrazione" quasi "sincronica" e "aprospectic[a]" (Carlino 1995, 66). Di conseguenza, in connessione con le questioni già illustrate sulla simbolicità/materialità del linguaggio (§ 6) e in accordo con la temperie di quegli anni, diventa arduo discernere il figurato dal letterale, la "virtualità retorica della metafora" dalla "metamorfosi reale" (Muzzioli 2007, 185; cfr. Viviani 1980). Lo stesso concetto classico e rinascimentale di forma come autocontrollo sublimante viene travolto da un'incontenibile energia vitale e immaginifica, trasfusa nell'informalità espressionista-surrealista dello stile.

Anche la conformazione dei cronotopi è radicalmente non-umana; in particolare, i protagonisti del *Pianeta* si liberano dalla "nozione di tempo" e dall'assillo della sua misurazione, entrando infine nella "post-storia" (Muzzioli 2007, 193). Sebbene sia erroneo riservare ai *sapiens* la cognizione della dimensione cronologica, tale indebolimento del "paradigma temporale in favore della dimensione geografica del racconto", ossia la preminenza della "spazialità" rispetto a una "Storia" (Falistocco 2022, 113) intesa come predominio umano e gerarchia degli esseri, può essere interpretato come un ulteriore fattore anti-antropocentrico. Procedendo lungo questa pista ermeneutica, si potrebbe scorgere nel *Pianeta* un impianto deleuzianamente rizomatico, orizzontale piuttosto che

verticale, fondato sulla giustapposizione più che sulla successione di un *plot* consequenzialmente srotolato, sul *Nebeneinander* (l'uno-accanto-all'altro) più che sul *Nacheinander* (l'uno-dopo-l'altro).⁵⁸ Viene da chiedersi, allora, quale sia la reazione del lettore, o meglio che lettore implicito sia presupposto da un'opera così repellente, provocatoria e 'irritante'. All'inizio, appunto, si resta turbati e spaesati dallo stravolgimento dei consueti punti di riferimento; dopo tale ricercato *shock*, le strategie di fruizione praticabili sono a mio avviso due, solo in apparenza antitetiche. Da un lato, la tradizionale sospensione dell'incredulità viene forzata, esasperata, e dunque ironizzata: il lettore, così, rimane in una posizione sospettosa e interrogante, in uno stato di distanziante *Verfremdung* brechtiana. Dall'altro, però, lungo il percorso si impara, come Mamerte, ad abbandonare i propri schemi mentali e orizzonti d'attesa, rassegnandosi passivamente o, meglio, accettando gioiosamente di assecondare quell'inafferrabile e inarrestabile corrente allucinatoria. Anche il fruitore, insomma, è soggetto a una contro-*Bildung*, è spinto a cambiare se stesso e i propri parametri, in modo da prepararsi adeguatamente alla novità.

Volponi, in questo modo, finisce per accostarsi ad alcuni dei temi, degli indirizzi di ricerca artistici e delle parole d'ordine critico-filosofiche diffuse in quel torno d'anni: l'eros e il desiderio; l'allontanamento da una Storia sinonimo di violenza e Potere, in direzione della Natura; il ricorso ad archetipi, fiabe, favole; l'onirismo proteiforme, oscillante tra miracoli e catastrofi, con la conseguente indecidibilità tra sogno e realtà; il sospetto anti-edipico verso un Logos totalizzante e fallocentrico; la postulazione anti-metafisica di un unico "livello di esistenza" e, quindi, di un'"assoluta parità ontologica" tra gli esseri (Mobili 2007, 133); la fascinazione per il metamorfismo e per un linguaggio rifondato nella fisicità corporea. Tuttavia, l'autore urbinato non pare affatto rinunciare alla propria formazione intellettuale, né alle proprie battaglie e ai propri ideali politici; non c'è alcuna concessione al primato postmoderno del Testo sull'extra-testo, né a un recupero euforico e a-problematico dell'infanzia e dell'innocenza primigenia: il "mito delle origini" è dialetticamente corretto dalla "nevrosi della fine" (Simonetti 2008). Specchio di tale complessità potrebbe essere

58 A questo riguardo, cfr. le analisi stilistiche di Pischetta (2004, 297-8): "concatenazioni pluripercettive che risolvono i vincoli logici [...] nel senso di una simultaneità straniante"; "l'insidia di significati aleatori e giustapposti"; "un modulo sintattico regolato secondo principi di equivalenza".

la stessa vicenda di Idelcditu, che (a dispetto della sua frammentazione e della sua caratura allegorica) risulta più tradizionale rispetto a quella dei protagonisti animali. Nonostante le numerose allusioni, anche topologico-geografiche, alla *Commedia*, il quartetto segue un percorso verso un “regno” terreno, materialistico, ancorato all’immanenza della vita (cfr. Deleuze 1969), muovendosi – come l’“esploratore” lotmaniano – su un asse orizzontale, piuttosto che su quello verticale del ‘pellegrino’. Idelcditu, invece, grazie al suo legame con gli uccelli, ma forse anche a quello con la luna, rimanda “emblematicamente” a un’idea di “salvezza e ascensionalità”.⁵⁹ Il tipo di *récit* che lo concerne e il suo *Streben* verso l’alto, la sua tensione a una soteriologia forse trascendente, potrebbero costituire le cause della sua probabile morte, l’errore rimproveratogli ad ampi gesti da Epistola. Ciononostante, la sua figura enigmaticamente polisemica sprigiona un’innegabile “forza utopica” (Marchionne Picchione e Picchione 1980, 74), isomorfa a quelle punte di registro alto, sublime, che – come ricordato – permangono nel dettato del *Pianeta*, come preservazione di un blochiano *Prinzip Hoffnung*.

Occorre, quindi, tornare a riflettere sulla presunta spazialità di questa narrazione, per correggere, o meglio sfumare, quanto sopra ipotizzato. A dispetto di digressioni e stranezze varie, si registra infatti una certa tenuta della trama e del *sense of an ending*, causata da elementi quali il *pattern* odeporico (il viaggio è certo casuale, dispersivo, eppure oscuramente orientato verso una meta); l’allegorismo apocalittico, dunque strutturalmente tendente all’escatologia, allo svelamento del destino ultimo; lo schema del romanzo di prove, reiterate fino al momento di *Spannung*, al cimento supremo e risolutore, all’Armageddon tra Bene e Male. Volponi, insomma, non solo – come Mamerte – trova difficoltà a liberarsi totalmente del passato, ma non vuole nemmeno farlo, per ragioni artistiche (il romanzo, altrimenti, diventerebbe davvero illeggibile) e ideologiche. In altri termini, l’autore ricerca una necessaria formazione di compromesso, capace di articolare e mediare ordine e libertà, novità e tradizione, vitalismo e formalizzazione, istanze dell’Es e autocontrollo, istinto e razionalità progettuale, Illuminismo e sua autocritica dialettica, anti-antropocentrismo leopardiano e umanesimo marxista (Zublena 2015, 476).

59 Nella tradizione francescana, d’altronde, i volatili potevano valere per le anime dei frati che risalivano al cielo.

10. *L'inaudito' e i generi letterari*

L'ultimo tratto del *Pianeta* su cui vorrei soffermarmi – in parte implicito in quanto già esposto – consiste nel fatto che Volponi adopera l'inclusività bachtiniana e la plasticità della forma romanzo per creare un habitat nuovo e accogliente, in cui (sotto)generi e 'modi' letterari molto diversi – quelli alti, che presuppongono un fruitore colto e consapevole, e quelli bassi, al limite del *pop* (cfr. Inglese 2008, 351) – convivono ecologicamente, anzi si ibridano con grande originalità. Già Raboni (1979, 8939) rilevava la mescolanza delle "cadenze 'meccaniche' di un racconto d'avventure alla Jules Verne con quelle rauche e profonde di un romanzo picaresco e con le volute astrattamente melodiose di un poema cavalleresco". A ciò dobbiamo aggiungere l'ambientazione fantascientifica;⁶⁰ l'impianto favolistico (per la presenza di un animale co-"protagonista e parlante", per il "contenuto didattico-moraleggiante", ma forse anche per lo "slancio vitalistico" del ritmo narrativo) (Toracca 2020, 120; Marchionne Picchione e Picchione 1980, 64); la densità speculativa da operetta morale leopardiana o da *conte philosophique*; le battute smaccatamente fumettistiche e uno *splatter* oscillante tra eroicomico e *video game*.⁶¹ La scelta di un nano come protagonista, per esempio, è certo dovuta all'intenzione di introdurre un punto di vista basso (tanto fisicamente quanto socialmente), ossia la prospettiva delle classi subalterne, degli esclusi e dei marginali, ma si riallaccia anche a una lunga tradizione, che dal Medioevo discende al fantasy, affacciandosi sulle suggestioni *posthuman* di un *Bildungsroman* rovesciato: l'antico si fonde, così, all'ultra-contemporaneo, anzi al futuristico. Similmente, il ricco "bestiario" volponiano (da cui, in qualche modo, eravamo partiti, con la nostra ricognizione ornitologica) è "funzionale" all'allegorismo, ma è parimenti "radicato in un immaginario fiabesco contadino e appenninico", pronto a fendere la modernità industriale o cibernetica con "squarci mitici e visionari" (Zinato 2001, 62). Tale coesistenza è anche leggibile come una provocazione: dopo il clamoroso insuccesso di *Corporale*, recepito come troppo sperimentale (nell'anno del trionfo della *Storia* di Morante), Volponi da un lato opta per romanzi più 'tra-

60 Cfr. Pischedda 2004, 280, secondo cui *Il pianeta* è "tributario di una *vogue* anglosassone" che comprende i nomi di "Ballard, Dick, Ursula Le Guin".

61 Cfr. Zinato 1998, 1298, ma le "atmosfera" del *Pianeta* sono così "stranianti" da aver fatto pensare persino al "post-esotico di Volodine" e al "weird di VanderMeer" (De Giuli 2019) e alla lista si potrebbero forse aggiungere la *bizarro fiction*, il *science fantasy*, lo *slipstream* ecc.

dizionali' (*Il sipario ducale*), dall'altro dimostra di saper ricorrere a schemi forti, consolidati (*l'avventure*, il viaggio, la fine del mondo), e persino alla 'narrativa di genere', inglobando però tutto ciò in un organismo indefinibile e *unheimlich*. L'interpretazione potrebbe qui spingersi oltre, azzardando l'idea di una costruzione complanare, in cui i differenti livelli gerarchici sono collassati, in antitesi a un sistema che ha separato ciò che era unito, a una *Stiltrennung* sinonimo di classismo e antropocentrismo.

Per finire, mi sembra allora suggestivo proporre un confronto con le riflessioni formulate da Ghosh in *La grande cecità. Il cambiamento climatico e l'im-pensabile* (2016).⁶² *Il pianeta*, difatti, rappresenta un mondo infetto e alterato; mostra continuamente che i *sapiens* sono circondati da una pluralità di altri esseri viventi, a cui sono legati da rapporti intimi e profondi; e soprattutto pone ciò che è spaesante, imprevedibile e *inaudito* al centro delle proprie pagine, dalla prima all'ultima riga. Detto diversamente, non è un romanzo ascrivibile alla macro-famiglia del *novel*, del racconto serio e mimetico della vita di tutti i giorni. Certo, nel *Pianeta*, come nella fantascienza e nei testi (post-)apocalittici, la catastrofe è allontanata in un futuro distante, in un cronotopo totalmente altro rispetto all'oggi (il che, per Ghosh, rappresenta un limite, anche se si potrebbe rammentare che ogni distopia non fa che ammonire sulle criticità del presente). Ma è proprio in questi sottogeneri, negli ultimi secoli forse periferici rispetto al *novel* borghese, che viene attribuita maggiore attenzione al non-umano, alle esigenze delle piante, all'intera biosfera, all'intelligenza e alla prossimità degli animali (in verità dotati di molte delle abilità spesso credute appannaggio esclusivo dei *sapiens*). Per Ghosh, di conseguenza, è necessario rinnovare anche il linguaggio e lo stile, puntando su una più stretta interazione tra il verbale, il visuale e la comunicazione non-umana.

In conclusione, il quesito che soggiace al saggio di Ghosh, così come alla presente esegesi dello sperimentalismo di Volponi, è se sia possibile accon-

62 Nella valutazione complessiva dell'ecologismo volponiano occorre, tuttavia, mantenere una certa cautela, al fine di evitare il rischio di attualizzazioni forzate. Il *primum* del suo allegorismo è chiaramente politico-ideologico; più che la crisi ambientale, l'autore urbinato denuncia il potere derealizzante di un neocapitalismo finanziario e mediatico-informatico (cfr. Zinato 1999, 9-10). A dispetto di queste precisazioni, è pur vero che Volponi ha apertamente denunciato la carica autodistruttiva dell'attuale sistema economico, affermando che l'incontrastato dominio della logica del profitto porterà a inquinare e devastare la Terra, se non ad annientare tutta l'umanità in un'immane esplosione termonucleare.

tentarsi ancora dei “minimi punti di vista di un protagonista-tipo”, cioè se il “racconto realistico-quotidiano di esistenze individuali [...] sia un genere da porre ancora al centro del sistema letterario”. *Il pianeta*, con la sua straniante ‘impensabilità’, potrebbe così configurarsi come una “narrazione ecologica” in buona misura “non antropocentrica e non vincolata all’esemplarità quotidiana di un’esistenza individuale” (Scaffai 2017, 15, 206). Ciò implicherebbe, in ultima istanza, un netto mutamento di *Weltanschauung*: a un solipsismo monadico in cui contano soprattutto i desideri e le paure, i successi e gli scacchi delle singole persone (pur sempre inserite, però, in un certo sistema sociale e trascese dai grandi processi storici) si sostituirebbe una concezione relazione dell’esistenza, una valorizzazione della convivenza e della collaborazione tra esseri diversi, allargata dalla sfera umana a quella delle interazioni inter-specifiche. È per questo, in fondo, che Roboamo incita Mamerte rivolgendogli le seguenti parole: “non vedi che andiamo verso un mondo che può essere *anche* il tuo? [...] Chissà quante cose troveremo davanti; anche più belle di quelle che abbiamo lasciato...” (Volponi 1978, 406, corsivo mio).

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Francesco Diaco ha conseguito il dottorato presso l'Università di Siena, in cotutela con l'Université de Lausanne, dove ha lavorato come *premier assistant*. Attualmente è beneficiario di una borsa del FNS. Si è occupato di autori del XX e XXI secolo (Alziati, Buffoni, Lahiri, Magrelli, Ottieri, Sereni, Viviani, Volponi) e in particolare di Franco Fortini (*Dialettica e speranza*, 2017; *Dall'altra riva*, 2018; «*Per voci interposte*», 2019). È membro della redazione dell'*Ospite ingrato online* e del comitato scientifico del Centro di Ricerca Franco Fortini.

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How passive voice gets affected by popularization. A quantitative analysis of scientific research articles and university press releases

Abstract

The passive voice has been explored for its communicative potential offered by the possibility to omit the agent, which makes it suitable for both ideological and academic discourse. Research has shown that the passive voice is a characterizing element of academic discourse, but there is a gap in the research concerning the incidence of the passive voice in popularized science discourse. In this paper, the presence and form of the passive voice are analyzed and compared in two bijective English corpora: one comprising published research papers ($n = 30$) and the other their respective popularized versions published as press releases on university websites ($n = 30$). The results of the quantitative analysis show statistically significant differences with regard to the amount of passive voice constructions between the two corpora; the difference in the use of the be-passives is also significant; the differences of get-passives, conjoined passives, and bare passives are not statistically significant between the two corpora. Additionally, some novel tendencies seem to arise: the scientific texts present instances of get-passives, which might point toward a contamination between academic language and the objects of analysis, such as text corpora, interview transcripts, or other verbal materials analyzed in the articles.

Keywords: passive voice, academic language, press releases, English for Academic Purposes (EAP), comparable corpora

1. *Introduction*

In the outcome of proceedings on the “high-quality, transparent, open, trustworthy and equitable scholarly publishing” published by the Council of the European Union, it is emphasized “the importance of supporting the development of such models [“that do not charge fees to authors or readers and

where authors can publish their work without funding/institutional eligibility criteria”] led by public research organisations” (Council 2023, 4;5). Consistently with this, the Council recommends that the member states support and reward open science culture (Council 2021). It turns out that free accessibility of science is a goal to be pursued and supported by governments and institutions and one of the reasons for this to happen is to narrow the divide between scientific research and society.

Although some observers believe that open access (OA) is the future of research, many still oppose it, resulting in a significant amount of research being locked behind paywalls. While achieving global, comprehensive, and enduring access to scientific knowledge on a worldwide scale remains an ongoing endeavor that still needs time, one way through which research findings are being disseminated to wider society is science communication. The popularization of scientific discourse (Fahnestock 1998; Garzone 2014; Garzone 2020; Luzón 2013) consists in disseminating science by adapting a format and language appealing and accessible to audiences of non-experts, thus contributing to the promotion of scientific literacy and to the engagement of the public with scientific issues. Universities worldwide, as privileged research environments, contribute to science communication by posting on their websites press releases reporting on findings of published scientific research (Autzen 2014; Di Ferrante et al. 2021; Lindh 2020; Zhang 2018). Research has demonstrated that the language that is used to present scientific findings to the general public has distinct characteristics that differentiate it from academic discourse.

Most of the time, press releases are derived directly from newly published scientific articles. While they are adapted in terms of length, format, and language to suit the general public, they still retain linguistic traits of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) (Petrocelli et al. 2022). In this context, it is important to understand if and to what extent specific features of academic English are manipulated and adapted to science communication genres. This understanding helps shed light on the linguistic mechanisms used to foster science-society relationships.

Several functions have been attributed to the use of passive voice in academic discourse, including the preservation of objectivity, the concealment of the author, the focus on process, and the emphasis on formality. These aspects have been shown to be particularly appropriate for the presentation of scientific information in English. Consistently with this, passive voice is listed as a

marked feature (positive loadings) in the fifth dimension (Abstract - Non-abstract) of the multi-dimensional linguistic analysis of genre variation (Biber 1992). However, it has been demonstrated that the use of the passive voice is decreasing and many writing manuals are suggesting to avoid its use in writing. Moreover, grammar checker tools like Grammarly often advise to replace passive voice with active voice – sometimes inaccurately (O’Neill and Russell 2019; Zinkevich and Ledeneva 2021). Some associate such decline with a tendency to use language that is more informal and colloquial.

In this paper, a corpus-assisted analysis is conducted with the objective of observing and measuring the variation in the use of the passive voice. Specifically, such variation is observed when transforming the content of scientific papers to make it more accessible to a wider audience through press releases. To achieve this goal, the following research questions are addressed:

RQ1. How does the incidence of passive voice in university press releases compare to that in the source scientific articles?

RQ2. What is the distribution of different types of passives in press releases and scientific articles? Is there any significant difference in distribution between the two corpora?

RQ3. Is the get-passive, deemed as the most informal passive, present in one or both corpora? And if so, how is it used?

In the following sections, quantitative studies focusing on the use of passive voice in scientific discourse are reviewed to identify methods and criteria employed to explore this specific research subject and to gather information on data that could facilitate comparisons and/or contrastive reflections. Subsequently, a quantitative analysis is carried out. This analysis aims to contribute quantitative data and understanding of the popularization processes involved in scientific discourse.

2. Literature review

The analysis of passive voice has a long and solid tradition. Researchers have analyzed passive voice both diachronically and synchronically with a particular interest in scientific discourse. These studies were motivated by interest in the passive voice as a characterizing feature of registers, particularly in written discourse. Biber’s fifth dimension – abstract vs. non-abstract style (Biber

1988; Biber 1992) – serves as a prototypical example: genres that exhibit a high frequency of be-passives are typically characterized by abstract and technical content, as well as a formal style.

Research on the use of passive voice in written texts also provides insights into the role of academics in the relationship with each other and their readers. Several diachronic investigations, however, found that the use of passive voice is generally declining (Biber 1999), including in scientific texts and particularly in American English compared to British English (Seoane and Loureiro-Porto 2005). Hundt, Schneider, and Seoane (2016) summarize the motivations adopted to justify this tendency in two general trends: one that concerns the “democratisation of discourse in Western society” (33) and the other is related to the competitiveness in academia. The democratization trend would result in keeping the distance from the detached and formal style associated with a conception of academia as confined within the ivory tower. Competitiveness, instead, worked as a force toward more efficient communication. It turns out that “the tendency to make academic writing more accessible and engaging goes together with the trend towards informalisation” (Ibid.: 33). As Hyland and Jang (2017) suggest, authors are no longer constrained by a stylistic system that imposes strict norms on objectivity. This increased freedom allows authors to generate texts that are less formal and to adopt a more inclusive approach in establishing relationships with their readership.

Over the years, research on passive voice has been motivated by the need to contribute research for the understanding of several aspects: from impersonality (Biber et al. 1999; Fairclough 1995) to written and spoken discourse (Xiao, McEnery, and Qian 2006), from authorial presence in texts (Seoane and Hundt 2018) to development of disciplinary language across time and disciplines (Leong 2020), as well as emphasizing stance (Baratta 2009). Research has also shown differences in the use of passive voice across English varieties and across disciplines (Hundt, Schneider, and Seoane 2016; Mair and Leech 2006; Seoane and Hundt 2018).

Some information exists about the use of passive voice across different registers, thanks to the significant amount of studies carried out by Biber and colleagues with multidimensional analysis (Biber 1988; Biber 1999; Conrad and Biber 2001). Academic prose and official documents are heavily characterized by the presence of passive voice, followed closely by press reportage, which provides valuable insight into the use of passive voice in press releases.

To the best of my knowledge, quantitative research on passive voice has not looked at press releases yet. With reference to the passive voice, multidimensional analysis has been applied to some genres like press reviews and press reportages that are similar to press releases insofar as they are related to journalistic genres. However, the language of press releases cannot be identified with that of other journalistic genres as press releases are shown to be an inherently hybrid genre (Catenaccio 2007; Catenaccio 2008; McLaren and Gurău 2005) in that they convey content which is both informational and promotional (Di Ferrante et al. 2021; Lindh 2020; Petrocelli et al. 2022).

The presence of passive voice in corporate press releases has been recorded in a number of qualitative studies, like in McLaren and Gurău (2005), who noticed that passive voice in press releases tends to be present in the first part of the text, which is concerned with the Announcement and its Elaboration, a part of the text that appears “more informative than persuasive” (Ibid.: 19); Jacobs (1999) also noticed the strategic use of passives to convey authoritativeness in some excerpts of press releases. Hyland (2010) compared research papers and popular science articles, specifically focusing on proximity, which he defined as the manner in which writers utilize rhetorical features to convey both their authoritative expertise and their attitude toward the subjects being discussed.

2.1 *Passive voice in written discourse*

Research on the use of passive voice in academic writing is rather scattered and hardly allows for cross comparisons. Differences among studies concern a wide range of aspects regarding both corpus selections and methodological choices and procedures. In order to give a sense of the variability across these studies, it is interesting to notice that some studies focused on specific journals and counted the passive voices used in their published articles (Amdur, Kirwan, and Morris 2010; Leong 2014; Lu 2013). In addition, several scholars analyzed articles from a specific discipline, mainly scientific ones with a few exceptions – for example, Leong (2021) focused on History articles and Lu (2013) on Theoretical and Applied Linguistics – but the bulk of the studies took into account articles from scientific disciplines: Banks focused on Oceanography in 1994 and on Physical and biological sciences in 2017, Tarone et. al (1981; 1998) on Astrophysics, Seoane (2006) on Natural science and Medicine, and Riley

(1991) on Speech-language pathology. Other studies focused on papers simultaneously from the science and the humanities fields, for example, on Biochemistry and Literature (Iddings 2007) or on Biology and History (Rachul 2008). Biber (2006) focused on multiple disciplines but looked mainly at university textbooks. Moreover, in different studies, the passive voice is categorized with different criteria and methodological choices. For instance, Bakalar et al. (2014) and Millar et al. (2013) did not consider bare passives when counting passives; Banks (2017) eliminated single-author papers or other instances; Seoane and Loureiro-Porto (2005) did not take into account -ing passives.

Additionally, in some studies, the percentage of passives was calculated over the total number of sentences (Lu 2013), and some of these provided the mean value (Leong 2014) while some the median (Amdur, Kirwan and Morris 2010); other investigations counted the number of passive forms over all verb phrases (Biber 2006); some instead counted the passives over the total number of finite verbs (Banks 1994; Banks 2017; Biber et al. 1999); other scholars counted the passives over the total number of clauses (Leong 2020), or over the total number of non-modal verb forms (Barber 1962), or over the total number of words in the selected corpus (Chen and Ye 2014). This brief picture of the different approaches to the count of passive voice constructions should suffice to present the heterogeneity of the landscape, where passives are examined through very diverse timelines and disciplinary fields, diverse operational definitions, and diverse computational bases. It turns out that on the one hand the research on passives is very rich and provides information on their use qualitatively, quantitatively, and diachronically, but on the other hand the different approaches and methodologies make it difficult to attempt comparisons among the results obtained in the various studies.

Furthermore, another aspect that makes the study of passives quite hard to carry out is that counting passive voices is not as straightforward as with other linguistic categories for several reasons. First, passive voice takes different forms because of the variety of tenses and modals it can be formed by, because of the presence of the auxiliary *be*, which can also be omitted (bare passive) or substituted by *get* (see section 3 for a classification of the passive forms); this means that passives take multiple forms, which are expressed with one or more words (e.g., the different length of the two passive forms in the following sentence: “the lesion could have been caused by the trauma described”). Second, in the case of bare passives, the past participles are sometimes similar to adjectives in terms of

form. Both the first and the second reason contribute to make it difficult for most corpus software to detect all the different variants. This resulted in the choice, operated by many scholars, to manually count the passives in the articles, which, to date, seems to be the only way to detect all forms of passives. Manually counting determines that in some studies, the number of analyzed articles is low enough – sometimes less than five articles were analyzed – to not allow for generalizations.

In the context of investigations focusing on the passive voice, some studies combined the methodology of corpus linguistics with contrastive analysis, comparing the presence of passives in two different corpora, as it is the case of the present study.

Xiao, McEnery, and Qian (2006) conducted a comparative analysis of data between two different languages, British English and Mandarin Chinese. They utilized four corpora, two for each language, consisting respectively of written and spoken language samples. They compared the occurrences of get- and be-passives in the English corpora looking at their use in positive, negative, or neutral contexts and also looked at other features of the passive voice, such as variation across genre, long vs. short passives (with or without the by-phrase), and adverbials in be- and get-passives.

However, most contrastive analysis of passive voice focused on written texts. Chen and Ye (2014) analyzed the presence of the passive voice in two corpora in the field of translation studies: the first corpus consisted of 160 original English abstracts, the other consisted of 160 English abstracts translated from Chinese. In order to identify passive voices, they used the tagging tool CLAWS (the Constituent Likelihood Automatic Word-tagging System) and manually tagged the instances of bare passives. They found that the passive voice accounted for 1,28% of the total number of words in the first corpus and 1,13% in the second. They also found that be-passives are 1,22% and 1,08% respectively of the total number of words of each corpus. They also analyzed the occurrence and frequency of tenses and types of pronouns.

Hiltunen (2016) also compared two corpora of academic writing: one of 256 research articles and the other of 388 university student essays. The corpora were tagged with CLAWS. The analysis revealed cross-disciplinary differences in the presence of passives in research articles, characterizing particularly the distinction between hard and soft sciences.

Seoane and Loureiro-Porto (2005) analyzed texts from scientific articles written in American English and British English. The two corpora consist of

110,000 words each distributed across three time periods: 1905/1925, 1960/1975, and 1985/1990. The scholars demonstrated that the use of passive has been actually declining over time and more so in American English than in British English, however they show that the reason of such decline cannot be ascribed to the integration of traits of spoken language into written language; instead, the authors propose that the underlying reasons for this decline might be rooted in events and dynamics that are sociolinguistic in nature.

2.2 Use of be-passive and get-passive

Quantitative analysis has enabled the monitoring of language change over time which has revealed how written language has been significantly impacted by the increase of colloquialisms and traits of spoken language (Mair 1998). This influence can be attributed, in large part, to the rise of digital platforms which fostered the development of informal writing. As a result, these new forms have also had a partial impact on academic style.

Consistently with this tendency, between the end of the 20th century and the first two decades of the 21st century, research has recorded an increase of the use of the get-passive construction (Biber and Gray 2016; Givón and Yang 1994; Mair and Leech 2006). This is a construction where get is used as an auxiliary verb accompanied by the past participle of the main verb in the passive voice: typically, it is less common than the be-passive and has traditionally been documented as a trait of spoken language (Biber et al. 1999). Given its different nature from the be-passive, it does not substitute it and in this regard, it has been found that it is mostly used in colloquial and informal texts (Xiao, McEnery, and Qian 2006). Additionally, Leech et al. (2009) note that: “the get-passive and the mediopassive are less typical as passive constructions because they are both grammatically and semantically different from the be-passive.” (Leech et al. 2009, 145; on the difference between get-passive and be-passive, see also Chappell 1980; Collins 1996; Matthews 1993). The reasons for the increase of the use of the get passive are attributed to the process of grammaticalization of this construction, facilitated by the evolution of get into an auxiliary verb in passive constructions and the increasing presence of spoken traits in written English. Additionally, it should be noted that a number of studies demonstrated that the use of the get-passive is not a perfect alternative to the be-passive,

hence the choice between them is not arbitrary. In particular, it has been found that the get-passive constructions are usually related to specific meanings, implying, for example, a transition or change of state, but also the speaker/writer's intention to convey an adversative context or unpleasant outcome for the subject (Chappel 1980; Carter and McCarthy 1999; Xiao, McEnery, and Qian 2006), namely "a state of affairs that is signalled contextually by the conversational participants as unfortunate, undesirable, or at least problematic" (Carter and McCarthy 1999, 49). Xiao, McEnery, and Qian (2006) provided separate frequencies for get-passives and be-passives and, consistently with the literature, found that get-passives are mostly present in the spoken corpus (BNCdemo) and more frequently (46.5% of the cases) associated with negative meanings in the written corpus (FLOB). It is important to point out that most studies on the get-passive are based on spoken corpora (or written-to-be-spoken – see, for example, Schwartz 2015) and not all of them agree in connecting the get-passive to mostly adversative contexts. For example, Xiao, McEnery, and Qian (2006) found that most of the get-passives were neutral, however, it should be specified that data from multiple genres of spoken and written English were aggregated. Coto Villalibre (2015), who only focused on spoken data, found that the majority of get-passives in his study had "semantically neutral and non-adversative implications for the subject" (24).

3. Data and Method

The study presented here is based on two bijective corpora of articles, where each paper in one corpus corresponds to a paper in the other corpus. The first corpus, named University Research Press Releases (UNREP), consists of university press releases reporting on findings from scientific articles; all the press releases were collected from the university websites where they were first issued. The second corpus, Scientific Articles (SCAR), includes the original scientific papers on which the articles in the UNREP corpus are based. The two corpora are very different in number of words as the popular-science articles are inherently shorter than their respective scientific articles.

While this study is part of a much larger project on the discursive practices emerging from the comparison of scientific texts and their popularization, for the purposes of the present work, 30 pairs of articles and press releases were

analyzed. The study consists in a blended approach that combines Corpus Linguistics and Discourse Analysis (i.e., the so-called CADS, Corpus Assisted Discourse Studies) (Partington, Duguid, and Taylor 2013; Gillings, Mautner, and Baker 2023). Both the academic articles and the press releases were manually tagged. The tagging was compared with the results obtained by corpus analysis tools and, when discrepancies would arise, inconsistencies were checked again and addressed.

The process of identification and tagging of the passive voices was time-consuming, and this impacted considerably on the final number of articles analyzed. Manual tagging was selected as the most accurate process to make sure that all the passive voices in the articles were identified and marked, because corpus analysis tools are not always able to identify all the different types of passives, particularly in specific cases like bare passives. In particular, piloting tests were run with some tools like LancsBox (Brezina, Weill-Tessier, and McEnery 2020) and UAM Corpus Tool, and it was found that the bare passives and some other passive constructions like modal + be + past participle or the conjoined passives (see below) were not detected. The tagging included the following four different labels for four types of passive voice.

1) *Be passives*, which are passive voices formed with the auxiliary verb “to be”, and following Leong (2014), include the following subtypes:

a. Basic (be + Ven)

The study also found that a positive chatbot experience <BE PASSIVE> *was associated* with customer loyalty.¹

b. Progressive (be + being + Ven)

Lee and her colleagues set out to understand how they <BE PASSIVE> *were being deployed* throughout the social media universe.

c. Perfective (have + been + Ven)

The report says that since 1970, large areas of land <BE PASSIVE> *have been urbanized* [...].

d. Modal (modal + be + Ven)

It <BE PASSIVE> *can be used* to clean car headlights.

1 The examples are taken from the two corpora in this study.

e. Modal perfective (modal + have + been + Ven)

Future studies could also investigate how materialistic values <BE PASSIVE> *may have been affected* [...].

f. To-infinitive (to + be + Ven)

Temperature anomalies <BE PASSIVE> *have also been found* <BE PASSIVE> *to be associated* with moderate stunting in Ethiopia.

g. Non-finite -ing (being + Ven)

Christopher Bail et al. [8] have also shown how <BE PASSIVE> *being exposed* to more opposing views can actually increase political polarization.

2) *Bare passives or passives with no auxiliary verb* (Ven)²

The other attributes <BARE PASSIVE> *associated* with customer satisfaction were [...].

[...] through the same procedure <BARE PASSIVE> as *used* in experiment 3.

3) *Conjoined passives*, which are “passives where the repeated ‘be’ auxiliary in a conjoined clause is omitted to avoid repetition” (Leong 2014, 3). In the present work, the auxiliary could also be “get”.

When consumers <BE PASSIVE> *are* either *primed* with a general sense of nontraditional product functionality (experiment 5) or explicitly <CONJOINED PASSIVE> *fixated* on the traditional functionality of a product (experiment 6).

4) *Get passives*, which are passive voices formed with *get* used as an auxiliary verb

Uninsured children are still less likely to <GET PASSIVE> *get vaccinated*.

Since the present study is heavily based on counting frequencies of passive voices, it is important to clarify some methodological choices. The first methodological remark concerns some particular cases which although might be possibly interpreted as instances of passives, either implicitly or in terms of early grammatical genesis, were not tagged as passives in this study:

- Past participles in a left-branching position (Garzone 2020, 100), e.g., *based on, given, compared, granted, provided, taken, set*:

2 Most of the instances under this umbrella label are non-finite relative clauses, or “reduced” relative clauses (Biber, 2006, p. 74).

Taken together, the regression analysis finds a positive and meaningful treatment effect for the marketing intervention. (SCAR)

Compared with less descriptive logos, more descriptive logos elicit stronger impressions of authenticity. (SCAR)

Given that the consumption of authentic brands provides important identity benefits to consumers, consumers typically appreciate and value authenticity in brands. (SCAR)

Set against the rapid pace of technological innovation, this simple question has grown into a pressing concern for scientists, care givers, and policymakers. (SCAR)

- Idioms like *be bound to, be supposed to, get rid of, as opposed to*.
- Two instances of the so-called causative passive or have-pseudo-passives (but with *get* instead of *have*) were found in the corpora and they were not counted as passives. One case was “Newswise — Investing in product safety, employee diversity and carbon footprint reduction are all examples of corporate social responsibility (CSR) that can result in high praise for a chief executive — or get them fired— according to new research from the University of Notre Dame.” (UNREP)

The second methodological remark concerns the denominator. As it was mentioned in the previous section, multiple studies have been conducted on passive voice, however the baseline, or denominator, in relation to which passives have been counted has not been consistent across different studies which counted passives over units as vary as total number of clauses, of verbs, of finite verbs, of verb phrases etc. Moreover, while corpus linguistics commonly uses per million words (pmw) as a baseline for normalization (see, for example, Brezina 2018, 43), other studies are based on different choices, such as the percentage over the total number of words (Chen and Ye 2014), over 100K words (Sulaiman 2022), over 1,000 words and the ratio of passive voices to active transitive clauses (Seoane and Loureiro-Porto 2005) or to active voices (Seoane 2009). These choices were probably related to the sizes of corpora, their comparability (or difficulty thereof); other issues may be related to passive voice being often manually tagged rather than automatically tagged through corpus linguistics software, which is also one of the issues mentioned in some critiques to using pmw as a baseline for some linguistic features; other concerns are related to the opportunity of selection of a given feature (for an extensive discussion on this, see Wallis and Mehl 2022). In this paper, relative frequencies of the passives

are presented together with percentages calculated over the total number of words with normalization. The total number of words in a corpus allows for easily replicating the counting and therefore more easily comparing data across different studies. As a matter of fact, other measures used in other studies, like the number of active voices or the number of clauses or sentences rely on operational definitions that may differ across software and research designs.

The criterion for the choice of the articles has been that of looking for popular articles first. The search has been performed by making sure that each popularized article was overtly based on a scientific paper. The topics range from Biology to Psychology, from Economy and Marketing to Information Technology and Education.

4. Results

As mentioned before, 30 scientific papers and 30 press releases were manually tagged for four types of passives. Table 1 illustrates differences between the scientific articles in the SCAR corpus and the press releases in the UNREP corpus in terms of total number of words, average article length, total number of passive voices and average number of passive voices in each article.

Corpora	Number of articles	Total number of words	Average article length (number of words)	Total number of passive voices	Average number of passives per article	Average passives*
SCAR corpus	30	216,874	7,229	3,512	117	1.66%
UNREP corpus	30	24,084	802	308	10,2	1.28%

Table 1. Number of words and passive voices in the two corpora

Note: References were not included in the word count.

Percentages were calculated on the total number of words.

*The average percentage of passives was determined by computing the average of the percentages of passive constructions present in each article.

The count shows that press releases have approximately nine times less words than scientific articles (24,084 vs. 216,874). The average length of the scientific articles is 7,229 words, while on average, the number of words in press releases

is 802, approximately 10% of the number of words in scientific articles. In order to answer the first research question and thus compare the incidence of passive voice in the two corpora, the passive constructions were counted in each article. Throughout the 30 scientific articles, a total of 3,512 instances of the passive voice were detected, while 308 were found in the press releases: 11 times fewer passive voices than in the scientific articles, with an average percentage of the passive occurrence of 1.66% in the scientific articles of the SCAR corpus and 1.28% in the press releases of the UNREP corpus. The observed differences are compatible with the two distinct genres of scientific articles and press releases and with the substantial variation in article length. Interestingly, 1.28% is also the exact percentage of passive voice reported in Chen and Ye's (2014) study on scientific abstracts.

A Wilcoxon Paired Test was performed to determine whether the difference in the number of passives between the two corpora is statistically significant, and therefore whether a relationship exists between the use of passives and the textual genre of scientific articles and press releases. The Wilcoxon Paired Test was selected after a Shapiro-Wilk Test was used to test the null hypothesis of normal distribution of the data at a significance level of 0.05. While it did not reject the null hypothesis in the UNREP corpus ($W = 0.9636$, $p\text{-value} = 0.3816$), the distribution of data in the SCAR corpus was significantly different from a normal distribution: ($W = 0.92497$, $p\text{-value} = 0.03616$). It turns out that a t-test could not be used.

The Wilcoxon Paired Test was computed with the data expressed as percentages of passives in each article. The test produced a significant result with $p\text{-value} < 0.05$ ($p\text{-value} = 0.001341$), which shows a statistically significant difference in the number of occurrences of passive voices in the scientific articles of the SCAR corpus and in the press releases of the UNREP corpus. It turns out that our data confirm that passive voice is a discriminating feature of the two types of texts, based on these two corpora. This is particularly interesting because despite the fact that the press releases analyzed in this study are based on their corresponding scientific articles, they don't seem to be completely adherent to the scientific articles and their language use, at least in terms of passive voice incidence.

The second research question pertained to the distribution/occurrence of the different types of passives in the two corpora and whether any potential difference might be determined by the genre specificity of press releases and scientific articles.

Table 2 shows the distribution of the different types of passive voice in each corpus. Each type of passive construction (be-passive, conjoined passive, get-passive, bare passive) is represented in terms of its frequency and percentage (ratio) within both corpora. The percentages in the table are calculated on the total number of passives.

	bare passive		be passive		conjoined passive		get passive		total number of words	
	frequency	ratio	frequency	ratio	frequency	ratio	frequency	ratio	frequency	ratio
SCAR corpus	1124	32.0	2296	65.37	88	2.50	4	1.59	3512	100
UNREP corpus	101	32.68	198	64.07	8	2.58	2	0.64	309	100

Table 2. Distribution of the types of passives in each corpus on the total of passives

Looking at the distribution of each type of passive, it is apparent the percentages on the total number of passives are very similar across the two corpora. Consistently with the literature (see, for example, Leong 2014), the be-passive is the dominant type in both corpora constituting over 64% of all passives in both corpora. This proportion is partially comparable to Chen and Ye's (2014) findings, where the be-passives accounted for 95.71% of all passives, which is over 30% more compared to our corpus; however, Chen and Ye's (2014) study focused solely on paper abstracts, where the most typical form of passive might be more prevalent compared to the main body of the paper. This is merely a hypothesis, and further investigation is required to confirm its validity. Additionally, the bare passive is also very similar counting around 32% in both corpora. This particular finding is partly comparable with the ones in Hiltunen's (2016) study which found that bare passives ranged between 24.7% and 32.8% on the total number of passives in research articles, depending on the discipline. The bare passives in the SCAR corpus are 32% of the total number of passives. This percentage is within the range, and hence compatible with Hiltunen's findings.

While the data presented in Table 1 are calculated on the total number of passives to show how the four types of passives are apportioned, in Table 3 and Figure 1 below, the distribution of the passives is instead computed on the total number of words in each corpus.

	bare passive		be passive		conjoined passive		get passive		total number of words	
	frequency	ratio	frequency	ratio	frequency	ratio	frequency	ratio	frequency	ratio
SCAR corpus	1124	0,518	2296	1,059	88	0,041	4	0,002	216.874	100
UNREP corpus	101	0,419	198	0,822	8	0,033	2	0,008	24.084	100

Table 3 Distribution of the types of passives in each corpus on the total number of words

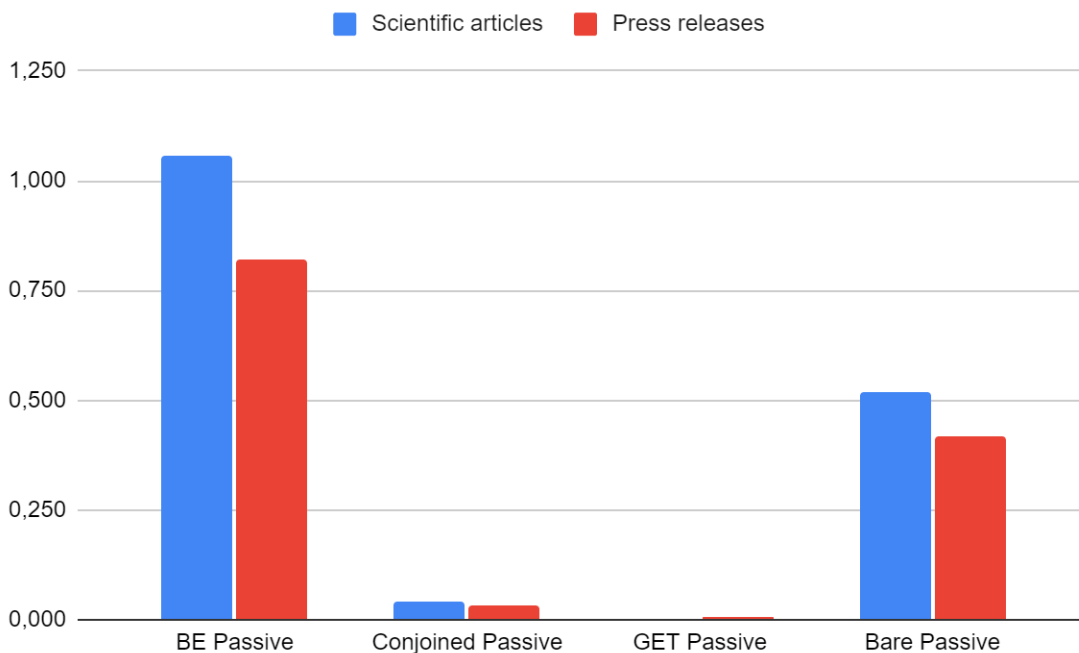


Figure 1 Distribution of types of passives in the two corpora

As shown in Table 3 and Figure 1, the distribution of the types of passives in the two corpora is similar in terms of proportions: in both the corpus of scientific articles and the one of press releases, the be-passive is the most used type of passive, followed by the bare passive. The conjoined passive has relatively few occurrences in the two corpora and the get-passive is barely used and is the only type of passive voice that occurs comparatively more frequently in press releases than in scientific articles.

A Wilcoxon Paired Test was used to assess the differences between the two corpora in the distribution of each type of passive. Since multiple statistical tests were performed simultaneously, to account for the type-I error inflation, the Bonferroni correction (Dunn 1961) was applied to the 5 tests. The procedure consists of rescaling the targeted significance level of 0.05 to account for the multiple tests, which is $0.05/5 = 0.01$.

Table 4 shows the mean and median number of each type of passive construction in each of the two corpora; it also presents the results obtained for the p-values and their significance. A visual summary of the variability of passive voice in the two corpora is reported in the box plot in Figure 2.

<u>Passives</u>	Mean (SCAR)	Mean (UNREP)	Median (SCAR)	Median (UNREP)	p-value	significance
Bare Passive	0.536	0.433	0.490	0.425	0.038418418	ns
Be Passive	1.083	0.816	1.010	0.770	0.003222989	**
Conjoined Passive	0.042	0.027	0.023	0.000	0.111650797	ns
Get Passive	0.001	0.011	0.000	0.000	0.583882421	ns
Total Passives	1.663	1.287	1.671	1.311	0.001340603	**

Table 4 Mean and median number of passive constructions and their statistical significance

Note: statistical significance is indicated through an asterisk (*); ns: $P \geq 0.01$; ** $P \leq 0.01$.

Because for the Wilcoxon Paired Test the Bonferroni correction was used on 5 simultaneous comparisons (total passives, be passives, bare passives, conjoined passives and get passives), only those comparisons with $p < 0.01$ are considered statistically significant.

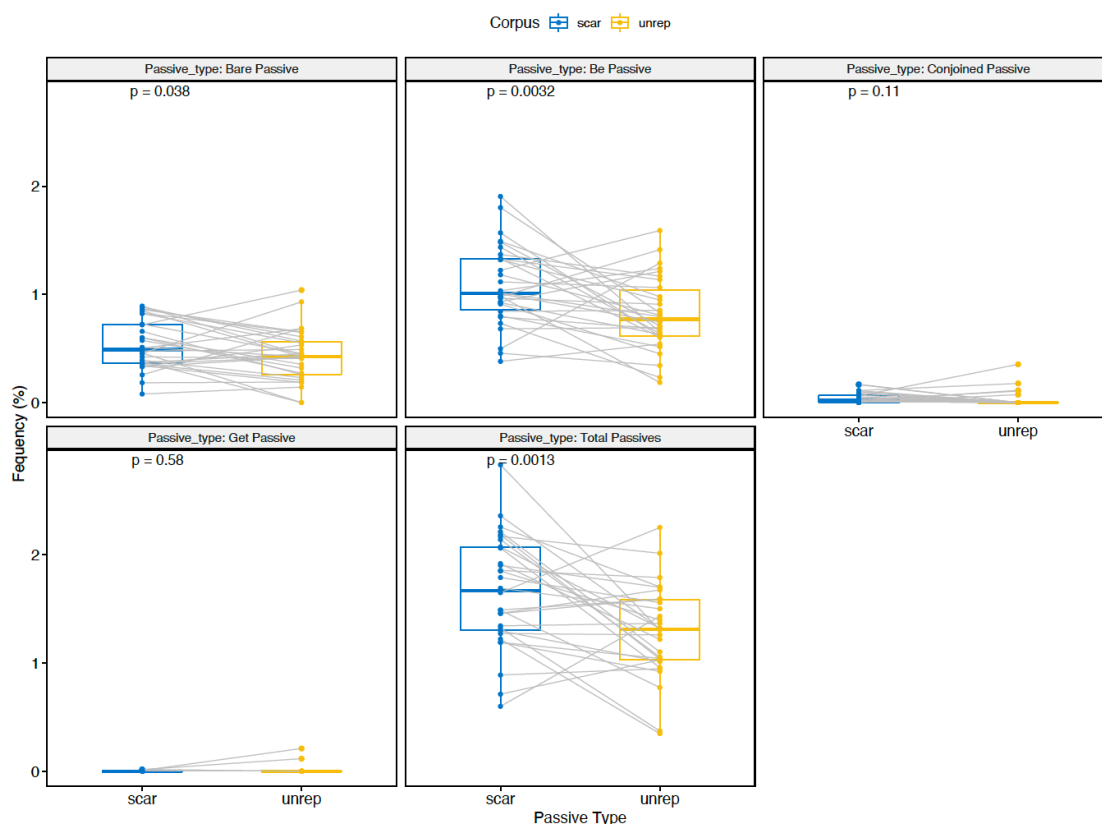


Figure 2. Box plots of the distribution of the different passives in the two corpora and statistical p-value based on a Wilcoxon Paired Test

Table 4 and Figure 2 show the results obtained for each comparison of passive types. In particular, the box plots in Figure 2 present a visualization of the distribution of the different passives in the SCAR and UNREP corpora, along with the Wilcoxon Paired Test results. The horizontal lines within the blue and the yellow rectangles are the median values of each type of passive in the two corpora. The lines coming out of each box span the range between the highest and lowest values within each set. Each blue whisker is paired with a yellow whisker through grey lines: these lines allow us to see how the use of passive constructions changed from the research article to its respective press release. The type of passive construction visualized is indicated in the row at the top of each of the five plots. At the top center of Figure 2, the box plot shows the comparison on the be-passive, which turned out to be statistically different (p-value = 0.00322). The tests on the other types of passives did not show sta-

tistical significance with p-values always greater than 0.01 (bare passive: p-value = 0.038; conjoined passive: p-value = 0.11; get-passive: p-value = 0.58). These results are interesting for several reasons: first, they suggest that the be-passive is the only passive form whose use varies between scientific articles and university press releases. Hence, it seems reasonable to state that it is the be-passive that shows the statistical difference in the general use of passives in the scientific articles compared to the press releases. Second, these results also show that the bare passive, which is the second most used type of passive, does not seem to heavily characterize either text type and this suggests that the bare passive might be perceived as less formal or less academic. As mentioned before, many studies on passive voice disregarded bare passives and many taggers fail to detect them; for these reasons, the different incidence of the two types of passives in the texts was probably overlooked.

It should be pointed out though, that although these data are based on two comparable, bijective corpora, the sample of analyzed articles is still limited, so it seems appropriate to suggest that such significance might account for a probable tendency which should be tested in future studies, with larger samples.

As far as the get-passive is concerned, its presence is very low, which makes it impossible to make generalizations or even observe tendencies, yet the presence itself of a total of six get-passives in the two corpora deserves to be noticed. In the literature, the get-passive is usually regarded as a trait of spoken discourse whose use is being recorded as increasing, but still in the realm of spoken and informal discourse. Moreover, it is regarded as not typical of written discourse, and most studies on passive voice in academic discourse reported zero or very low occurrences of get-passive. Its presence in the present corpora of scientific discourse, and particularly in the one of academic articles, is therefore unexpected and it prompted the analysis to delve into the individual cases. As a matter of fact, academic articles often report chunks of discourse from other contexts for research-related needs: for example, interviews, spontaneous conversations, etc. Moreover, the get-passive used in scientific articles might have been repeated or reported in the matching press release. For all these reasons, it seemed relevant to observe the individual cases qualitatively other than quantitatively.

Interestingly, the analysis of the individual cases revealed that in two cases, the get-passives are found in both the scientific article and the press release belonging to the same pair, hence four of the matching instances belong to two matching pairs. However, surprisingly, it is not the same passive being used:

the passives in each article are used with different verbs and in different contexts. Still, it could be assumed that the source text, namely the scientific article, may influence textual choices of its derivative text, namely, press releases (Biber 1992; Biber et al. 1999; on the influence of textual choice, see also below, the comments on Example 3). Examples 1 and 2 below report two instances of get-passives in a scientific article and its corresponding press release in the field of Mathematical Modeling:

Example 1. Scientific article:

A recovered node cannot infect or <GET PASSIVE> *get infected*. The ratio $R_0 = rI / rR$ is the basic reproduction number and is a single adjustable parameter for the infectiousness of an SIR process. (SCAR)

Example 2. Press release:

In the last decade or so, much handwringing has transpired over “fake news” – stories that are not factually accurate that seem <GET PASSIVE> *to get wedged* in the popular psyche and stick. Many now accept the conventional wisdom that fake news spreads “farther, faster, deeper and more broadly than the truth.” (UNREP)

This presence of get-passives, even in such low frequency, is important with regard to the reasons why it is used. We could assume that the source texts, namely the scientific articles, may influence textual choices of its derivative texts – namely, the press releases (see Biber 1992; Biber et al. 1999).

As far as the particular get-passives presented in Example 1 and 2 are concerned, consistently with the literature (see Carter and McCarthy 1999), it seems that they both portray an adversative context. As a matter of fact, the verb *infect* intrinsically conveys negative implications as it implies the transmission and spread of harmful agents, often resulting in adverse effects on individuals or systems. Similarly, *wedge*, in Example 2, is lexically connoted as evaluative: it refers to the insertion of an external object in a way that creates disruption, obstruction, or difficulty in removing it. Both these instances of get-passive thus align with the literature that reports such construction as not semantically neutral. Similarly, three more of the six instances present get-passives which are not neutral nor unproblematic, as in Examples 3, 4, and 5 below:

Example 3. Press release:

From facts to fake news: How information <GET PASSIVE> *gets distorted*. (UNREP)

Example 4. Scientific article:

Harris <BE PASSIVE> *has been accused* of forcing businesses to donate to his foundations. Mayor Ludovic <GET PASSIVE> *got entangled* because he supposedly instructed his employee[s] to collect money for the cult-like foundations. (SCAR)

Example 5. Scientific article:

As one user lamented, “I wish more of the public would do some research into them and see how much of a risk they are but sadly most wont [sic] — because once you do and you see the truth on them, you <GET PASSIVE> *get labeled* as an ‘anti vaxxer’ which equates to fool. In the next few years, the vaccine industry <BE PASSIVE> *is set* to be a nearly 105 billion dollar industry. People should really consider who profits off of our ignorance”. (SCAR)

The get-passive in Example 3 has prominence as it is located in the title of the press release. The adversative meaning is here attached to the passive *gets distorted* by the context, as it refers to information which is manipulated, possibly with the intent of deceiving by presenting a biased or misleading perspective. In Example 4, the passive is used in the past and it should be stressed that it is part of a written passage that is reported and analyzed in the study, but it has nothing to do with scientific language or the language of the authors of the scientific article. As for the previous examples, this get-passive has adversative meaning: *got entangled* is here used figuratively, as it is referred to a person who was caught in a situation which generates conflict and adversity. Similarly, the get-passive used in Example 5, *get labeled*, clearly implies adversative implications for the subject, as it suggests the attribution and/or impositions of an undesired or unrequested association between the subject and the label. Therefore, it is plausible that also in this case, the choice of a get-passive is connected with the adversative context of the text. Additionally, this particular passive is included in a *verbatim* quotation from a Facebook post, which forms part of the material analyzed in a scientific article in the field of Data Visualization. As mentioned above, some scientific papers are based on verbal data, which are often cited and quoted within the articles: it turns out that chunks from other genres (from Twitter posts to transcriptions of spoken interactions) are juxtaposed with the academic language used in academic articles. As a result, the academic language gets contaminated when quantitatively analyzed with corpus linguistic tools that do not discriminate between the two.

Moreover, one hypothesis is that there is an additional type of contamination which consists of the authors of the scientific articles being influenced by

the stylistic and linguistic strategies used in the materials they analyze. Such a possibility can be observed in Example 6 below.

Example 6. Scientific article:

Informants used selfies on social networks to <GET PASSIVE> *get noticed* (e.g. Darla: “I want people to see me. I want people to *notice* me”) and get responses from others (e.g. Eden: “To *get* Likes or any kind of reaction out of it or comments out of it. That’s usually my intention). (my emphasis, SCAR)

Example 6 shows that the get-passive used in this particular scientific article is *get noticed*. Looking at the subsequent quoted statement, the informant in the first passage uses *notice* and the one in the second passage uses *get* even though not with the same function: ‘get’ is used as a main verb – not in a passive construction – in the phrase *to get likes*. This might suggest that the passive *get noticed* was used by the authors of the scientific article because their writing style was being – probably unconsciously – influenced by the linguistic style and lexicon of materials (often spoken English or written social media interactions) they were analyzing. Clearly, these data are not enough to demonstrate this, but it might be an interesting hypothesis to take into consideration for future research.

5. *Conclusions*

This study is rooted in the field of research aimed at understanding the communicative and linguistic strategies underlying the transformation of technical-scientific language into science-communication language, a more accessible variety that enables larger audiences of non-experts to read and understand such content. In particular, the analysis conducted here focused on passive voice which is one characterizing feature of written academic texts. Specifically, the data consist of two bijective corpora where every scientific article in the SCAR corpus is matched with its popularized version, namely a university press release in the UNREP corpus. This methodological design provided comparable data in terms of topics, disciplines, and individual linguistic phenomena.

The data used in this analysis have a distinctive characteristic that is uncommon (but not novel: see Garzone 2014; Sumner et al. 2016); the data at hand here are exceptionally well-suited to reveal if and how discursive transformations occur

when comparing expert-oriented scientific texts with non-expert oriented ones. In terms of results, it should be first noted that although the press releases in this study are strictly related to their matching scientific articles, the difference in the use of passives between the two corpora is still statistically significant. When considering the total number of passives in the two corpora, it is expectedly higher in the corpus of scientific articles and the difference is statistically significant. The lower presence of passive voices in press releases compared to scientific articles is probably mostly due to the difference in technicality and abstraction of the two genres, but it could also be partly attributed to the difference in focus. Typically, the methodological sections of academic articles are the densest in terms of passive voice compared to other sections (see Leong 2014; Riley 1991). Conversely, the specifics of the methods are usually overlooked in the press releases, which instead prioritize presenting the research findings and their implications (Fahnestock 1998, 335). As a result, the necessity for passive voice decreases, leading to a lower presence of it in the press releases.

Furthermore, it has been found that there is a predominance of be-passives in both corpora and this difference is statistically significant. More precisely the be-passive is the only type of passive whose presence is statistically significant in the two corpora. This could be related to the fact that it is the most prototypical of the four types of passives and also the most easily recognized and avoided by writers of press releases who try to informalize their texts. This being said, also the difference in the presence of bare passive is still noticeable and contributes to draw the distance between the two types of texts.

Finally, the get-passive is – minimally – present in both corpora, even if this is the only one of the four types of passives whose occurrence is higher in the corpus of press releases. The presence of the get-passive appears to be simultaneously surprising and reasonable. It is surprising because the use of get-passives has been mostly recorded in colloquial and informal registers and it is interesting to identify a number of occurrences in the two corpora, limited to a small number of articles and referring to scientific content. It is also reasonable, though, because on the one hand, the press releases accommodate the language to the needs of a wider, nonexpert audience and it is to be expected that some less prototypically formal linguistic means are used. On the other hand, scientific articles in the field of communication, linguistics, sociology, but also statistics and mathematical modeling often rely on authentic language material from spoken interactions, interviews, social media posts, written summaries.

This material is often quoted in the scientific articles, contaminating/affecting their language and probably also the academic writing style of the researchers themselves. In this paper, scientific language was conceptualized as a register with overarching macro-characteristics shared across all disciplines. However, future research in this field may carry out analogous studies, while distinguishing between various subjects to ascertain whether the frequency of passive voice usage varies across disciplinary fields. Moreover, such research could investigate potential disparities in the extent to which both the subjects under investigation and the methodological approaches impact scientific discourse.

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The Intersemiotic Journey of André Marie de Chénier,
through Umberto Giordano, Mario Martone
and Audio Description

Abstract

The story of André Marie de Chénier is real and well known: he was a poet and a political journalist martyred during the French Reign of Terror. The way his story is conveyed in Umberto Giordano's opera *Andrea Chénier* is realistic, to such an extent that it is often classified as a masterpiece of verism. Mario Martone's new reading of the opera for his 2017 production of *Andrea Chénier* is faithful both to the story of the poet and to Umberto Giordano's portrayal offered in his opera, first performed at Teatro alla Scala in Milan, Italy, in 1896. Martone's reading was staged at Teatro alla Scala for the season *première* and revamped in 2023, also through a new form of intersemiotic translation, i.e., audio description for the blind and partially sighted. The thread that runs through all these rewritings and retellings is strong, complex and rich. It is precisely this complex journey from history to audio description that is at the core of this essay, with an eye to faithfulness in intersemiotic translation and the creation of timeless texts precisely through faithful readings and transfers.

I. *Introduction*

Operas contribute greatly to giving substance to the uniqueness of Italian cultural heritage and its appreciation worldwide. Still today, six out of the ten most frequently staged operas worldwide are by Italian composers Giuseppe Verdi, Giacomo Puccini and Gioachino Rossini (Operabase n.d.). If we consider that three out of ten are by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and one is the well-known *Carmen* by Bizet, we can state without any doubt that opera, as the word itself, is Italian. Most operas falling within the classical repertoire have a complex genesis behind them: they may originate out of historical facts or famous, imaginary tales, they may have been narrated by novelists or his-

torians, but they are hardly ever the result of the imagination of a composer. This is the case, for instance, of *Macbeth* by Giuseppe Verdi, inspired by the Shakespearian tragedy but written by consulting its Italian translations and translators. The same holds true for Bizet's *Carmen*, inspired by a story written by Prosper Mérimée, in turn inspired by the Greek poet Palladas, who was active in the fourth century AD. First performed, generally, between the final years of the eighteenth century and the nineteenth century, these operas have, over the years and decades, lived on thanks to numerous rewritings and new readings that have revamped them and ensured them an afterlife.

This essay aims to report on, and reflect upon, an intersemiotic journey that I was able to experience when working on the audio description of Mario Martone's production of Umberto Giordano's *Andrea Chénier* for the 2017-2018 opera season at Teatro alla Scala in Milan, Italy, a production that was staged again at the same theater in the spring of 2023. The essay explores the complex transfers from the real story of André Marie de Chénier to the libretto by Luigi Illica, the music by Umberto Giordano and their fascinating intersections, and from the reading and new staging by Mario Martone to the audio description for blind patrons at Teatro alla Scala. It does so to reflect upon the nature and impact of intersemiotic translations, their cultural implications, and their occasional quest for faithfulness, which has been little explored to date.

2. *André de Chénier, the Revolution and the Reign of Terror*

The story of André de Chénier is real and well known. He was a poet and a political journalist who was born in Istanbul in 1762 and died in Paris in 1794. For the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, he is “generally considered the greatest French poet of the 18th century” (Britannica 2023), although today he is most commonly associated with Umberto Giordano's opera (Milner 2001, 12). His literary works were all published posthumously with the exception of two poems. His first collection appeared in 1819, soon making him a reference point for the Romantic movement and throughout the nineteenth century. In our times, as Jacqueline Milner recalls:

In terms of literary studies he has often been relegated to a twilight world of neo-classicism [...] [but] [t]hese attitudes are far from historical, since he contributed to the discourse of the day not only with neo-classical poetry but with political journalism. (Ibid.: 10)

In Milner's words again, the latest poetry he composed, especially during his Paris years, was satirical and loaded with political intentions, as we can see, for instance, in "Hymne à la Justice" or "Terre, Terre Chérie", among many others. All in all, Chénier led a short but intense life, enriched by his political commitment and struggle. It also inspired great works of art such as Chateaubriand's *Génie du christianisme* (1802), Sainte-Beuve's *Joseph Delorme* (1829) and, last but not least, Umberto Giordano's opera *Andrea Chénier* (1896), who made him a true symbol of the poet-hero. In 1789, five years before dying, Chénier left London for Paris where he became immediately involved in the revolution by actively working as a political journalist. He initially supported the revolution but, later on, he became critical of the monarchist positions, as well as the post-revolutionary Terror. In late 1793, he was imprisoned and sentenced to death. He was guillotined in March 1794, a few weeks before the fall of Robespierre and the end of the Terror. His brother Marie-Joseph de Chénier, born two years after André, was also a poet, a dramatist, a politician and a supporter of the revolution.

3. Umberto Giordano's *Andrea Chénier*: *The Genesis of a Unique Opera*

Umberto Giordano's opera has been classified as a masterpiece of Verism, although many operas written at the end of the nineteenth century tend to be assimilated with this movement for their portrayal of powerful, passionate and harsh dramas set among the humblest layers of society. However, Giordano's Verism goes well beyond this: the historical drama he depicts in music and the libretto by Luigi Illica in words are extremely scrupulous in their reconstruction of events, milieux, colors and sounds of the time (Sozzi 2013). The latter, i.e., the time span covered in *Andrea Chénier*, coincides precisely with the five years of activity of the French poet and journalist in Paris, until his death (Giordano 2013). Initially, the libretto for this opera was to be composed by the musician and nobleman Alberto Franchetti. However, he passed the task on to the younger and talented Luigi Illica, whom Giordano met for the first time in 1893. Before embarking on the writing of the libretto for *Andrea Chénier*, Giordano tried to persuade Illica to create the texts for a score he wanted to compose, based on a play by Ivan Sergeevič Turgenev, but the dramatist and librettist was not enthusiastic about the

idea. When Franchetti offered to pass the writing of the libretto for *Andrea Chénier* on to him, Illica replied enthusiastically.

Luigi Illica's libretto, which Giordano checked eagerly upon while it was being composed, offers extremely detailed descriptions of the milieu, the costumes and the protagonists' main movements, something that was not at all customary. To Umberto Giordano's great concern, Illica was late in submitting his libretto because he lingered over accurate historical studies, so as to make sure he would offer an absolutely faithful portrayal of the environment and settings. To this end, Illica added pivotal characters such as Maximilien de Robespierre to his text, while Giordano, working after Illica, filled the score with notes and sounds that evoke the French Revolution and its aftermath: the balls at the aristocrats' homes, the rolls of drums, the patriotic chants, and even a hint at *La Marseillaise* (Marco n.d.). We can, therefore, say that the libretto and the score are perfectly interwoven in their faithfulness to history: Giordano worked on the score as soon as he finally laid hands on the libretto, offering yet another faithful rendering of the story of André de Chénier.

Giordano's opera was staged for the first time at Teatro alla Scala in Milan on 28 March 1896. The *première* provoked opposite reactions. Amintore Galli, who was one of the managers of the most prominent Italian musical publisher, Sonzogno, disliked the opera and deemed it unworthy of being staged any further. Sonzogno himself, who at the time was director of Teatro alla Scala, shared Galli's opinion, whereas composer Pietro Mascagni insisted that the opera had to be kept in the program. After a few more performances at La Scala and the audience's increasing enthusiasm, Galli had to change his mind, and he eventually acclaimed both Umberto Giordano and his work. A few months later, *Andrea Chénier* was staged at the Academy of Music in New York, scoring a huge success that was to be replicated over the following months and years throughout Europe. In 1897 only, the opera was performed in Poland, Hungary, Germany, France, Russia, the Czech Republic, and Argentina (OperaGlass 2008).

4. *Andrea Chénier Reborn Again: Mario Martone and His Faithful Staging*

In 2017, cinema and stage director Mario Martone was called upon to give life to a new production of Andrea Giordano's opera to open the season at Teatro alla Scala. As Italian and international operagoers know, the *première* at Teatro

alla Scala in Milan is a unique event, broadcast worldwide and, in terms of production, always assigned to prestigious directors to secure new readings and stagings that are bound to become historical and possibly timeless.

Faithful both to the (hi)story of the poet and journalist André de Chénier, and to the portrait offered by Umberto Giordano in his opera, is Mario Martone's new reading of this work for his 2017 production. One of the main tenets of Martone's faithful reading is the time span covered by Giordano, which coincides precisely with Chénier's final years in Paris, from 1789 to 1794, and the wish by Martone himself to convey the whole time span as smoothly as possible. To this end, the director envisaged what he defined as a *machine célibataire* (cfr. Deleuze and Guattari 1972) that occupies the largest part of the stage and functions like a rotating music box, allowing the different moments and events to transition smoothly so that the story is told without interruptions. Also, the rotating machine box allowed Martone to portray the action from multiple viewpoints, including that of the lowest layers of the society that actually changed history over those five years (Martone 2017).

Working closely with Margherita Palli for the settings, and Ursula Patzak for the costumes, Mario Martone has given life to a faithful intersemiotic translation of Umberto Giordano's opera, with some unique elements that aim to highlight specific aspects of the (hi)story, as we shall see. For instance, the mirrors that are present throughout the performance. In the first scene, they multiply the images of the nobles dancing at the castle of Coigny, just before the revolution. Afterwards, they show the revolutionaries hidden behind them, almost motionless, to highlight their constant presence in the years that followed. In the third act, the mirrors in Carlo Gérard's home are distorted, to convey his torments as he craves for Maddalena and is disillusioned and tired by the politics of the Reign of Terror. As Martone (2017) states, mirrors are the simplest but cruelest *machines célibataires*.

On the whole, many a symbolic intersection can be identified in the writings, readings and transfers that make up the journey of André de Chénier from history to the stage, most of all from Umberto Giordano to Mario Martone's production of Giordano's opera. To mention just one, as Martone recalls in his director's notes, Umberto Giordano moved to Milan to urge Luigi Illica to write the libretto for *Andrea Chénier* so that he could then create the score. He tried to find lodging in the same building where Illica was living, not far from the monumental cemetery of the city. However, the only avail-

able space that Giordano was offered, and accepted, was a storehouse on the ground floor, filled with statues coming from, or destined for, the cemetery itself. Such a fact struck Martone to such a degree that the first act of his *Andrea Chénier* is set in a castle filled with highly symbolic statues, and more statues appear throughout this production.

As is already evident, the intersemiotic translation of Giordano's work performed by Martone is not easy to frame, and yet, faithfulness is to be found everywhere in this undeniably complex transfer. The story of André de Chénier, which we experience through Mario Martone's staging, is the original, a story that we can trace back in history and that assumes a striking timelessness precisely by virtue of its fidelity to the original facts. This is what I will try to explain and exemplify in the following sections.

5. Intersemiotic Translation and Audio Description

All the forms of reading, re-reading and transfer discussed so far are part of a long journey whose fascinating traits have not yet all been discovered. Nonetheless, having referred to intersemiotic translation many times, exploring a few definitions of this concept and their applications is useful here.

For Umberto Eco (1976), intersemiotic translation forms the basis of cultural communication and exchange. It is an ongoing process that generates meaning as "culture continuously translates signs into other signs, and definitions into other definitions, words into icons, icons into ostensive signs, ostensive signs into new definitions, new definitions into propositional functions, propositional functions into exemplifying sentences, and so on" (Ibid.: 71). Later on in his seminal book, *A Theory of Semiotics*, Eco tackles the thorny issue of how to classify signs, focusing on the passage from verbal to non-verbal and vice versa. In relation to this, he states that meaning expressed by means of verbal units can smoothly be translated into other verbal units, and that a good part of content that is conveyed by non-verbal units can equally be translated into verbal units. However, as he adds, there is a lot of content that is expressed through complex, non-verbal units that can only be rendered through verbal units with a high degree of approximation. To support this statement, he refers to Marcel Proust as an example. Proust, according to Eco, managed to give us the impression

of translating into words the feelings, attitudes and values conveyed in the paintings of Elstir. However, as Eco further recalls, he decided to do so by referring not to a real, but to an imaginary painter because even a superficial evaluation of the painter's real work would have revealed content that Proust's words had not reflected. We can, indeed, say that the intersemiotic journey of *Andrea Chénier*, starting from the real-life story of the protagonist and arriving to the stage production by Mario Martone and the audio description for blind patrons, represents a set of complex, mostly non-verbal units that would potentially have to be translated with a high degree of approximation, in Eco's terms. And yet, as we have been saying so far, there seems to be no approximation in this journey but, rather, a great amount of faithfulness through it all.

Along the lines outlined by Eco, and following his path, Nicola Dusi (2015) has provided us with a definition of intersemiotic translation that also encompasses the diachronic dimension, rightly observing, by way of example, that a film remake is an intersemiotic translation, possibly using the same systems of signs, but revising more or less radically their interrelation, for the sake of new audiences and, more significantly, to function in a new social and cultural setting. Quoting Juri Lotman, Dusi says that the function of an aesthetic text is to produce new meanings that are generated precisely by the provision of new readings. Moreover, for Dusi:

Intersemiotic translation is a complex "form of action", not a simple transcodification but a transcultural, dynamic and functional event caught between the requirement to remain faithful to the source and the need to transform it into a text that is understood and accepted in the target culture. (Ibid.: 183)

The attention is, in Dusi's definition and analysis, geared towards the need for intersemiotic translation to function in a new, target culture. As Eco also stated, the cultural dimension of a complex, necessarily creative form of transfer is tantamount. Although generally true, these statements bring to mind the age-old dichotomy spelled out by translation practitioners and scholars Friedrich Schleiermacher and Lawrence Venuti (quoted in Munday, Ramos Pinto and Blakesley 2022), between domestication and foreignization in translation, with an eye to domestication in the definitions above, as the preferred strategy to make a translation function in a new culture and

for new receivers implies naturalizing it. Similarly, Gideon Toury (1995) distinguished between appropriate and adequate translations, where the former are meant to appropriately display the source, and the latter are adequate to fit in the receiving culture.

In the complex transfers described in the previous sections, from the original story of André de Chénier to the libretto by Luigi Illica, from the libretto to the music score by Umberto Giordano, and from this complex, intersemiotic text to the reading and staging provided by Mario Martone with the support of Margherita Palli and Ursula Patzak, faithfulness to the source, or to multiple sources, remains always central. And yet, Martone's faithful staging of *Andrea Chénier* is extremely successful with contemporary audiences. Indeed, Teatro alla Scala revamped this production over twenty times, with a sold-out theater for virtually all performances.

Therefore, provided that intersemiotic translations can be done in the name of faithfulness to the source(s) as a primary objective, they can, nonetheless, be extremely effective with new audiences, thus being, by virtue of an almost magical journey, both adequate and appropriate. Moreover, this journey, as it has been explored thus far, points to another important feature: intersemiotic translations, when performed in the name of faithfulness, seem to become timeless (O'Halloran et al. 2016), not attached or anchored to a specific time and space except for that of the original (hi)story. This is also, quite evidently, one of the reasons why they appeal to old and new audiences.

In performing the last transfer of this intersemiotic journey, that is to say, the creation of an audio description for Mario Martone's *Andrea Chénier* for the benefit of blind operagoers, the many signs contained in the previous transfers have all been turned into verbal sequences. Audio description is undoubtedly a form of intersemiotic translation, whose complexity is due to many features, most of all its time limitations. The following section is devoted to a more detailed exploration of audio description, with specific reference to operas and to the case of *Andrea Chénier* for Teatro alla Scala.

6. *Chénier, Giordano, Martone and the Writing of a Faithful Audio Description*

In *Image Music Text*, Roland Barthes (1977) discusses the nature of the photographic image and the texts which accompany it in the press by making three,

important remarks. First, he states: “the text constitutes a parasitic message designed to connote the image, to ‘quicken’ it with one or more second-order signifieds”. In what he names a historical reversal, the image, for him, no longer illustrates the words, but it is rather the words which “are parasitic on the image” (Ibid: 25). As a second remark, he recalls that the connotation defined by a text in relation to an image depends on the text format and structure: by remaining closer to the image, the connotation is less evident and the relationship remains primarily denotative, objective. However, and this is Barthes’ final remark, “it is impossible [...] that words ‘duplicate’ the image; in the movement from one structure to the other, second signifieds are inevitably developed” (Ibid: 26) and these often involve the wish to highlight one or more elements conveyed or implied by the image. By assuming the concept of “image”, in broad terms, to refer to all the visual elements making up an opera, Barthes’ analysis seems to be particularly appropriate to analyze the audio description of Mario Martone’s *Andrea Chénier*, i.e., the creation of a new, descriptive text that aims to respect the fidelity of the source text to its own sources.

As hinted at above, audio description is an evident form of intersemiotic translation that turns images and all other visual stimuli into words, aiming to provide accessibility to a show, a film, a musical or an opera for persons with visual disabilities. As Anna Matamala and Pilar Orero (2007, 329) rightly put it, audio description is transfer, an intersemiotic passage “transforming images into vivid narration”. One of the peculiarities of audio description is that, by transforming visual stimuli into words and sentences, it is called to give a linear sequence to objects, colors, characters and movements that the eyes perceive virtually simultaneously. This implies choices that an audio describer always has to make when writing a description: prioritizing information, giving it a linear sequence in the form of a written text that is nonetheless not free, but constrained by the time available to provide descriptions over an opera performance, and by the actual time when someone or something is seen on stage. Research on audio description has been widely developed throughout Europe and the world since the turn of this century, becoming more and more central in audiovisual translation studies over the past decade (Di Giovanni 2018, Braun & Starr 2020). One of the classical debates developed by scholars over the years revolves precisely around the issue of objectivity: since audio description turns into verbal language what reaches the describer’s eyes in the form of diverse, non-verbal elements, it has to

remain as objective as possible, by not expressing judgment or over-interpret- ing. However, this quest for objectivity is very hard to define because when sighted individuals look at static or moving images, their brain embarks on a cognitive process that implies both perception and reception (Ibid.), and reception is shaped by our knowledge and experience of the world, and it implies inevitably an interpretive act.

Thus, in audio describing *Andrea Chénier*, as Barthes rightly puts it, I have striven to convey its images as objectively (and faithfully) as possible, nonethe- less bringing my competencies and experiences to the reading of those images, and by making selections, prioritizing information as I deemed appropriate, while still trying to be as neutral as possible. In the following paragraphs, the focus will be on excerpts from the audio description of Martone's *Chénier*, taken from different sections.

6.1 *From Images to Text: Examples from the Audio Description*

Audio description (AD) of operas is normally created in the form of two main types of verbal inserts. The so-called audio introduction (AI) is normal- ly 5 to 8 minutes long and it is released via different systems to blind patrons before the beginning of the performance, to then continue over the break(s). In addition to the introductory sections, short in-opera descriptions of a few seconds are inserted throughout the performance, making sure no primary sound is covered, nor the voices of singers and the choir. Even though AI and descriptive inserts can be pre-recorded, they are always delivered live, following the rhythm of each live performance. An operator sends the audio clips manually through the use of software and a set of receivers distributed to blind (and non-blind) persons who request the service. The structure that is normally given to the AI is as follows: 1) short historical facts connected to the opera; 2) the synopsis; 3) the stage director's intentions and vision; 4) the settings; and 5) the costumes. These are normally followed, as a final section of the AI, by a short description of the opening scene that is provided a few seconds before the overture. Sections 2, 4 and 5, plus the description of the opening scene, are normally split into several parts, based on the number of breaks for each show, so as not to foreground too much information and avoid overloading the receivers with it. During breaks, blind patrons are thus

advised to leave their headsets on and listen to the new introductory sections for the remaining parts of the performance.

Before embarking on the analysis of three excerpts from the AD of *Andrea Chénier*, let us here recall that AD is created by watching a performance, i.e., a specific production, with the libretto only occasionally used as further reference. Therefore, the performance, and not the libretto, is the source text for AD.

6.1.1 *Audio Introduction: The Opening Scene*

The opening scene designed by Mario Martone is a faithful reproduction of Umberto Giordano's opera and the descriptions provided by Luigi Illica in his libretto.

A few days before the French Revolution, in the rich palace of the Counts of Coigny, a party is being prepared in a large, elegant hall that looks like a winter garden, with plants and statues, beautiful lamps, mirrors and a harpsichord. Furniture is scattered all over and the servants who are preparing for the countess' party fret about, nervously. As the performance designed by Martone begins, we see a wide hall adorned with plants and statues, and some sofas and chairs are overturned. The nobles are already on stage, but they are motionless, as if suddenly frozen in their actions. The only characters that are moving are the servants, so as to convey, in Martone's intentions, that the days before the revolution were animated by static, passive, reactionary nobles and active laypeople, who were to become the true soul and engine of the great historical movement. In this case, the faithfulness of Martone's images to the original opera is clear, with an additional emphasis provided by the presence of the frozen nobles, that are slowly taken back to life by the servants (a highlight and a connotation, in Barthes' terms).

Although, as mentioned, AD is written by carefully watching a performance more than once by exploring the settings and costumes after watching the performance and by talking with the director and set designer. Table 1 below offers an excerpt from Luigi Illica's libretto on the left and the text of the AD on the right. All translations from Italian of both the libretto (Teatro alla Scala 2017, 5-31) and the AD are mine.

<p>We are in the province, the castle of the Counts of Coigny. The <i>winter garden</i>, a <i>great hall</i>.</p> <p>At the end of a winter day, in 1789, the hall offers a curious view: it looks like a garden with statues of <i>Bacchus</i>, <i>Flora</i> and <i>Minerva</i>. It is a hall, with <i>furniture scattered all around</i>, <i>exotic plants</i> and a <i>harpsichord</i> by Silbermann.</p> <p>When the curtain raises, the arrogant Master of the House, in livery, gives orders to the servants, lackeys and porters who bring furniture and vases for the final arrangement of the hall. Carlo Gérard, also in livery, helps arranging the furniture.</p>	<p>The first act is set in 1789, right before the Revolution, at the castle of the Coigny family.</p> <p>An <i>elegantly decorated hall</i>, with golden framed mirrors, crystal lamps and three big statues: <i>Bacchus</i>, <i>Flora</i> and <i>Minerva</i>. The hall is a <i>winter garden</i>, with <i>exotic plants</i> and <i>luxurious furniture</i>, some pieces of which are scattered on the floor. On the right, a <i>harpsichord</i>.</p> <p>In the opening scene, there are approximately 30 nobles in the hall: they are motionless, as if frozen in their positions. The only moving characters are the servants and porters, among them Carlo Gérard. The first one to arrive on stage, amidst the nobles, is the Master of the House.</p>
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Table 1 – Excerpts from the opening instructions in the libretto and the audio introduction.

The words in italics in both columns point to a high degree of similarity between the libretto and the AD, a similarity that is the result of a wish to convey Mario Martone’s high degree of faithfulness to Umberto Giordano’s opera. Other important similarities are to be found in the costumes for the main characters in this opening scene, whose descriptions are offered in the dedicated section: in Martone’s production, both Carlo Gérard and the Master of the House wear traditional livery, as indicated in the libretto.

6.1.2 *The Settings: Jean Paul Marat*

Maximilien de Robespierre is central to the whole journey – from the life story of André de Chénier to the production designed by Mario Martone, appearing as a character in the second act and being mentioned several times by characters throughout the opera. However, a less prominent but symbolic presence is that

of Jean Paul Marat. As is known, Marat was a great protagonist of the revolution and a supporter of the toughest group of revolutionaries who were to institute the Reign of Terror. He was killed in his washbasin by Charlotte Corday in July 1793, right before the Terror was established. In Giordano's *Andrea Chénier*, the appearance of Marat coincides precisely with the passage from the days before the revolution portrayed in the first act to the first months of the Reign of Terror, in 1794, in the second act. As Luigi Illica described it in the libretto, this passage needs to be harsh even on the visual level: from luxurious halls and costumes to the tavern where the revolutionaries and the prostitutes hang around. In Martone's staging, it is the central, rotating structure that shifts smoothly from the great luxurious hall in the castle to the streets and the tavern.

However, Jean Paul Marat does not appear as a real-life character in Umberto Giordano's opera: it is, as we can read below, a statue of the revolutionary that is described by Illica as part of the basic settings for the opening scene of the second act. Once again, the AD points to Mario Martone's faithful intersemiotic translation of his source text, with the addition of a few extra details to enrich the connotative effects, always in line with history and with the original opera.

<p>In Paris. On the right, <i>an altar dedicated to Marat</i>, supporting his bust, is in the foreground. In front of it are <i>withered flower garlands</i>, ribbons, and an extinguished lamp.</p>	<p>In act two we are in Paris, in 1794. At the centre of the stage is the Café Hottot. [...] On the right is <i>an altar with a bust of Marat</i>. On the altar are <i>withered flowers</i>, a large, French flag and a few, extinguished candles.</p> <p>Marat is portrayed as in a famous portrait by Joseph Boze, done in 1794, where he wears an elegant overcoat and a white shirt, and nothing on his hair.</p>
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Table 2 – Excerpt from the libretto and the audio introduction for the second act.

In this case, the AD is more than twice the length of the text in the libretto, with extra details such as the French flag, and with extinguished candles instead of the lamp described by Illica. The second part of the description above aims to convey some of the intentions expressed by Martone in his director's notes, as well as in

a conversation aimed to better write the AD. Marat is not portrayed dead, with a turban on his head, as in a very popular painting by Jacques Louis David. He is alive and wearing his best uniform, so as to highlight his active role in the days narrated at the beginning of the second act. Again, this additional element in Martone's production, transferred in the AD, speaks the language of faithfulness.

6.1.3 *The Costumes: Bersi, the Mulatto Servant*

In opera audio description, as anticipated, the costumes are described in a dedicated section of the AI, but references to the characters, to the overall choice of style and temporary collocation are normally made also in the section dedicated to the stage director's intentions. Bersi, the young countess' servant, stands out as an interesting example of a radical change of appearance and costumes. In the first act, during the party at the castle, she wears a very elegant, voluminous, light green dress and her hair is nicely combed.

From the beginning of the second act, after the revolution, she is no longer the countess' servant, as the nobles have been imprisoned and the castle expropriated. Bersi, thus, becomes a prostitute (a *meravigliosa*, in Illica's libretto), and her appearance changes radically. Once again, below is an excerpt from the libretto (left), and two excerpts from the AI (right), the sections dedicated to the stage director's intentions and the costumes.

<p>At the Café Hottot [...] one notices Bersi, the mulatto servant, for her free, bizarre hairstyle, and for her exaggerated dresses, that clearly identifies the once refined and elegant woman as a prostitute (Meravigliosa).</p>	<p>(AI – The stage direction)</p> <p>In the second act Bersi, Maddalena's servant, is a prostitute (Meravigliosa).</p> <p>(AI – The costumes)</p> <p>In the first act, the mulatto Bersi wears an elegant party dress in pale green and white, with a tight corset and a wide gown. Her hair is elegantly combed and tied at the back of the head.</p> <p>In the second act she is dressed as a prostitute: she has a green cotton dress, sleeveless and extremely low-necked, so as to show part of her breasts. Her hair is voluminous, curly and untied.</p>
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Table 3 – Excerpt from the libretto and two sections of the audio introduction.

If Luigi Illica only described the appearance of the mulatto Bersi after the revolution, when she becomes a prostitute, Martone's faithful intersemiotic rendering of the opera highlights the character's change by making her wear extremely different costumes. The AD has striven to faithfully and objectively convey Mario Martone's intentions.

7. Conclusions

This essay, inspired by a collaboration with Teatro alla Scala, has aimed to reconstruct an intersemiotic journey through history, music, singing and accessibility. Written with a necessarily bottom-up approach in mind, it has brought me, as the author of the AD as well as of this essay, to reconstruct all the passages and transfers that have led to yet another reading and intersemiotic translation of André de Chénier's life story, across media, times, spaces and performances. The bottom-up approach, dotted with interdisciplinary explorations, has led me to unveil and reflect upon the great and often underestimated potential of intersemiotic translation in ensuring the afterlife of a story, or a source text, through faithfulness. One of the recurrent themes in the debates developed within the translation studies field over the decades is connected to the timelessness of original texts, especially of a literary nature, and the aging of translations that are often anchored to a certain space and time, or better, to an audience, in space and time.

Following this path dotted with fidelity to the sources, throughout the journey, I have been able to find, and demonstrate, that faithful intersemiotic translation can ensure timelessness, without giving up its inherent creative dimension.

AD, as discussed above, is first and foremost a strategy aiming at accessibility: it ensures access to the visual dimension of an opera, or any other multimodal text, by the addition of a verbal track, written to be then spoken and delivered to the ears of blind patrons. As a matter of fact, reviewing all the steps in the journey reconstructed here, we can say that they have all aimed to provide access faithfully and objectively: to historical facts, to music and singing, to specific text types and genres, and to the authors' intentions.

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Raising young learners' ELF-awareness: An intercultural telecollaboration between Italian and Kyrgyz students

Abstract

This article provides an overview of the strategies aimed at raising young learners' awareness of English as a lingua franca (ELF), in order to reflect, in language pedagogy, on the profound transformation that English has undergone in recent decades. The main purpose of our research is to explore the efficiency of innovative intercultural activities like telecollaboration in developing young learners' intercultural communicative competence (ICC) and ELF-awareness. For the purposes of this research, a project entitled *Intercultural telecollaboration: Italy-Kyrgyzstan* was conducted by the authors during the school year 2022-2023. This study involved the design and implementation of web-mediated collaborative tasks for an international community of practice (CoP) of young learners, which comprised twenty-six Italian and fourteen Kyrgyz same age pupils (10-11 years old). We concluded that a blended approach that combines ELF and sociocultural theory (SCT) should be integrated into young learners' English syllabus and should become an integral part of teacher education programmes.

1. Introduction

In recent decades, English has undergone a profound transformation at phonological, lexicogrammar and discoursal level, mainly due to its leading position as the language of globalization. A growing body of research (e.g., Gradol 2006; Grazzi 2018; Sifakis et al. 2018; Sifakis and Bayyurt 2017; Pennycook 2009; Tsantila et al. 2016) has emphasized the necessity to take these changes into account as long as language pedagogy is concerned, in order to make

teachers of English, teacher educators and, more in general, second-language practitioners realize the importance of raising students' awareness of the reality of English as a lingua franca (ELF) and its plurilithic dimension (Pennycook 2009) in today's globalized world. ELF researchers (e.g., Grazzi 2013, 2015, 2017; Kohn 2016) believe that the path for raising such awareness lies through the implementation of innovative intercultural activities (e.g., telecollaboration) that may allow language learners from other languacultural settings to cooperate via the Internet.

The present study is particularly focused on young learners of English. Its main objective is to answer the following research questions: how efficient is the experience of intercultural telecollaboration in developing young learners' intercultural competence and ELF-awareness?

The research project presented in this article is entitled *Intercultural telecollaboration: Italy-Kyrgyzstan*. It comprised Italian and Kyrgyz same age pupils who had just started Grade 6 (the last grade of elementary school in Kyrgyzstan and the first grade of middle school in Italy). In particular, participants included twenty-six Italian students from St. Philip School (Rome, Italy) and fourteen Kyrgyz students from United World International School (Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan). The pupils were 10-11 years old. Moreover, the project involved the active participation of one Italian middle-school teacher (Tatiana Kozlova) and one Kyrgyz primary school teacher (Lukas Zawadzki).

Before and after the project took place, pupils were asked to fill in a paper and pencil questionnaire. This survey, following Dörnyei's (2010) indications, was intended to collect three types of data, namely: factual (about who the respondents were), behavioral (on how the respondents use or had used English in the past), and attitudinal (on what the respondents think about today's global use of English). Qualitative data collection had to be appropriate for young learners, that is why most questions had multiple-choice items to choose from. The remaining items were open questions that contained certain guidance, especially as regards the respondents' reflection on the global use of English and the communicative strategies they normally use when using English as a contact language.

The first part of the project was aimed at exploring learners' experience with ELF and identify the learners' perceptions of the concepts of normativity, appropriateness, comprehensibility, and ownership of English. The second part of the project consisted in an exploratory session in which the pupils introduced themselves and explored each other's cultures. Moreover, it included a collaborative

task, whereby the members of the international community of practice (CoP) had to create a song on the topic of intercultural friendship. The final stage of the project consisted in a post-survey and in a focus group, which also provided us with relevant qualitative data about the participants' feedback on their experience of intercultural telecollaboration. However, each teacher administered and analyzed the data collected through the pre-survey, the post-survey, and the focus group separately, for privacy reasons. Therefore, the data analysis and the conclusions about the overall project efficiency that are presented in this article are based on the answers of the Italian respondents only.

In the Conclusions the authors suggest ways in which an ELF-aware perspective in English language teaching (ELT) may be introduced as part of teacher education programs, in order to enhance what seem to be necessary and undeferrable changes within the mainstream ELT paradigm, based on native-speakerism (see, for instance, Holliday, 2005; Houghton and Hashimoto, 2018).

This study is organized as follows. The first three sections are intended to establish the theoretical framework that supports our on-field research, with plenty of references to ELF studies that have so far paved the way for a reconceptualization of the English of the subject in ELT. Moreover, we believe that these first three sections may be particularly appreciated by readers who are not familiar with some fundamental notions regarding ELF research and its pedagogical implications (e.g., the historical background of the global spread of English; the concept of ELF-aware pedagogy as a way to raise ELF-awareness and intercultural communicative competence in the English classroom; the convergence of English as a foreign language (EFL) and ELF through learners' performance).

Section n. 4 presents the project called *Intercultural telecollaboration: Italy-Kyrgyzstan*, and the data analysis of the pre- and post-treatment surveys that were conducted at the beginning and at the end of the project, respectively. It also takes into consideration the Italian participants' feedback that was provided during the final focus group.

In section n. 5, we discuss the findings of the project presented in the previous section and confirm that distantly located classes from heterogeneous contexts tend to appropriate English as a mediational tool to carry out their communicative tasks successfully.

Finally, section n. 6 contains our concluding remarks about the pedagogical value of innovative ELF-based learning activities, like intercultural telecollaboration, which may enhance young learners' ELF-awareness.

2. English as a lingua franca

In recent decades, mainly due to its leading position as the language of globalization, English has undergone a profound transformation, as Graddol (2006) showed in his seminal study for the British Council. Until then, it was spoken in most cases as a mother tongue in English-speaking countries, and as a nativized language in post-colonial countries. In addition, it was learned as a foreign language, that is for communication between native and non-native speakers in many other parts of the world. Nowadays, however, it is used most extensively as a lingua franca between speakers of different first languages and cultural backgrounds, who are mainly non-native English speakers (NNESs) from countries with no British colonial history. Grazzi (2018, 21) emphasizes that the “reasons for the pervasiveness of English are not intrinsically linguistic, but largely depend on external circumstances.” For example, English first spread as the language of the British empire, and then, in the 20th century, as the language of the United States of America, i.e., the world’s main superpower and the leading force of globalization.

In this article the definition of ELF encompasses all uses of English where communication takes place between speakers of different first languages, including non-native speakers of English, as well as between non-native and native speakers of English.

The future of ELF is intrinsically connected with globalization and depends on what scenario this process will ensue. So far, as Jenkins et al. (2011, 284) have claimed, a major result of the globalization of English is its relatively “fluid, flexible, contingent, and often non-native-influenced” nature. Hence, in the following section we will consider: a) how the global diffusion of English has inevitably led to its localization to serve local purposes; and b) the consequences of such appropriation and adjustment.

2.1 The glocal dimension of English

The global diffusion of English inevitably led to its appropriation by non-native speakers (i.e., its adjustment for their own purposes), and consequently to the emergence of a wide range of varieties. In this perspective, English emerges as a “glocal, polycentric lingua franca [...] that represents an additional re-

source that increases the L2-users' communicative power" (Grazzi 2018, 29). The word *glocal*, coined by Robertson (1995), is a blend of the words *global* and *local*, and refers to the process in which English is adopted by a local culture to be used for global communication. Because a language normally reflects its speakers' linguistic background, but also their culture and society, we may affirm that ELF, in turn, reflects the variable international social practices and identities of its speakers. This represents a linguacultural shift whereby English should not be considered a threat to the sociocultural identity of NNEs, but rather an additional affordance to mediate worldwide communication.

2.2 *The transcultural dimension of English*

Intercultural communication through English has become a central element in investigating into the global uses of English, and particularly into ELF (Lopriore and Grazzi 2016). The fact that nowadays NNEs significantly outnumber English native-speakers (NEs) has major implications for the way we view English as a language and a medium for intercultural communication.

Larsen-Freeman (2016, 15) suggests to conceive of language, its use and learning as a "complex adaptive system" (CAS), inspired by Complexity Theory. She (Larsen-Freeman 2016, 29) remarks that the typical features of ELF, like fluidity, variability, creativity, and local negotiation are also qualities that are consistent with a vision of language as a complex adaptive system, which is "open, adaptive/feedback sensitive, dynamic, unfinalizable, inseparable from context and variable." CASs are continuously transformed by use, consequently, Larsen-Freeman extends the CAS view to culture, considering language and culture as two interacting CASs that constantly influence and adapt to each other. In line with Larsen-Freeman, ELF research contributes to the development of our understanding of the relationships between language, culture and identity. As Baker (2018, 13) argues, "ELF research underscores the move away from the essentialist confluences of cultural identity with national cultures and languages – at the forefront of decentering the Anglophone native speaker as the model for intercultural communication through English." The author (Baker 2020, 13) links intercultural communication and ELF research in adopting a similar post-structuralist perspective on language, identity, community, and culture, which are seen as constructed and negotiated:

successful intercultural/transcultural communication involves the ability to make use of and negotiate multilingual/plurilingual linguistic resources, a variety of communicative practices and strategies, and movement between global, national, local, and emergent frames of reference. This is a very different conception of competence to that typically utilised in English language teaching (ELT) with its pre-determined 'code' consisting of a restricted range of grammatical, lexical, and phonological forms and minimal concern with the sociocultural dimension of communication. The reconceptualization of English language that scholars are calling for needs to be accompanied by a focus on the wider intercultural and transcultural communicative practices in which language is embedded and enmeshed. This entails recognition of the central place of intercultural competence and the awareness that it is necessary to manage such complexity, variation, and fluidity in communication.

Increasingly complex multilingual and multicultural settings in which ELF communication takes place led Jenkins (2015, 73) to view them as creating a complex communication terrain of "English as a multilingua franca [...] in which English is available as a contact language of choice, but is not necessarily chosen." Empirical studies of ELF communication have revealed that interlocutors use English to create and manipulate multiple cultural identities. Baker (2018, 14) calls these identities "third-place identities", with participants being in-between and mediating between cultures or other groupings. These findings, together with the conceptualization of English as a multilingua franca and the notion of translanguaging – i.e., a learning strategy that includes the use of the entire linguistic repertoire of each learner, through teaching practices in a multilingual key – (García and Wei 2014) have led to a recent call to refer to ELF communication practices not as intercultural, but rather as *transcultural communication* (Baker and Sangiamchit 2019; Baker and Ishikawa 2021; Ishikawa 2022). In this view, ELF users take advantage of their multilingual and multicultural resources while engaging in translanguaging and transcultural practices, transgressing and transforming the borders between languages, communities, and cultures. This transformationalist approach challenges the homogenization hypothesis, that is the vision of ELF as a monolithic variety. Therefore, Jenkins et al. (2011, 3) conclude that the purpose of ELF research is not to identify the core features of a new, independent, and self-contained variety of English. In this perspective, the empirical research into intercultural collaboration through ELF (Baker 2015; Grazzi 2015, 2018) highlights the importance of enhancing intercultural communicative competence (ICC) (Byram 2008) in ELT. The issue of intercultural awareness, and especially raising learners' intercultural awareness in ELT settings, will be further examined

in the next section. Moreover, an example of its implementation is provided by the research project presented in section n. 4.

It should not go unnoticed that while World Englishes studies are mainly focused on bounded varieties of English, including non-native varieties like post-colonial Englishes, ELF research is mainly concerned with the process of globalization and how it has led to the emergence of a fluid, flexible, contingent, hybrid and deeply intercultural use of English (Dewey 2007). Following Grazi (2020, 287), ELF is considered “a variable social construct that emerges in authentic communicative contexts where international speakers with diverse sociolinguistic identities and cultural backgrounds communicate.”

As we have seen, ELF communication takes place between speakers from a wide variety of linguacultural backgrounds, whose appropriation of English has led to what Pennycook (2009, 205) has defined: “plurilithic Englishes”. As Jenkins (2015, 51) argues, ELF is not only a “highly complex phenomena but also one whose diversity is currently constantly increasing as more people from different language backgrounds engage in intercultural communication using English as one of their mediums.” The borders between English and other languages with which it comes in contact become blurred as more recent notions of translingual practice shed light on how non-native speakers appropriate English for their own purposes. The phenomena deriving from language contact are not new, though. In fact, the increased use of English on a global level gave them more visibility. This process results in innovations, as English is appropriated by speakers from diverse linguacultural backgrounds and assumes distinct functions and forms in different contexts.

The current transformations that English is undergoing, and which in ELF contexts are accelerated, are part of wider global trends. The increased cultural flows of our digitized world have given rise to an intensification of innovative language practices, which are especially prominent in ELF interactional settings. Such considerations, along with the concept of the NNEs’ ownership of English, have a number of implications for ELT that will be discussed in the next section.

2.3 Going beyond native-speakerism and the Standard English ideology

As regards ELT and the assessment of learners’ competences, ELF poses a double problem. Firstly, the expected global growth in ELF usage calls into

question the prioritizing of native English standard grammatical and pragmatic norms when evaluating the competencies of non-native students. Indeed, these norms belong to a foreign target language that they will hardly ever fully acquire (see also section n. 3.1, in this article). Secondly, the inherent variability of ELF does not just entail that assessment criteria should be updated, but also that an alternative notion of second language assessment is necessary in order to be able to measure whether the English of the L2-users is well suited for its pragmatic purposes. Jenkins and Leung (2014, 5), for instance, contend that “the (teaching and) testing of English [...] needs to reflect this reality if it is to be relevant to the ways in which the majority of non-native English learners will use the language in their future lives”. In teaching English as a foreign language (EFL), often for professional or academic purposes, it is normally assumed that students' ideal interlocutors are NESs. Consequently, a standard native variety of the target language is considered the ultimate goal of learning, and learners are evaluated in terms of the proximity of their English skills to those of NESs. Any forms that differ from the standard English variety are therefore to be considered errors. On the contrary, from an ELF-perspective, variations from native English forms are not necessarily rejected, as they may be considered viable options, as long as they do not affect the interlocutors' mutual comprehensibility. We should observe, however, that there are also other criteria for assessing learners' proficiency, which represent an alternative model to the dominant native-speaker-oriented paradigm. In a nutshell, what really matters in authentic communication is effective and pragmatically successful communication through users' use of English. This may well include emerging and innovative forms of ELF.

Despite empirical evidence, making teachers and examination boards take account of the reality of ELF in the English classroom remains a major challenge. Essentially, it is advisable that teachers and examination boards consider ELF a socially appropriate linguistic repertoire and resource in real intercultural communication. Reflecting on the appropriateness of a native-speaker model for ELT, Larsen-Freeman (2016, 24) suggests that the difficulty and resistance of English language teachers to adopt an ELF-aware approach is connected with their inability to “reconcile the normative conception of language that they have inherited [...] with an acceptance of the fluidity of language.” Adopting an ELF perspective on teaching does not mean neglecting norms and standards, but rather exposing students to language variation to foster

their understanding that such norms and standards are flexible. The following section will consider the pedagogical implications of ELF research findings in more details, and the concept of raising ELF-awareness in the English classroom as a pivotal point in a new paradigm for ELT.

3. Raising ELF-awareness in the English classroom

Over the last twenty years, ELF research has challenged the primacy of the native speaker model in ELT, promoting the alternative notion of ELF-aware pedagogy that will be explored in the current section.

3.1 The convergence of EFL and ELF through learners' performance

Current studies on ELF are quite vast and varied, but an area that deserves further investigation is “the interplay between foreign language education and ELF, in ELT” (Grazzi 2020, 281). The author (Grazzi 2020) recommends to consider the interaction between the formal learning context and the opportunities that learners have to communicate in authentic intercultural settings. Normally, English is taught as a foreign language, according to a structured syllabus based on native-speaker standards. Meanwhile, ever younger L2-users/learners are gaining access to the Internet and become exposed to English in extra-scholastic contexts (e.g., through videogaming, YouTube videos, fan groups, etc.). Therefore, there seems to be a direct relationship between the process of learning English in an institutional environment, the extra-scholastic sources of English input, and the emergence of ELF as a medium of communication in real intercultural communicative events. Indeed, EFL learners are at the same time ELF users once they step outside the scholastic context and are involved in authentic situations where ELF mediates communication, especially online. This ambivalent dimension of the English speaker as an EFL student and an ELF user generates a process of learning and acquisition whereby EFL and ELF converge in the speaker/learner's performance (Grazzi 2013). The convergence of EFL and ELF entails that a critical stance should be taken as regards the Interlanguage Hypothesis (Selinker 1972) that so far has held a significant place in second-language acquisition and ELT. Selinker claims that learning a second language consists in a progres-

sion between two opposite poles: the student's native tongue (also called *source language*, SL) and the target language (TL), that conforms to an abstract native speaker's model. The intermediate stages between these two extremes constitute the so-called "interlanguage continuum" (Corder 1981, 90), which, if successful, eventually coincides with the prototypical native speaker's language.

According to Grazzi (2013), instead, the process of learning a second language does not require a progressive distancing from the student's LI. In fact, from a cognitive point of view the learner's first language plays a fundamental role in the way a student appropriates English and reshapes it according to their linguacultural identity. In this sense, EFL and ELF are considered two adjacent orientations that serve the student/user as mediational tools both in the school environment and in the world of global communication. Kohn (2018) defines the process that leads learners to construct their own English the *My English* concept. He (Kohn 2011, 80) describes the process whereby learners develop their personal way of using English from a social constructivist perspective:

people acquire English, or any other language, by creatively constructing their own version of it in their minds, hearts and behaviour. [...] Acquiring a language is the very opposite of copying or cloning -it is a cognitive and emotional process of sociocultural and communicative construction. [...] Regardless of how powerful the communicative and communal pull towards a 'common core' might be, the English that people develop is inevitably different from any target language model they choose or were forced to adopt.

In the same vein, through the lens of Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory (SCT), Lantolf and Thorne (2006) see the process of second-language development as depending on the educational macro-system in which learning occurs, i.e., on the interaction between the individual learner, the teacher, and the class. While the Interlanguage Hypothesis presupposes that second language learning is essentially an idiosyncratic learning process activated by the single student, SCT presupposes that the improvement of the individual language learner may depend on appropriate and timely peer support and companions' corrective feedback in a zone of proximal development (ZPD¹).

1 Vygotsky (1978, 86) sees the ZPD as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers".

In conclusion, it seems reasonable to affirm that there is a dynamic interplay between EFL, the English of the subject, and ELF, the language that learners appropriate and construct cooperatively through the communicative activities they carry out. Especially when English students/users are involved in authentic international settings (e.g., through web-mediated communicative tasks), they interact with companions from diverse linguacultural backgrounds and use ELF as a contact language. This requires a paradigm shift in ELT, which is supposed to integrate the notion of ELF within the English curriculum, in order to raise teachers' and learners' ELF awareness.

3.2 *Raising ELF-awareness in ELT*

Sifakis (2017, 1; our emphasis) has defined ELF-awareness a concept that refers to “the knowledge, attitudes and skillset of ELT stakeholders and ELT products *with regard to issues and concerns raised in [...] ELF [...] research literature*, and the extent to which they have relevance for local ELT contexts.” The author specifies that ELF-awareness does not replace other L2 approaches, because ELF is not teachable, but rather complements them. ELF-aware teachers might find more effective ways of teaching and testing English to empower their students as successful users of English. Sifakis (2017, 1) views ELF-awareness as a “continuum that depicts the gradual transformation of stakeholders' attitudes, to the extent that local contexts, and stakeholders' needs and wants allow.” This continuum comprises different degrees of awareness, ranging from no awareness to full awareness, which is useful because it can help to perceive (and begin to research into) the degree of engagement with ELF in the language classroom. The continuum, which is strictly notional, has two components, A and B (Fig. 1). Part A concerns how much and what teachers know about ELF, i.e., their awareness of ELF discourse and of the strategies used in ELF interactions. It also concerns their awareness of the local teaching-learning context. Part B concerns the ELF-aware orientation of ELT. The continuum relates also to the decisions teachers make regarding instruction, corrective feedback, etc., to render their lessons ELF-aware.

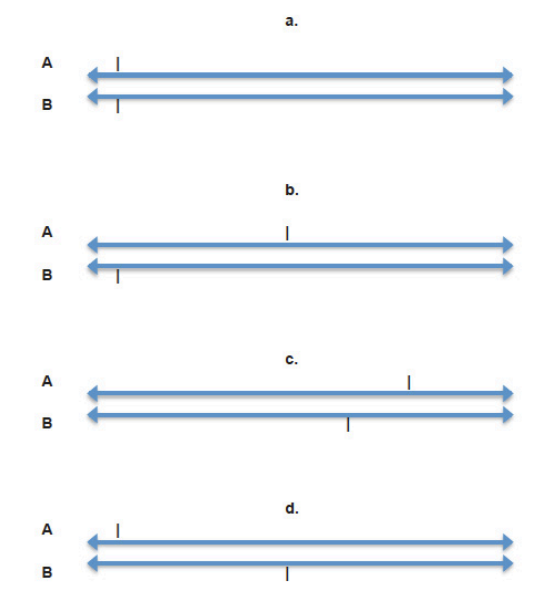


Fig. 1. The ELF awareness continuum (Sifakis 2017, 14)

As ELF-awareness is a question of degree, case (b) and case (d) above are considered by Sifakis (2017) to be legitimate attitudes regarding ELF-awareness. The continuum can help to appreciate the complexity and challenges of integrating ELF into ELT. This should help teachers grasp the meaning of the term ELF-awareness, and also its complexity when thinking about it in practical, context-specific terms. Sifakis (2017) contends that knowing about ELF is not enough. In order to be ELF-aware, teachers must also be fully cognizant of their context. As a notion, ELF-awareness offers valuable insights into various pedagogical contexts. It may influence the evaluation of established instructional practices, textbooks, school curricula, L2 policies in testing, and generate innovative teaching and testing practices that are informed by ELF research.

When it comes to learners of English, integrating the findings of ELF research into the English classroom enables them to be considered competent users of English in their own right and not a deficient version of an ideal native speaker. Learners benefit greatly from such recognition, which values the way they exploit their multilingual communicative resources (Jenkins 2015; García 2009; García and Wei 2014). Findings from the extensive studies of what ELF users know and how they interact should inform lesson plans, teacher education curricula, textbooks, policies, and assessment procedures in ways that

will render the ELT experience richer, and closer to a realistic experience of what has come to be global communication via English. According to Vettorel (2017, 239), “raising awareness of the multifaceted sociolinguistic realities of Englishes and ELF in teacher education constitutes a first and fundamental step towards a more ‘inclusive’ and ‘realistic’ approach in ELT.”

As a recent survey has shown (Grazzi and Lopriore 2020), standard English is still considered the uncontested reference model in ELT by a large majority of respondents, thus revealing that language education is essentially centered on a monolithic vision of EFL. Nevertheless, data also indicate that, in terms of teaching practice, the notion of English as a closed system is actually changing. As the authors (Grazzi and Lopriore 2020, 16) conclude, “respondents’ tendency to stick to native-speakerism is gradually giving way to a more open-minded approach to language variability, which is inherent to the process of language acquisition.” In the next section we will discuss some of the main controversial issues related to ELF-aware pedagogy.

3.3 A new paradigm in ELT: bringing ELF to the English classroom

3.3.1 ELF-aware pedagogy and Sociocultural Theory

The new role of English as a global language has led Rose et al. (2021, 157) “to call for a paradigm shift in the field of English language teaching (ELT), to match the new sociolinguistic landscape of the twenty-first century.” Over the last few years, numerous publications appeared exploring this proposal in practice. Classroom-based research, and research in teacher education (e.g., Bowles and Cogo 2015; Gagliardi and Maley 2010; Grazzi 2013, 2017, 2018; Vettorel 2015) have outlined some key proposals for change in ELT from the related fields of ELF and Global Englishes. However, this paradigm shift poses a few burning issues concerning the implementation of ELF-aware pedagogy, for the transition from native-speakerism towards a more open approach in ELT is still in progress. Grazzi’s (2017) approach to ELF-aware second language teaching is based on a theoretical framework which combines Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory (SCT), its implementation in second language development (Lantolf 2000; Lantolf and Thorne 2006), and van Lier’s (2004) ecological approach to second language learning. One of the most controversial points regarding ELT

concerns the role of a native-speaker language model in language education. Grazzi (2017, 210) notices that “ELF research has never advocated the apriori elimination of a NES model in ELT, nor its replacement with ELF, which, as we have seen, is not an encoded variety of English that could be taught as such, but rather a variable way of using it by NNES.” From a social constructivist perspective, the NSE model provides an ‘orientation’ (Kohn 2011) for learners’ acquisition and performance, but it gains a new existence in the speakers’ appropriation of the L2. As Sifakis (2017, 16) contends,

ELF-aware pedagogy should focus on prioritising what structures and functions of English need to be taught, showcasing successful interactions involving non-native users, updating corrective feedback strategies, and reflecting on the role of the teacher as a custodian of standard English and as a role model (be they native or non-native users) for their learners.

Consequently, in a global context it seems more appropriate to focus on the “super-diversity” of ELF (Cogo 2012, 289) that offers a more realistic view of English and design a new curriculum where a gamut of language models (including World Englishes) and examples of successful NNES language usage are made available to students. A language teacher should present native as well as non-native varieties of English, while conformity to NS-models should not be enforced in the English classroom. As for the assessment of learners’ competences, it should be based on their communicative capability (Widdowson 2003).

3.3.2 Reconceptualization of learners’ errors and dynamic assessment

This section is focused on an ELF-aware alternative assessment paradigm and the reconceptualization of learners’ errors. In mainstream EFL teaching, deviations from SE codified norms are considered developmental errors that mark the steps of the “interlanguage continuum” (Corder 1981, 90), that is the linear learning process that evolves between two opposite ends: the learner’s L1 and the target language. Therefore, the student’s L1 is considered a hindrance to the acquisition of the target language and becomes the main cause of ‘interference’ (e.g., errors caused by the occurrence of negative interlinguistic transfer). Instead, from a SCT point of view the student’s L1 is a valuable resource for the acquisition of English, which, as we have seen, takes place through the

dynamic intra- and inter-personal contact between these two languages (e.g., non-standard ELF lexicogrammar forms resulting from the strategic use of cross-linguistic transfer). According to Lantolf and Thorne (2006, 294-295),

adults, in particular, have a well-developed first-language system, which [...] is their primary symbolic artifact for regulating their own cognitive activity. It is therefore natural that they should rely on this artifact to mediate their learning of anything, including additional languages. [...] Thus, pedagogies that seek to avoid reliance on learners' first language are, in our view, misguided.

Therefore, if ELF deviant language features meet the criteria of systematicity and communicative effectiveness, they must be considered ELF variants, not errors, when contrasted with equivalent standard ENL forms. The immediate implications of this changing attitude towards learners' deviations from standard norms is that also the assessment criteria of students' proficiency should be consistent with an ELF-aware approach to ELT. As Newbold (in Grazi and Lopriore 2020, 78) suggests,

the time seems to have come to abandon native speaker standards in order to provide valid and meaningful assessment of the use of English in an international ambit, in which the language and strategies of native speakers may actually hinder communication. [...] Teachers and testers (and ultimately international examining boards) will need to develop 'ELF aware tests'.

Alsaadi (2021, 73) claims that "assessment is one of the most demanding aspects in education." The author (Alsaadi 2021) suggests that 'dynamic assessment' (DA), that is formative assessment, should be adopted to reinforce learning and motivate students in second language development, as well as enhance language teaching. DA, being rooted in Vygotskian SCT and the ZPD, enhances learning through students' interaction and mediation. It is concerned with measuring language learners' performance through their interaction with the teacher and more experienced peers. DA tends to elicit the skills and abilities of individual learners, as well as their learning potential. Being highly beneficial for assessing learners from different linguacultural backgrounds, it can be seen as a valuable tool in ELF-aware pedagogy. Additionally, Poehner and Lantolf (2005) have described DA as an approach that integrates assessment with teaching to build up learner's development through appropriate forms

of mediation. It requires the interaction between teachers and students, and it is closer to instruction rather than examination.

In the next section we will present a research project that was carried out at primary school level, the aim of which was to create a multilingual and intercultural CoP with Italian and Kyrgyz young learners. The aim of this project was: a) to raise pupils' ELF-awareness and ICC through a web-mediated telecollaboration task; and b) enhance the implementation of DA within the English classroom.

4. Intercultural telecollaboration: Italy-Kyrgyzstan

This section reports an on-field experience regarding the implementation of ELF-aware pedagogy for young learners. It follows Grazzi's (2018, 169) call to develop "new practices from the earliest stages of language teaching/learning, which can promote forms of partnerships with teachers from other countries to create opportunities for their students to cooperate and improve their lingual capability [...] and intercultural citizenship." The intent of this study was to implement innovative communicative activities for the English classroom based on a blended approach that combines sociocultural theory and Network-Based Language Teaching (NBLT) (Warschauer and Kern 2000). In particular, the learning activities that participants carried out were based on intercultural telecollaboration, which O'Dowd and Ritter (2006 1) have defined as follows: "the use of online communication tools to bring together language learners in different countries for the development of collaborative project work and intercultural exchange." The goal of this project, which was called *Intercultural telecollaboration: Italy-Kyrgyzstan*, was to improve young pupils' ELF-awareness and ICC through the use of ELF within a virtual CoP, i.e., a web-mediated community of learners of English from different linguistic backgrounds.

The collaborative task assigned to the CoP by their teachers (i.e., Tatiana Kozlova and Lukas Zawadzki) began with connecting students online during their English lessons. In the first phase, they used an interactive white board in class; in the second phase, each student was provided with a laptop. The task that the two teachers assigned to the CoP was to work collaboratively to create a song about international friendship. The main pedagogic purpose un-

derpinning this task was to foster the development of learners' intercultural awareness by reflecting on: a) what international friendship entails; and b) the differences/similarities between participants' cultures. The aspects of culture that students had to reflect on were determined by a list of topics proposed by the teachers: a) their school, b) their cuisine, c) their music, d) their fashion, e) their festivities, f) their traditions. The importance of developing cultural awareness and cultural literacy skills for success in 21st century is highlighted in the report World Economic Forum "New Vision for Education" (2015, 3).

Working as a group was supposed to give learners the opportunity to be involved in authentic intercultural communication via the Internet, so that the socio-cognitive process of second language development could be activated in a ZPD. Working as a CoP and writing the song about international friendship cooperatively was also expected to help this group of students not only raise their ELF-awareness but also improve their communicative and sociocultural competencies through their reciprocal advice and feedback. In this way, practicing creative writing was turned into a social event that could foster language development as well. The creation of a ZPD was favored by pupils sharing their posts, so that they could help each other in reflecting on their language output and improve it both linguistically and with more creative ideas. This particular kind of language check, which was appropriately guided by the teachers, was able to help learners focus on their use of English. This, in turn, promoted students' reflective attitude. This social networking was also intended to reinforce learners' media literacy, as they were expected to realize that they were able to carry out collaborative work with companions from another country, using ELF as a mediational tool. This in turn was expected to raise pupils' ELF-awareness.

4.1 *Intercultural telecollaboration: Italy-Kyrgyzstan*

The project *Intercultural telecollaboration: Italy-Kyrgyzstan* was carried out in the 2022-2023 school year. For the purposes of this project, a CoP was created comprising Italian and Kyrgyz learners who had just started Grade 6. The pupils interacted online through ELF to improve their ICC. They communicated once a week, for one hour, from November 2022 to February 2023. There were 40 pupils altogether: 26 Italian students from St. Philip School (Rome,

Italy), and 14 Kyrgyz students from United World International School (Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan). The pupils were 10-11 years old. The group was coordinated by two teachers, namely Tatiana Kozlova, at St. Philip School, and Lukas Zawadzki, at United World International School. They organized web-mediated communication, provided language support, advice, and corrective feedback to the members of the CoP.

The project was created out of the partnership of these schools with Cambridge Primary Combined Course. Both schools are accredited by Cambridge International and follow the Cambridge curriculum in teaching English as a Second Language, as well as other subjects. It should be noted that the Cambridge Curriculum is firmly rooted in the Standard English model, with a native-speaker assessment framework. Moreover, the Cambridge assessment system includes mostly form-focused activities and evaluates learners' compliance with native-speaker norms (both British and American models are accepted). Nevertheless, for both schools the current project was the first step in the integration of ELF-based activities into the English syllabus, despite the dominant British English pedagogical model. This, we may say, is in line with the latest indications provided by the Companion Volume (Council of Europe, 2018) of the Common European Framework for Languages (CEFR), where descriptors of competence are provided for building on plurilingual/pluricultural repertoires.

The literature analysis conducted by the authors revealed that telecollaboration is most effective when it is "set up in an institutional context with the aim of developing both language skills and intercultural competence through structured tasks." (Guth and Helm 2010, 14). A pre-treatment survey was carried out among Italian pupils aimed at exploring learners' experience with ELF and identifying the starting point and learners' perceptions about normativity, appropriateness, comprehensibility and ownership of English.

The implementation of the intercultural telecollaboration project consisted of two stages:

Stage 1. Exploratory session, in which the pupils introduced themselves and explored each other's cultures through question and answer (Q&A) activities, via two video-calls.

Stage 2. Collaborative session, which consisted in the CoP creating a song about intercultural friendship.

Before and after treatment, pupils were asked to fill in two questionnaires, respectively. The first one was intended to collect information about the pu-

pils' use of English outside the classroom and their knowledge about the use of ELF; the second one encouraged respondents to: a) reflect on the experience of intercultural collaboration; and b) assess the communicative strategies they used in completing their cooperative task.

Each teacher administered these questionnaires separately, because for privacy reasons the results could not be shared between the teachers. Therefore, the data analysis and the conclusions about the overall project efficiency are based on the answers of the Italian respondents only.

4.2 Pre-treatment survey

During the pre-treatment stage, pupils were asked to fill in a questionnaire that consisted of twenty questions, divided into two parts, which covered three types of data: factual, behavioral, and attitudinal (Dörnyei 2010). The structure of the questionnaire had to be user-friendly for young learners, that is why most questions consisted in multiple-choice items, while the open questions contained certain guidance.

4.2.1 The pre-treatment data analysis

Here is a synopsis of relevant data collected through the pre-treatment survey, which consisted of 20 items, altogether. Most of the pupils were eleven-years old, while some of them were still ten. All surveyed pupils could speak two languages, their L1 and English, and the majority of them (65%) could speak three languages. The data analysis showed that within this multilingual and intercultural CoP several different L1s were spoken, namely Chinese, Japanese, Bangla, Russian, Spanish, German, and Arabic. The vast majority of pupils' families (77%) could speak English as well.

The majority of respondents had been studying English since they attended nursery school and had occasionally used this language for authentic communication. Moreover, all pupils were encouraged to speak English during the English lessons, at lunch time, and during the breaks. English is also the language students normally used at school to carry out plenty of group activities. This contributed to their perception of being successful users of English as an

additional contact language. Indeed, apart from their teachers and classmates, their interlocutors would include family members, other friends, people on the Internet, and even strangers.

88% of students reported that they could understand everything their interlocutors said. Further investigation into this communicative success shed light on the pupils' perception of their performance. Indeed, they showed an overall comprehension (i.e., extensive) of their interlocutors' messages, rather than an intensive understanding of every utterance.

77% of pupils were able to perceive different accents in spoken English by comparing their previous experience with native and non-native speakers with the English of their counterparts. This datum is particularly important as long as raising learners' ELF-awareness is concerned, for it allowed their teachers to focus on the notion of English variability in international contexts. Notably, children could also perceive of the difference in the lexicogrammar between the English spoken by their adult interlocutors and their teacher.

96% of respondents used English to communicate with other people online. Therefore, the Internet was also exploited by their English teachers to enhance learners' ICC.

The pre-treatment survey revealed that the use of ELF in videogaming (73% of respondents) and social networks (46% of respondents) has become a reality even among young learners. Pupils also used English to communicate with other people via WhatsApp videocalls.

The survey showed that misunderstanding in online communication was handled differently than in face-to-face communication, with learners' preferences distributed almost equally between asking interlocutors for more help (e.g., asking for clarification, asking for repetition, etc.) and looking up the meaning of unfamiliar words on the Internet.

As for the open question of the survey regarding the areas where English is spoken today, respondents indicated the following countries: the USA/America, the UK/England/Great Britain, Canada, Australia, India, China, Argentina, all countries/every country/the whole world. This shows learners' awareness both of the English-speaking countries, and of the global spread of English as an international language.

100% of respondents were interested in talking to people of their age from other countries. This was a good pre-requisite for the project, as it showed learners' motivation to engage in intercultural communication. The pupils

were provided with the following list of topics: a) their school, b) their cuisine, c) their music, d) their fashion, e) their festivities, f) their traditions, g) other (please specify). The topics that seemed to be of major interest were ‘traditions’ (77%), ‘festivities’ (42%) and ‘school’ (50%).

The majority of respondents (88%) showed their positive attitude towards cultural diversity, which constituted another important pre-requisite for working collaboratively as a CoP in the upcoming intercultural project of telecollaboration.

When asked about their favorite communicative strategies in using ELF, 50% indicated repetition, and 58% paraphrasing. These were their most commonly used forms of accommodation.

4.3 *Treatment*

The project lasted from November 2022 to February 2023, and was divided into two stages: 1) introductory; and 2) collaborative.

4.3.1 *The first stage*

The first phase included two introductory online meetings with all the pupils involved in the project of intercultural telecollaboration. These meetings were carried out using videocalls on Google Meet. During the first meeting, Italian and Kyrgyz pupils took turns to introduce themselves briefly. During the second meeting the students interacted through a Q&A session about their traditions, festivities, cuisine, and music. When they could not hear each other due to technical problems, pupils used visuals, i.e., drawing pictures and writing words on flashcards that they showed in front of the camera. In this way, participants experienced that communication is multimodal and transcends all boundaries with interlocutors, who used every available means to interact and negotiate meaning.

4.3.2 *The second stage*

The researchers’ original intention was to make participants discuss different topics through live videocalls. However, due to the five-hour time difference

between Rome and Bishkek, they opted for asynchronous writing to carry out their collaborative task. In this way the pupils could interact using written ELF when it was convenient for them.

The second part of the research project was carried out on PBworks platform (<http://stphilip.pbworks.com>, former PBwiki), which is a real-time collaborative editing system. A free basic wiki workspace was created for this project, as well as accounts for all Italian and Kyrgyz pupils. Students had to click on the link they received, and log in using their accounts. Then they had to carry out the assigned collaborative task, i.e., create a song about international friendship.

For the purposes of the current research, hundreds of learners' comments that were posted on the platform were divided into phases. The off-topic comments were excluded, while the most relevant and representative comments from both groups of students, (i.e., those that contained stimulating ideas that influenced the course of the discussion), were later selected and analyzed by the researchers, in order to draw conclusions about the final outcome of the project. The majority of participants' comments were posted by the Italian students, because they outnumbered the Kyrgyz students. Moreover, the Italians seemed to be more highly motivated to get the work done, supposedly because they were already familiar with teamwork and had already shown their appreciation for group activities. In the following section, participants' names are abbreviated or replaced by pseudonyms, for privacy reasons.

4.3.2.1 ELF features and intercultural telecollaboration

The collaborative work on the composition of a song on intercultural friendship began with the opening message posted by the teachers on December 6, 2022. They invited learners to start discussing the topic of the song. This phase ended on February 2, 2023.

- Phase 1. Initiating. At the beginning of the discussion, pupils introduced themselves and expressed their hope to carry out a nice project and make new friends. In doing this, they signaled their cultural identity by deliberately adding Italian and Kyrgyz greetings to their comments in English. Learners saw this collaborative project as an opportunity to bridge the gap between their countries and teach each other some basic sentences in their respective languages.

- Phase 2. Planning. In this phase, the pupils discussed the tune and the style of the song they were going to compose. They eventually decided to proceed with the rap style and make the lines of the lyrics rhyme.
- Phase 3. Executing. In this phase the pupils posted their contributions to the composition of their song. The following are two examples of their online interaction (the original spelling is preserved).

F. G. wrote:

I think I have an idea for our song
 A friend is a treasure
 Friendship is a think that you can't measure
 If you have a friend you have more than gold
 Friendship is the best the best thing in the world...

Y. A. wrote:

its international friendship not friendship in general!

It should be noticed that Y.A.'s comment shows that this pupil is remarkably aware of the fact that international friendship entails something different than the friendship between people from the same linguacultural background. This was a turning point in the discussion that made other students aware of the intercultural dimension of the project they were working at. The following examples show how the pupils' intercultural awareness was slowly developing (the original spelling is preserved).

B. G. said:

I think that the song needs a peice of another language

C. B. said:

Maybe we can write it in kirgis (if its called like this) (heart emoji) I hope they will like it

B. G. said:

I think this song will help People from diffrent countries to become friends

It is also important to underline that whenever any of the participants tended to lose the intercultural focus of their work, the other members of the CoP reminded them about the true spirit of the project. Moreover, their emphasis was primarily on the intelligibility of the lyrics of the song they were writing collaboratively.

When the Kyrgyz pupils joined the discussion, the Italian students asked for their partners' support and collaboration. As soon as the first contributions

to the song began to arrive from the Kyrgyz group, the Italian learners were faced with cases of “reverse unilateral idiomaticity” (Grazzi 2018, 148), a typical feature of ELF communication, whereby the use of L1 idiomatic expressions in English could make meaning exceptionally opaque and affect the conversation flow. In our case, the Italian students could not understand the meaning of a few idiomatic expressions that the Kyrgyz partners had turned into ELF (see the underlined example below).

E. B. *said*:

Hi guys i have some ideas for our song

Maybe we can start it like this:

WE ARE GOOD FRIENDS

WE ARE TOGETHER

WE MAKE THE LIGHTBULB OF THE FRIEND GO AND FLY LIKE THE BIRDS
IN THE SKY

As we can see, the use of reverse unilateral idiomaticity in the expression “lightbulb of the friend” might make the meaning quite opaque and affect the conversation flow in a multicultural and multilingual context. Since the idiom was not understood, clarification requests from the Italian students followed to mediate communication in a ZPD. It was a significant moment of the project, because it raised the students’ awareness that unilateral idiomaticity may lead to misunderstanding in intercultural contexts. The pupils were encouraged by the teacher to always put themselves in their interlocutors’ shoes and think whether their messages would be comprehensible for them or not. With the help of their teachers, the pupils tried to guess what their companion meant to say when they used the idiom: “the lightbulb of the friend”. They also reflected on the fact it could be a Kyrgyz idiom that their friend had just translated into English. The Italian students suggested that there might be some connection between ‘lightbulb’ and energy, and later the Kyrgyz students confirmed that ‘lightbulb’ was a metaphor for ‘enthusiasm’. Once the meaning of this idiom was clarified, the CoP decided to include this sentence into the song, as an example of the Kyrgyz linguacultural contribution to their work. However, they managed to make its meaning more explicit.

- Phase 4. Closing. Each part of the lyrics of the song that was composed by the CoP was considered precious. Hence, the Italian pupils combined the lines that had been written. The final result was an intercultural rap composition

about international friendship. Finally, this tune was performed by participants, who even added dancing to it.

International friendship

Hello all! Hello all!

*Despite our difference we can still make a song!
Oh what a joy it is to have a friend like you,
For giving strength to me the way that you can do.
A friend is loyal, a friend is royal,
If they help you in your saddest moments.*

*A friend is a treasure, a friend is a treasure,
Friendship is a thing that you cannot measure.
If you have a friend, you have more than gold,
Friendship is the best, the best thing in the world.
When you are with a friend, you feel you drank a potion,
Because friendship is the best emotion.
A friend, a friend is your prized possession,
and friendship needs a lot of reflection.*

*Hola everybody! We are friends!
Also at long distance we can be friends.
It's all of us together,
From different countries, different states.
Friendship is amazing,
And sometimes it is blazing!*

*Friends are always there,
Friends are everywhere.
WE ARE GOOD FRIENDS,
WE ARE TOGETHER.*

*THE LIGHT OF YOUR FRIENDSHIP WILL ALWAYS SHINE
IT WILL MAKE YOU FLY LIKE A BIRD IN THE SKY!*

*A friend is more than everything else,
And if you don't have it, you must be sad.
A good one's a person that's kind and generous,
The Earth is big but friendships are everywhere.
We don't care from where we come.
Friends are good! We all have some!*

4.4 *Post-treatment survey*

When the phase of the project called Treatment was over, a post-survey was administered to the CoP, which included a questionnaire and a focus group. Our aim was to elicit further information about the participants' perceptions of the shared experience they had made, and of the communicative strategies they implemented to carry out their task.

4.4.1 *The post-treatment survey data analysis and the focus group*

The post-survey provided relevant information about the learners' perceptions of the collaborative task they had carried out. The great majority of pupils (88%) were satisfied with the results of their work. In the focus group they said that “[i]t turned out very good”. They described it as “wonderful”, “amazing”, “sensational”, and having “beautiful meaning” and a “cool beat”. They were extremely proud that they “made it together”. 12% of participants said they were not happy with the song and explained that they didn't like the rap tune or disagreed with some of its lines.

As the data showed, the majority of students (65%) especially appreciated the social dimension of this activity and an opportunity to meet new friends from a different part of the world. The vast majority of learners (92%) said their task was interesting, while 4% found it boring and 4% found it challenging.

All pupils were ready to participate in a similar project in the future. When asked what they would change, their preferences distributed almost equally between three alternatives: a) working with companions from a different country (e.g., other European countries); b) trying a different mode of collaboration (e.g., face-to-face); c) designing a different activity (e.g., writing fanfiction). This means that further ELF-aware activities for the English classroom may explore all these options. Finally, 100% of pupils reported that, as a result of intercultural telecollaboration, they had learned to work together with people from a different country. Moreover, 85% of respondents reported that they had learned where Kyrgyzstan is, and that Kyrgyz people speak English too.

In the focus group, the Italian students specified that during the introductory stage of the project, when participants communicated orally (see section n. 4.3.1), the difficulties in understanding each other were mostly due to the

slow Internet connection available to them. Sometimes, this caused cuts in the communication flow. Data analysis revealed that students mostly dealt with non-understanding by asking their partners to repeat (35%), guess what they had said (27%), or ask for clarification (23%). We may infer that the communicative strategies participants had used were successful, since 100% of the pupils reported that they made communication work.

Moreover, during the focus group discussion, the teacher asked the Italian learners to clarify some of the answers given in the post-survey. For example, 70% of the Italian pupils reported that they had noticed that, during the Exploratory session (see section n. 4.1, Stage 1), the English pronunciation of their interlocutors was different from the English they had experienced before. Instead, the remaining 30% of participants said that they had already heard a similar accent before. Some of them called it “Slavic accent”, while others called it “Asian accent”. Indeed, Kyrgyzstan has two official languages: some Kyrgyz learners speak Russian as their first language (i.e., a Slavic language), while the others speak Kyrgyz (i.e., an Asian language) as their first language. Some students specified that the English spoken by Kyrgyz partners “was weird” and “was a lower level than our English”. However, thanks to a guided reflection on their experience of intercultural telecollaboration, they understood that in authentic situations it is important to ‘accommodate’ to one’s interlocutor and cooperate in order to achieve successful communication. Interestingly, two of the young learners’ final comments were: “this is exactly what we did”, and “the song we created is a proof”.

5. *Discussion*

The empirical results reported in the previous section should be considered in the light of some limitations. First of all, the data analysis and the conclusions about the overall project efficiency are only based on the Italian respondents’ answers, as was explained in section n. 4.1. This major drawback could be addressed in the future, if the authors of this study will be given access to Kyrgyz data. This would allow us to complete our research by comparing the results of the surveys conducted with both classes, in order to examine how the development of young learners’ intercultural competence and ELF-awareness varied within the CoP.

Secondly, the participants' contributions were disproportionate, as the majority of comments were posted by the Italian students. This was mainly due to the fact that Italian learners outnumbered the Kyrgyz.

Nonetheless, the project that has been presented in section n. 4 shows that a blended approach that combines ELF and SCT can be integrated successfully into the English syllabus, in order to give teachers and learners an opportunity to raise their awareness of the changing scenario of contemporary English on a global scale and be equipped to cope with it.

This experience was highly beneficial for the Italian young learners for several reasons. From the data analysis of the pre-treatment and post-treatment questionnaires, and from the focus group discussion we could see how the Italian young learners' attitude towards the use of English as a global language had gradually changed. Already in the pre-treatment stage, as the questionnaire has shown, some young learners knew that English is not only spoken in native-speaker and post-colonial countries. However, by the end of the telecollaboration project, participants' ELF-awareness reached 85% of pupils. As the results of the survey showed, working as an intercultural CoP, all participants (100%) had improved their ICC via the use of ELF. Moreover, participants showed their genuine appreciation for the differences and similarities between their cultures. As the data indicate, the majority of pupils especially appreciated the creative and social dimension of intercultural telecollaboration as an opportunity to meet new friends from a different part of the world.

As the analysis of the corpus compiled for this study has revealed, distantly located classes from heterogeneous contexts tend to appropriate English as a mediational tool to carry out their communicative tasks successfully, and in so doing allow ELF to emerge naturally. The implementation of adaptive communication strategies represents the observable phenomenon of this sociocognitive process through which ELF discourse reveals the interplay of the interlocutors' different L1s and English, in the process of signaling their linguacultural identities. This turns into a joint effort to negotiate meanings and work cooperatively.

The empirical evidence collected during this project confirmed the observation in Grazzi's (2013) study that learners tend to focus more on content rather than form in reviewing their cooperative work. For example, the members of the CoP would normally add new ideas or change just a few lines in the lyrics of the song they had written, rather than correct lexicogrammar deviations

from NS norms. This indicates that the use of ELF, as can be seen in the few examples provided above, could well serve the pragmatic needs of the pupils involved in CoP, i.e., it was used as an appropriate affordance to mediate communication in this pedagogical form of group work.

6. Conclusions

This paper follows from the call of Cogo et al. (2022) that more classroom-based research is needed in the area of ELF-awareness. Intercultural projects like the one described in this paper can become fruitful opportunities to allow teachers to reflect on language pedagogy and the profound transformation that English has undergone due to its leading position as the language of globalization. We may then conclude that innovative ELF-based projects should be integrated into the English syllabus at young learners' level and become an integral part of teacher-education programs. This, we believe, would raise teachers' awareness of the "changing tides in ELT" (Sifakis 2017, 12) and consequently encourage them to implement the strategies proposed in the initial sections of this study. With Sifakis (2014), the ELF construct may indeed become a wonderful opportunity for ESOL teacher education as well.

In a nutshell, ELF-aware pedagogy should bridge the "gap between the dominance of native-speaker oriented institutional curricula and the emergence of variable, context-bound forms of English in multilingual and multicultural communicative settings" (Grazzi and Lopriore 2020, 69). Moreover, we may suggest that, apart from top-down or bottom-up approaches in teacher education, there is also a fundamental horizontal channel to exploit, that is sharing the experience of implementing novel activities like intercultural collaboration among fellow teachers, in order to foster ELF-aware pedagogy. We wish our project to represent a step further in that direction.

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Appunti sulla rappresentazione spaziale. Il Veneto disegnato da
Giosetta Fioroni e l'Emilia fotografata da Cuchi White

Abstract

The aim of this essay is to investigate how two female artists, Giosetta Fioroni and Cuchi White, interpreted and represented two Italian real places: the Venetian countryside around the Piave River, and the places around the Via Emilia, an ancient Italian road still essential for communications and economy nowadays. Starting from Westphal's reflection on geocriticism, this article analyses the book *Attraverso l'evento* (1988), which contains both Andrea Zanzotto's poems and Giosetta Fioroni's illustrations. The relationship between words and images re-creates a Venetian countryside as a place of ancestral memory, where the nature is inhabited by fabulous creatures belonging to old fairy-tales. The second part of this essay analyses Cuchi White's photographs. These images, as her famous *trompe l'œil*, represent both a real space and the way in which the human being perceives, lives, and creates the space.

1. *Osservazioni preliminari*

Questo saggio vuole indagare il modo in cui due artiste italiane del secondo Novecento hanno riconfigurato lo spazio nelle loro opere. Si tratta di comprendere, cioè, come la realtà fisica, geografica, paesaggistica italiana sia stata personalmente e artisticamente reinterpretata, offrendoci così nuove prospettive di osservazione sul reale e stimolando riflessioni sul modo di esperire i luoghi che ci circondano.

In particolare, saranno considerati i lavori di Giosetta Fioroni e Cuchi White. La prima è stata un'artista contemporanea, parte del Gruppo di Piazza del Popolo di Roma, legata a una produzione che spazia dai disegni alle pitture, dalle installazioni agli happening. La seconda, americana, formatasi nella Photo League di New York, ha ritratto nelle sue fotografie luoghi e spazi dell'Europa, specie in Italia e Francia. È proprio in relazione a quest'ultimo aspetto che strade apparen-

temente divergenti finiscono per incrociarsi, tracciando un terreno comune che ci permette di affiancare linguaggi artistici diversi: la rappresentazione e riconfigurazione di luoghi reali. Il così detto *spatial turn*¹, sottraendo alla temporalità l'egemonia negli studi umanistici, ha imposto quella di uno spazio molteplicemente inteso e variamente studiato, che ha prodotto, per gli studiosi di argomenti letterari, una varietà di approcci e riflessioni teoriche fittissime attorno a quello che ormai è divenuto un "arcitema" (Iacoli 2008, 24). Tra i critici, Bertrand Westphal ha avuto il merito di proporre un metodo di analisi che ha come oggetto di studio il modo in cui la letteratura racconta lo spazio reale, il referente extratestuale. Come evidenza un'attenta scelta terminologica, questo metodo non egocentrato ma anzi geocentrato, dunque focalizzato sul reale referente extratestuale, sull'elemento geografico, si pone l'obiettivo di superare anche l'impasse della proposta imagologica, che studiando lo spazio soggettivamente esperito e letterariamente riconfigurato indaga la costituzione di cliché e stereotipi, ritagliati soprattutto sull'altro, sullo sconosciuto, sullo straniero. La geocritica, pertanto, sposta l'attenzione dall'ego, e dunque dall'autore dell'elaborazione narrativa, allo spazio, alla realtà oggetto di narrazione. Da questa opposizione giunge la necessaria multifocalizzazione come perno centrale dell'analisi di Westphal (2009, 161):

Il punto di vista geocritico, plurale perché situato all'incrocio di rappresentazioni distinte, contribuisce così a determinare uno spazio comune. L'essenza identitaria dello spazio di riferimento non può che essere il frutto di un incessante lavoro di creazione e ricreazione. Da questa constatazione deriva uno dei perni della metodologia geocritica: la multifocalizzazione degli sguardi su uno spazio di riferimento dato.²

Questa posizione è stata da altri studi per così dire mitigata, reinterpretata, ridiscussa teoricamente. Un primo esempio può essere individuato nella formulazione della parola "geotematica", un termine ma soprattutto un metodo che "riconosce al paesaggio piena dignità di geotema dinamico, di approccio soggettivo, mutevole" (Iacoli 2016, 43). Un secondo è riscontrabile nella lunga discussione degli studi spaziali operata da Robert T. Tally Jr. Lo studioso americano inizia la sua riflessione sottolineando la necessaria flessibilità della geocritica come prassi ermeneutica (Tally 2011, 1), per poi soppesarne altre declinazioni e sfumature vagliando il rapporto tra letteratura e mappe geografi-

1 Si vedano, come introduzione all'argomento, Maxia 2007 e Sorrentino 2010.

2 Oltre a questo riferimento, si veda anche il precedente Westphal 2000.

che (Tally 2014), e suggerendo un incrocio tra geocritica ed ecocritica (Tally e Battista 2016, in particolare Prieto 2016). Uno dei più recenti approdi di questo lavoro è la definizione di un campo di studi ampio e variegato dal nome “spatial literary studies” (Tally 2021a), che alla precisa identificazione di una precisa prassi critica preferisce un fluido campo in cui convivono pratiche eterogenee.³

Se, come scrive Prieto, possiamo considerare lo spazio “as a manifestation of the dynamic interpenetration of consciousness and world” (Prieto 2011, 25), questa indagine ci permetterà di addentrarci nella poetica delle due artiste, e di scoprire, attraverso la rappresentazione di un referente reale, come la peculiare visione di ciascuna è concretizzata nelle riconfigurazioni spaziali realizzate attraverso differenti mezzi espressivi. Ci collocheremo proprio lì, nella compenetrazione di cui parla Prieto, nell’interazione tra coscienza soggettiva e mondo reale, per comprendere, per mezzo delle peculiari sensibilità delle due artiste, i diversi modi di percepire, vivere e abitare alcuni spazi della penisola. Vedremo, più nello specifico, la rappresentazione della campagna e del paesaggio veneto limitrofo al Piave nel libro *Attraverso l’evento* (1988), che contiene poesie di Andrea Zanzotto e disegni a esse affiancate di Giosetta Fioroni, e la rappresentazione del paesaggio emiliano di Cuchi White, all’interno del progetto espositivo *Esplorazioni sulla via Emilia* del 1986, al quale collaborarono numerosi fotografi e scrittori.⁴ Un’indagine tra percorsi a distanza, dove la sensibilità, la poetica, la ricerca individuale delle artiste si confronta con un paesaggio reale sovrascritto da contemporanee riletture. Se il paesaggio non è “qualcosa di misurabile o di identificabile, di oggettivo, ma [...] un fenomeno che si sottrae a qualunque tentativo di fissarlo troppo rapidamente” (Jakob 2009, 27), allora i paesaggi qui analizzati saranno la risultante del legame tra interpretazioni liriche e semiotiche diverse, che cercheranno di definire “l’identità fluttuante, aperta, forse anche irritante” (Ibid.) del paesaggio.

3 “I think that spatial literary studies could still serve as a broad category that could include a number of different scholarly and critical practices involving space and literature” (Tally 2021b, 329).

4 La mostra si tenne a Reggio Emilia, Bologna e Ferrara, tra febbraio e aprile del 1986. Il catalogo, a cura di Giulio Bizzarri ed Eleonora Bronzoni fu pubblicato nello stesso anno per Feltrinelli. Al progetto parteciparono fotografi (Olivo Barbieri, Gabriele Basilico, Vincenzo Castella, Giuseppe Chiaramonte, Vittore Fossati, Luigi Ghirri, Guido Guidi, Mimmo Jodice, Klaus Kinold, Claude Nori, Cuchi White, Manfred Willmann) e scrittori (Ermanno Cavazzoni, Corrado Costa, Daniele del Giudice, Antonio Faeti, Giorgio Messori, Giulia Niccolai, Beppe Sebaste, Antonio Tabucchi e Gianni Celati).

2. *Gioietta Fioroni attraverso la campagna veneta*

Sfogliando le pagine di *Attraverso l'evento* di Andrea Zanzotto e Gioietta Fioroni, edito in copie numerate nel 1988 dalla casa editrice Eidos, specializzata nella pubblicazione di libri di artiste, ci si rende subito conto che non si tratta di un semplice libro di poesie illustrato, né di un libro di illustrazioni affiancato da componimenti, ma di qualcosa di nuovo, di un'alchimia nata dal fulminante incrocio di due percorsi artistici diversi, dove il significato finale è composto dal legame covalente di parola e immagine; un "ecosistema" (Brogi 2018, 12) che dunque andrà decodificato ponderando "gli effetti prodotti dall'interazione dei differenti piani mediali" (Seligardi 2014, 4).⁵

Prendiamo le prime pagine della raccolta.



Figura 1. Fioroni, Gioietta, e Zanzotto, Andrea. 1988. *Attraverso l'evento*.
Mirano: Eidos. Su concessione del Ministero della Cultura – Biblioteca Nazionale
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⁵ Il termine "ecosistema", particolarmente calzante per rendere il rapporto testo-immagine, è stato ripreso anche da Giuseppe Carrara per definire i fototesti, in Carrara 2020, 369-372.

Il primo testo che incontriamo è la poesia *Nella valle*, composta da Zanzotto come un ricordo della fine della Seconda guerra mondiale nella notte di San Silvestro, della gioia e delle speranze sgorgate come una primavera invernale. Quella dell'io lirico è una presenza subito espressa fin dal primo verso – “oltre la mia porta le ultime colline” (Zanzotto 1999, 107) – mediante un aggettivo possessivo che, legato alla parola “porta”, evoca immediatamente la traccia umana attraverso l'architettura abitata; un paesaggio, quello della valle, dunque antropizzato. Ma quella dell'uomo è una figura evanescente, una figura che pur provando la gioia della fine del conflitto, pur muovendosi nella valle “per conoscere / il proprio oscuro matrimonio / con il cielo e le selve”, “non sa parlare” (Ibid.). È un uomo che vive non con la natura, ma nella natura, un uomo che ha il letto “di cruda indivia e di vischio” (Ibid.). E dalle parole poetiche ai tratti di china l'uomo svanisce, lasciando il posto a una valle terrosa su cui si staglia una bianca luna, che ha preso il posto della stella che “dai suoi paesi / di solitario cristallo / ha osato sporgersi più acuta” (Ibid.); la “luna... quel senso di alone, di luminosità simbolica... e tutto il corredo notturno, sognato, le stelle che io ho adoperato incessantemente negli anni” (Boatto 1990, 12), come l'autore ha riferito in una conversazione con Alberto Boatto. Mentre il centro della scena è dominato da questa unione oscura di cielo e foreste, in alto a sinistra appaiono strane figure notturne, e sul limite sinistro segue il perimetro dell'immagine una densa linea rossa, che presto si perde approssimandosi al centro, come a rappresentare il passato sanguigno della guerra che si affaccia alla memoria. Gli unici richiami all'essere umano sono i numeri che compaiono in alto a destra, 0422 e 0438, cioè i prefissi telefonici del distretto di Treviso. Si tratta di un richiamo a una geografia e, se vogliamo, a un paesaggio istituzionale, utilitaristico, funzionale all'amministrazione umana del territorio e che investe la quotidianità degli abitanti. Come per l'appropriazione dello spazio da parte dell'uomo attraverso la memoria della guerra, anche in questo caso l'appropriazione dello spazio attraverso una sua ridefinizione a scopi telecomunicativi rimane evanescente, astratta come i numeri appena accennati a matita. La memoria dell'uomo, e il suo lavoro di ridefinizione e impossessamento del territorio sono rarefatti, una debole sfumatura nel dominio naturale.

Anche nella raffigurazione della poesia *Sul Piave* la figura umana, con la sua memoria, svanisce.



Figura 2. Fioroni, Giosetta, e Zanzotto, Andrea. 1988. *Attraverso l'evento*. Milano: Eidos.
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Centrale è il fiume, con i “sedimenti / da cui prendemmo forma e forza a vivere” (Zanzotto 1999, 225), mentre sullo sfondo, le montagne accennano al “dilagante ardore dei nevai” (Ibid.). Il paesaggio, nelle parole del poeta, reca le vestigia umane (Ibid.):

sulla tua riva sinistra mia madre patì sola,
a destra combatteva mio padre ed io ero solo.

Fiume unico
che segui tutta la mia vita,
che mi legghi e convinci,
ed ecciti e sconvolgi
ogni mattino della vita:
in questi giorni oscuri d'offensiva
vano forse non fu, forse fu santo
scendere coi fratelli
ad arrossarti, linfa senza fine.

Quella descritta è una orografia della memoria umana, una memoria personale ma anche, in qualche modo, nazionale, della comunità di chi ha combattuto e adesso, come *Nella valle*, sta vivendo la fine della guerra e l'attesa per ciò che a essa deve succedere. Ma il disegno di Giosetta Fioroni rende nuovamente astratta questa presenza umana, ricreando un paesaggio notturno, dove protagonista si leva nel cielo la luna, alla cui ombra scura si animano uccelli e creature.



Figura 3. Fioroni, Giosetta, e Zanzotto, Andrea. 1988. *Attraverso l'evento*. Milano: Eidos.
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In (*Che sotto l'alta guida*) Zanzotto rievoca la figura di Giovanni Comisso, sfamato durante un giorno di guerra dall'"ilare sangue" (Ibid.: 631) di un ciliegio. Nel disegno di Fioroni, però, la memoria del conflitto sbiadisce nell'aridità senza storia del terreno, sul quale sveltano solo un albero, verde e imperlato di carmino, e un altopiano lontano, all'orizzonte. Il paesaggio raffigurato richiama la seconda strofa (Ibid.):

Nell'ora che più intenta al suo banco squartava la battaglia
quando come a pidocchi si sentenziavano destini,
neutrali a sé stavano le bestiepiante della boscaglia
e a divine fogliate pause portavano i cammini.

Stava il ciliegio con le sue gocce rosse
privilegiatamente dimenticato e dimentico
tra piante qua e là per sbaglio ferite, tra fosse
di granate e il bruum delle artiglierie ardenti.

Se nella poesia “le vicende umane si intrecciano a quelle dei vegetali, degli animali [...] e la storia culturale dell'uomo non resta separata da quella naturale” (Benedetti 2011, 35), come è stato scritto per Gadda, nel disegno la figura umana, con la sua storia e i suoi destini, è relegata a piè di pagina e astratta nella scritta “Giovanni Comisso”, in stampatello, parzialmente sbuffata.

Sebbene non presenti echi della guerra e della storia di individui o di una comunità, lo stesso processo di progressivo scoloramento dell'immagine umana e della sua storia nel passaggio da poesia a disegno è presente anche in *Epifania*.

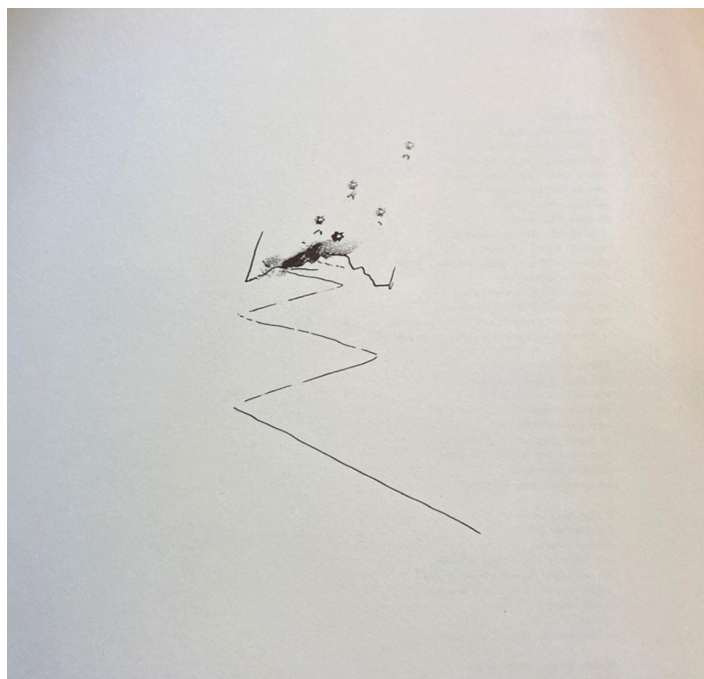


Figura 4. Fioroni, Giosetta, e Zanzotto, Andrea. 1988. *Attraverso l'evento*. Milano: Eidos.

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Se nel componimento, infatti, il brulicare della natura subisce l'intrusione antropica del “soffio del claxon” (Zanzotto 1999, 133), ben rappresentata an-

che stilisticamente dall'utilizzo di un termine non-poetico e di uso comune all'interno di un componimento dal linguaggio piano, ordinato e omogeneo, la rappresentazione grafica è dominata dal "Piave muscolo di gelo" (Ibid.), un labile filo nero che scava nella pagina bianca scendendo dalla montagna scura che si staglia sul fondo, mentre sopra di essa campeggia l'onnipresente notte contornata di stelle. Un notturno davvero dominante in tutto il libro, come dimostrano anche */()* e *Docile, riluttante*. Il primo componimento richiamava già la notte, come lo stesso autore dichiara in un'intervista (Ibid.: 1285):

In questi ultimi trent'anni si è abusato moltissimo delle parentesi; io le impiego, un po' scherzosamente, come una lontana immagine lunare che incombe sempre sul bosco.

La luna è sempre lì, osserva, gira in mezzo alle fronde, distante e vicina nello stesso tempo. Questa luna si riduce nel mio testo a luna crescente e luna calante, a forma di falce-parentesi. Le due parentesi, però, evocano anche l'immagine delle gambe vare o valghe – secondo il linguaggio dell'ortopedia – e, quindi, una scarsa capacità di deambulazione sicura, caratteristica del nostro tempo. Nell'immagine c'è un po' d'ironia, come a dire: siamo tutti, più o meno, coinvolti dentro una certa storpiatura della realtà.

[...] Nell'altra poesia, invece, appare la luna; ancora quella meravigliosa che apparirà sempre, se non la tireranno giù dal cielo, come un fiore che sboccia dal bosco. L'andamento è qui dolce e rammemorativo.

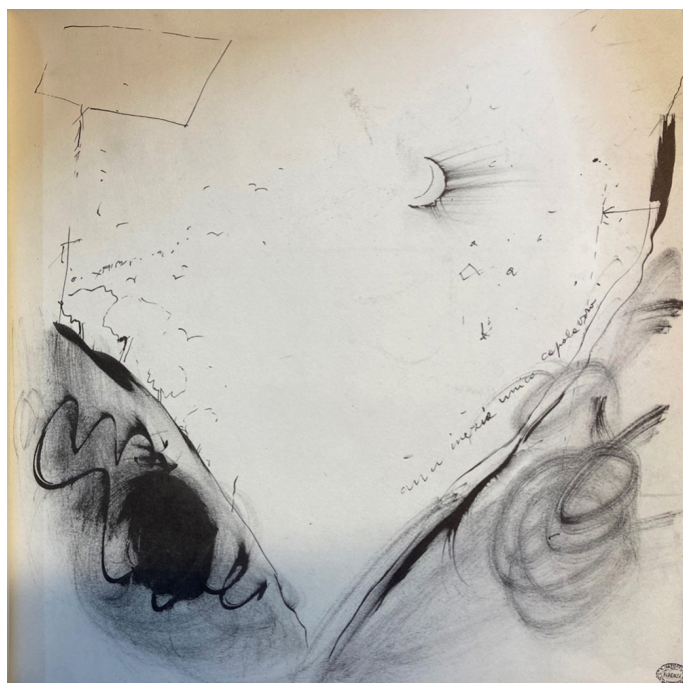


Figura 5. Fioroni, Giosetta, e Zanzotto, Andrea. 1988. *Attraverso l'evento*. Milano: Eidos.
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Tale intento “rammemorativo” emerge anche dal disegno relativo a)((). Non vi sono colori, se non il nero e il bianco, e in alto, dominante, accentuata da una scia scura, sta la luna, che svetta come un ombelico femminile su questa valle che ricorda un ventre. Sul ripido pendio, infine, sbiadiscono le parole “inezia unico capolavoro”, ultimo verso della poesia, come l’eco di un ricordo. Un clima di contemplativa oscurità troviamo anche nell’immagine che affianca la seconda poesia, *Docile, riluttante*, che chiude la raccolta *Idioma* (prima edizione 1986, la poesia è del 1984).



Figura 6. Fioroni, Giosetta, e Zanzotto, Andrea. 1988. *Attraverso l’evento*. Milano: Eidos.
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Qui, il lavoro dell’uomo, Nino⁶, svanisce nell’inarrestabile pullulare della vita che il feudo “emana emana emana” (Ibid., 809), in una ripetizione del verbo al tempo presente senza punteggiatura che evoca la continuità ricorsiva ed eterna della vita. Parlando degli ambienti di uomini e animali, il biologo e pensatore estone Jakob von Uexküll ha scritto (2013, 55):

⁶ Per la figura di Nino descritta dallo stesso Zanzotto si veda Zanzotto 2013, 157-70.

Ogni soggetto tesse intorno a sé una ragnatela di relazioni con alcune proprietà specifiche possedute dalle cose che lo circondano ed è proprio grazie a una rete tanto fitta che può condurre la propria esistenza.

[...] Troppo spesso ci culliamo nell'illusione che le relazioni intrattenute da un soggetto con le cose che costituiscono il suo ambiente si collochino nello stesso spazio e nello stesso tempo di quelle che intratteniamo noi con le cose che fanno parte del mondo umano. È un'illusione che si nutre della fede nell'esistenza di un unico mondo, in cui sarebbero inseriti tutti gli esseri viventi.⁷

Per Uexküll ogni specie animale vive e opera all'interno di un suo proprio ambiente, costituito dai legami che la specie intrattiene con le cose che la circondano, esteso per un particolare spazio e scandito da un preciso tempo. Il passaggio da una specie all'altra segna il passaggio a differenti scale spaziali e temporali di riferimento. Ecco, in questo componimento di Zanzotto percepiamo lo scarto tra il tempo umano, quello di Nino, e il tempo naturale, quello del suo podere, dove la vita si rinnova di continuo, dove gli esseri vegetali rispondono a leggi proprie, rinnovando la propria esistenza dall'uomo appena addomesticata ("docile e qua e là riluttante assai", Zanzotto 1999, 809). Una temporalità che, almeno per la percezione umana, sfiora l'eternità (Ibid.):

feudo di Nino
– ti mantieni
con la tua stessa immensità
con la tua stessa intensità
per tante valli e dossi posati qui in te
da chissà quante e quali eternità.

E anche lo spazio, a ben vedere, è uno spazio che trascende le possibilità percettive dell'io lirico, "i buffi dei tuoi rovi / che sono i fior-fiori dell'invernale universo" (Ibid.), evocando una dimensione dai limiti rarefatti, evanescenti e sterminati che si perdono nell'infinità cosmica. E il disegno di Giosetta Fioroni rappresenta questa vitalità eterna in una statica orizzontalità: da un nero impenetrabile emerge la terra senza orizzonte, dove la natura è reificata in un solo albero, sul quale si apre un cielo immenso solcato dagli uccelli. La composizione dell'immagine rimanda a una temporalità statica, una eternità

7 La riflessione di Uexküll è inoltre un nodo essenziale nell'analisi di Scaffai sul rapporto tra letteratura ed ecologia, in Scaffai 2017.

irraggiungibile, e difatti priva di esseri umani, che limiterebbero col proprio *principio individuationis* l'atemporalità dell'immagine. Il risultato finale, nel rapporto tra testo e immagine, è un clima di oscura contemplazione priva di connotazione antropica.

Ma in *Attraverso l'evento* anche gli esseri umani, o almeno loro apparenti raffigurazioni, come simulacri antropomorfi, emergono nei contrappunti figurativi dei testi poetici.

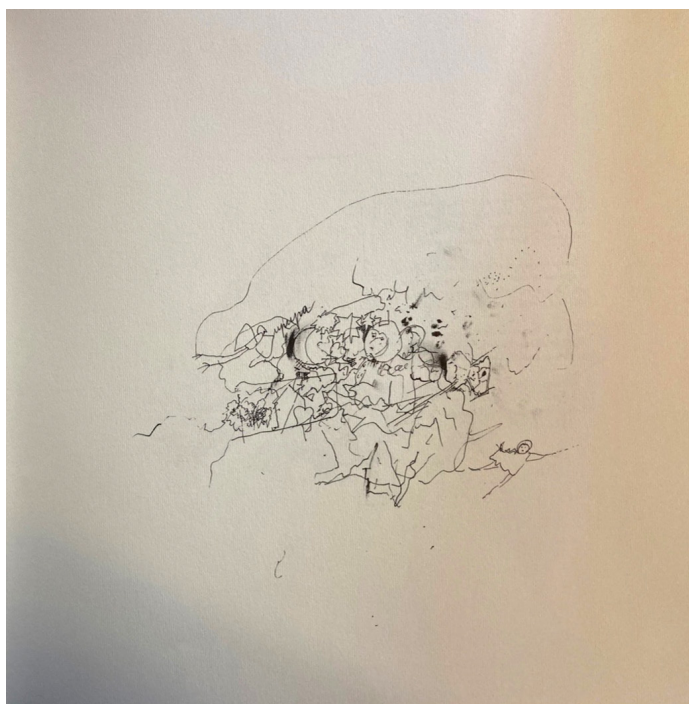


Figura 7. Fioroni, Giosetta, e Zanzotto, Andrea. 1988. *Attraverso l'evento*. Milano: Eidos.
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In *Ipersonetto I*, nell'intricato groviglio del pennino, che sembra riprodurre "le ife e i fili / di nervi spenti", (Zanzotto 1999, 594) emerge al centro un volto umano, mentre in basso a sinistra un'infantile figura di bambino sospesa, in volo. Vediamo anche un cuore stilizzato, figura ricorrente nel libro e in tutta la produzione di Giosetta Fioroni, e la scritta "upupa", al contempo didascalica al vicino essere volante, verso onomatopeico e nomenclatura fornita dall'uomo al mondo animale. A ben vedere, questa rappresentazione umana

è una rappresentazione giocosa, ironica, apparentemente infantile, in una deformazione magica che si situa in continuità con la produzione nata dalla riscoperta di una vecchia edizione delle fiabe dei fratelli Grimm (Celant 2009).

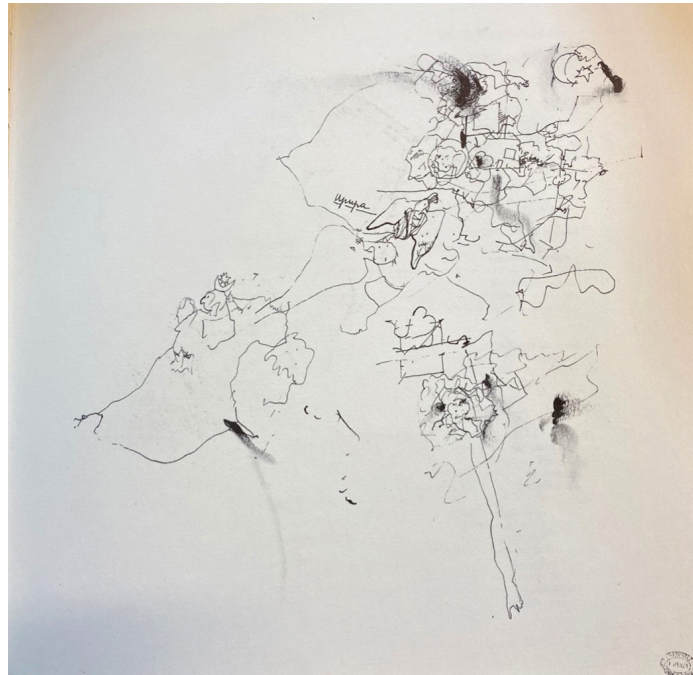


Figura 8. Fioroni, Giosetta, e Zanzotto, Andrea. 1988. *Attraverso l'evento*. Milano: Eidos.
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Simili riflessioni possono essere avanzate per il testo *Subnarcosi*, dove il groviglio di fili neri abbraccia figure simili a bambini, esseri di favole e leggende popolari, con in testa una luna e una stella, simboli della notte foriera di sogni, incubi e oniriche apparizioni. E a queste si annodano cuori, figure antropomorfe e, al centro, un uccello, a rappresentare il motore stesso del componimento: “Uccelli / crudo infinito cinguettio / su un albero invernale” (Zanzotto 1999, 391), udito in uno stato, come afferma il titolo, di subnarcosi, in quello stato, cioè, di veglia che appena precede il sonno. Si tratta, però, di un immaginario “nemmeno infantile ma / adulto occulto nella sua minimità” (Ibid.), cioè percezioni di versi animali che nella situazione di ridotta narcosi creano un mondo di misteri e apparizioni. L'afflato magico delle rappresentazioni di Giosetta Fioroni appare anche nella raffigurazione

della poesia in dialetto *Onde éla la Urora e i buzholà*, che rievoca la figura di Aurora, la donna che vendeva dolciumi ai bambini del paese.



Figura 9. Fioroni, Giosetta, e Zanzotto, Andrea. 1988. *Attraverso l'evento*. Milano: Eidos. Su concessione del Ministero della Cultura – Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze. È vietata ogni ulteriore riproduzione con qualsiasi mezzo

Qui le figure vagamente umane – una all'interno della casa, un volto in un groviglio di fili sfumati in una nube azzurra, una seconda che pare galleggiare con un'ampia veste nell'aria al di sotto della luna, e una terza che ascende a essa, fino a toccare il blu della notte in cui è immerso l'alone diafano – evocano un rapporto dell'uomo con il paesaggio naturale fondato su sogni e misteri.

Attraverso l'evento è un progetto dalle molte sfaccettature, un'indagine multimediale sul rapporto tra uomo e natura, e sulle potenzialità e i limiti degli strumenti umani, cioè della grammatica linguistica e della grammatica visiva, usati per investigare e rappresentare il paesaggio. La rappresentazione del componimento *Attraverso l'evento*, ad esempio, in una sorta di grande abbecedario, in una tassonomia di numeri, alfabeti, simboli, segni, risemantizza la poesia stessa trasformandola in una esplorazione all'interno

delle percezioni umane della natura e dei modi umani di appropriarsi della natura, rappresentandola.

Dopo questa lettura del testo di Giosetta Fioroni e Andrea Zanzotto, possiamo chiederci: tra le ironie, le scomposizioni, tra i “mille ghirigori della fantasia che possono presentarsi ai rigiri di questa ricerca” (Zanzotto 2013, 37), nell’interazione che si innesca tra le parole e le immagini, quale rappresentazione emerge del paesaggio veneto, e in particolare della campagna attorno al Piave e al colle Montello? Il paesaggio che emerge dal libro *Attraverso l’evento* vede prevalere l’elemento naturale, la cui pullulante vitalità supera i confini percettivi umani o rimane in una dimensione di misteriosa incomprendibilità, trasportandoci in un ambiente, per usare la terminologia di Uexküll, che risponde a una temporalità propria, che ai nostri occhi prende il nome di eternità. Ma “il paesaggio non è un fenomeno oggettivo, misurabile ed esistente di per sé, bensì qualcosa che nasce in virtù dell’azione dell’uomo e che da questi dipende” (Jakob 2005, 9). Questa vitalità pullulante della natura, infatti, appare qui come un paesaggio della memoria, dove non solo l’uomo esplora la natura, ma in questa riscopre la sua natura onirica e magica, dove le memorie individuali sbiadiscono, sfumano in memorie collettive, archetipiche: sono memorie di fiabe antiche, di esseri fantastici, di creature magiche che popolano i boschi della nostra fantasia, di sogni notturni, come il cielo scuro che domina tutte le opere. E proprio quest’ultimo aspetto deriva dalla penna e dai colori di Giosetta Fioroni. Ripercorrendo il suo itinerario artistico, non possiamo non notare la grande produzione stimolata dalla lettura di *Morfologia della fiaba* (1928) di Propp e *La struttura della fiaba* (1976) di Meletinskij, che ha portato sia “ad una lunga serie di acquarelli dedicati ai luoghi deputati della Fiaba di Magia” (Boatto 1990, 21), sia al ripopolamento grafico dei boschi veneti di creature magiche e fiabesche, attestati nel catalogo della mostra *Giosetta Fioroni: Fiaba di magia: opere 1962-1972* e il volume *Ozio* (1989), scritto da Goffredo Parise e illustrato da Giosetta Fioroni. Come ben racconta l’artista in una “giustificazione” che chiude il libro (Parise e Fioroni 1989, 26):

Nella casa vicino al Piave, tra Ponte e Salgareda, Goffredo ed io abbiamo passato tra i giorni più felici della nostra vita. Il racconto *Ozio* è autobiografico e si riferisce a questo luogo. Un uomo lunatico passa il suo tempo senza fare niente; ma da quel far niente nasce per il lettore un sentimento bellissimo di vita interiore e fantastica. Vicino alla casa dove abitava Goffredo, viveva un contadino quasi centenario di nome Vittorio. Costruiva oggetti con vecchi pezzi di legno: scale, scalette, trespoli, attaccapanni, rudimentali e molto belli. Lavorando

farfugliava di eventi che si riferivano alla campagna circostante. A «esseri», o animalotti, o apparizioni. Vaghe storie incomprensibili di minacce, dispetti, accadimenti lillipuziani, intrecciati al tempo, al maltempo, alle stagioni, con misteriose ricorrenze lunare.

Così si parlava molto di Elfi, di Gnomi e di Salbanelli e Salbani – una setta di spiritelli locali inventata da Goffredo, con possibilità magiche di ogni tipo. Sedurre le ragazze, volare, regalare, rubare, cucire... E soprattutto ridere, prendere un po' in giro tutti.

Seguendo tali piste biografiche, scopriamo che la rappresentazione grafica di *Ecloga IX Scolastica* di Zanzotto originariamente si intitolava *Baba volante* (1972), che il disegno di *Profezie o memorie o giornali murali* è parte di un acquarello del 1971 intitolato *Limbus del Piave*, che la *Femene che la lava* è in realtà un Baba di Busco del 1972, e che la raffigurazione di Aurora, la donna che vendeva dolci ai bambini finendo vittima dei loro scherzi, era in realtà parte di un acquerello intitolato *Coboldo soffione*.⁸ Una sorta di mitologia fiabesca che popola i boschi della vita dell'artista, della nostra vita. Come ha ben scritto Giorgio Agamben in un catalogo di opere di Giosetta Fioroni proprio dedicato alle fiabe (Agamben 1979, 15):

la figuralità del mondo della fiaba è funzione del suo tenore di inespresso: le creature della fiaba sono non mistero, ma figure dell'indicibile, che non rimandano a un significato nascosto, ma "portano la figura" dell'infanzia dell'uomo.

Questi lavori, nati autonomamente all'interno di un preciso percorso artistico, e ispirati da esperienze biografiche dell'artista, una volta poste a fianco alle poesie di Zanzotto compongono un layout espressivo unico. Seguendo l'andamento naturale della lettura, infatti, in *Attraverso l'evento* le opere di Giosetta Fioroni sono disposte subito dopo ciascuna poesia di Zanzotto, divenendone una sorta di commento, di rilettura critica da parte dell'artista. Un vero e proprio iconotesto (si veda la tassonomia prodotta da Cometa 2005, 21-23) a posteriori, assemblato con materiale proveniente da autonomi percorsi letterari e artistici, ma che agli occhi del lettore, presentati in un unico volume, si riconfigurano, in una vicendevole risemantizzazione di prossimità. E proprio questo ordine di lettura (prima la poesia, poi il disegno) ci fa esperire una sorta di continua smaterializzazione dell'essere umano, che nel passaggio da ogni poesia ad ogni relativa immagine svanisce, lasciando il posto allo spazio naturale e alle creature oniriche e magiche che lo popolano. In questo modo, i disegni di Giosetta Fioroni e le poesie di Andrea Zanzotto (e la loro disposizione nel

⁸ Si vedono, ad esempio, in Celant 2009, 206-12.

prodotto libro) ricreano un paesaggio in cui la natura, padrona della vita umana, è popolata di sogni, memorie antiche come le leggende tramandate dai nonni, dove il tempo è un'eternità in cui possiamo ritornare a esperire la nostra infanzia, e dove assieme alle nostre radici è possibile riscoprire le facoltà stesse della nostra fantasia.

3. *Cuchi White e le geometrie della via Emilia*

Per addentrarsi nella produzione di Cuchi White è tutt'oggi fondamentale il volume a lei dedicato dall'archivio CSAC di Parma (White 1995, 78), dove sono riportate, oltre le opere contenute nell'archivio, notizie sugli studi pubblicati in cataloghi di mostre, scritti accademici e quotidiani. Nata a Cleveland nel 1930 e formatasi presso la Photo League, in un contesto di fotografia sociale che aveva come oggetto privilegiato di indagine le strade di New York, Cuchi White ha trascorso molto tempo in Europa, sviluppando il proprio personale percorso tra Francia e Italia. Entrata in contatto con Luigi Ghirri, instaurando con lui “un rapporto di amicizia e collaborazione, [...] uno scambio fra intellettuali che operano in ambiti affini” (Quintavalle 1993, 46), ha preso parte ai progetti collettivi *Viaggio in Italia* ed *Esplorazioni lungo la via Emilia*, nonché al confronto *Caserta Versailles: Luigi Ghirri, Cuchi White*, che compara non solo due delle regge più grandi e importanti d'Europa, ma anche due diversi modi di osservare la realtà. Come dimostrano i quattro scatti racchiusi nella minima ed esemplare raccolta, di fronte all'immensità incontenibile dello spazio, i due fotografi hanno assunto atteggiamenti profondamente diversi. Ghirri “per riportare l'ambiente a misura umana ha usato soprattutto il colore: toni tenui sbiancati, quasi acquarellati che accentuano il senso di riflessione intima e privata così in contrasto con la pompa dei luoghi” (come scrive Palazzoli in Ghirri e White 1990⁹). Ma non solo non ha disumanizzato l'ambiente, ma anzi ha accolto nelle sue inquadrature “i turisti, i nuovi abitanti della corte del Re Sole, come protagonisti contemporanei adeguati a questo scenario” (Ibid.). Ghirri crea delle immagini attese: sospese in un costante presente e modellate sulla percezione comune e diffusa di quello spazio. Per questo le immagini della reggia raffigurano i turisti: non solo perché essi sono i nuovi abitanti di quegli spazi, ma perché la percezione stessa dello spa-

9 Il testo Ghirri e White 1990 si compone di cartelle non rilegate con 2 pagine di testo e 4 fotografie. La riflessione di Palazzoli non presenta numero di pagine.

zio è mediato da loro e dalla loro esperienza del luogo. Diversamente da Ghirri, dal quale potrebbe aver ricevuto nuove prospettive “sull’ombra e sulle cornici, sull’inganno della foto e sulla ambiguità delle immagini riprodotte” (Quintavalle 1993, 46) Cuchi White cerca di (come scrive Palazzoli in Ghirri e White 1990)

non uscire mai dalla finzione scenica, dal gioco di illusioni e di meraviglie che questi palazzi e giardini cercavano di creare in un contesto alternativo all’esistenza, così grande da dare l’illusione che potesse non finire mai, che fosse non un temporaneo esercizio di prestigio dell’immaginazione, ma una nuova forma di realtà.

Anche quella di Cuchi White è una ricerca sulle percezioni, ma non tanto sulla percezione sociale dei luoghi, quanto sulla percezione ottica, biologica dell’essere umano. Le due immagini riportate nella raccolta *Caserta Versailles* ci conducono in un’ esplorazione di spazi che è al contempo un’ esplorazione delle nostre capacità di vedere gli spazi. La volta a botte della prima fotografia della raccolta, oltre a raccontarci una monumentalità diruta, prima ammalia i nostri occhi con il sole che penetra dalla frattura nella pietra in alto, e dopo li attrae in un percorso sinuoso il cui esito rimane frustrato dall’imponderabilità del buio che ne tinge il fondale. La seconda immagine, anch’essa con un forte contrasto tra il sole diretto che illumina parti della statua e ombre scure proiettate dalla vegetazione, ci pone innanzi un’illusione che riusciamo a sciogliere solo con attenta osservazione: ci troviamo di fronte a una sola statua che si eleva dalla metà dell’immagine verso l’alto, mentre la metà che si trova in basso è solo il riflesso della stessa statua nello specchio d’acqua, e non un’altra statua o la sua prosecuzione. La statua è solo una, oppure sono due, come quelle che i nostri occhi percepiscono nitidamente? Se l’esperienza dei luoghi è forgiata dalle nostre percezioni, cosa avviene quando le percezioni ci fanno esperire un’illusione? Queste sono le domande che pone la ricerca di Cuchi White, la quale usa gli spazi delle regge come pretesti, come palcoscenici di una personale ricerca sulle possibilità e i limiti della percezione umana, in un continuo gioco di illusioni e sorprese. Un gioco che sta alla base dei lavori della fotografa sul *trompe l’œil*, che trova una sua formalizzazione nel libro *L’œil ébloui* (1981), dove fotografie di Cuchi White sono affiancate a poesie di Georges Perec, in modo tale che “the poetry appears as a kind of textual equivalent of the visual image” (James 2016, 868). Eppure, quello di Cuchi White, come percepibile anche dalle immagini della reggia di Versailles e Caserta, non è un asettico gioco di specchi e riflessi ma, come sottolinea lo stesso Perec nella prefazione del libro, una sfida alla percezione che porta su di sé l’usura del tempo (Perec 1981, senza pagina):

Ce n'est pas la première fois que la peinture oppose au temps ses simulacres d'éternité. Mais je crois que ce qui me touche et me trouble le plus dans les photographies de trompe-l'œil que Cuchi White nous donne à voir, c'est précisément le contraire: le retour du temps, l'usure, l'effacement, quelque chose comme la reprise en main, par le temps réel, par l'espace réel, de cette illusions péculaire qui se serait voulue impérissable.¹⁰

Le geometrie dell'illusione portano su di sé le cicatrici del tempo, che rivelano la dimensione culturale di queste lusinghe alla percezione. Elementi, questi, riscontrabili in alcune fotografie conservate presso lo CSAC (Centro Studi e Archivio della Comunicazione) di Parma.



Figura 10. Modena (dalla serie «Fondali» et fenêtres peintes – Backdrops and painted windows), 1980, 29,5x21 cm, stampa fotografica a colori Cibachrome © CSAC 2022

¹⁰ Per un'analisi del testo in cui si confrontano poesie di Perec e immagini di White si veda Cammarata 2016.

In questa prima immagine, ad esempio, scattata nel 1980 a Modena e parte della serie «Fondali» et fenêtres peintes, vediamo come l'erosione della parete dipinta, pur coerente con l'usura che logora le scale e le colonne che si levano al soffitto, rivela allo spettatore la natura artefatta del paesaggio dipinto sulla parete. Ciò è ancor più evidente in questa seconda immagine.



Figura II. Hotel Balestra, Sanremo (dalla serie «Fondali» et fenêtres peintes – Backdrops and painted windows), 1980, 29,7x21 cm © CSAC 2022

Qui, l'illusorietà del cortile che si apre al di là dell'arco è rivelata dal passaggio del tempo che è, soprattutto, passaggio dell'uomo: le scritte "Martinit for president", "morte ai bastardi rossi", "msi" e la svastica rossa in basso a destra creano un cortocircuito percettivo che rivela l'illusorietà del *trompe l'œil* mar-

chiandolo con connotazioni politiche lasciate da anonimi visitatori. Vale qui la pena ricordare le parole di Barthes (1980, 43):

In questo spazio quasi sempre unario, io sono talvolta attratto [...] da un 'particolare'. Io sento che la sua sola presenza modifica la mia lettura, che quella che sto guardando è una nuova foto, contrassegnata ai miei occhi da un valore superiore. Questo 'particolare' è il punctum (ciò che mi punge).

Ciò che punge, in quest'ultima foto di White, sono proprio quelle scritte: tracce che, una volta entrate nell'occhio dell'osservatore, modificano la lettura dell'intera immagine: non più la rappresentazione di un'illusione, ma il suo doloroso fallimento. La fotografia di Cuchi White rappresenta le illusioni perdute: quelle creazioni artistiche nate per illudere l'occhio umano ma delle quali il tempo ha rivelato, con il proprio passaggio, con le proprie tracce, con i propri sedimenti, la natura ingannevole e artificiale. La natura illusoria dell'arte è al contempo ricercata e tradita: ricercata nelle minute rappresentazioni inquadrature (un paesaggio bucolico, la tridimensionalità di un muro), ma tradita da tutti quei detriti che il tempo vi ha lasciato sopra. E forse proprio per questo le geometrie illusorie che White ci mostra ci ammaliano ancor di più, rivelandoci persistenze e precarietà del mistero della percezione.

Se c'è un'eredità delle sue prime esperienze di fotografia sociale maturate a New York, questa è da rintracciare nell'attenzione rivolta all'usura dei luoghi, al loro essere vissuti, alla silente accettazione dell'illusione ottica ormai inglobata in una quotidianità distratta, come nell'immagine bolognese, dove la vegetazione reale in primo piano rivela l'illusorietà di quella pitturata sul muro. Nelle foto di White si ha sempre la sensazione di essere arrivati dopo: dopo la perfetta efficacia dell'illusione, dopo il passaggio del tempo che ha eroso gli edifici. Mentre quella di Ghirri è una rappresentazione d'attesa, dove tutto è sempre in procinto di accadere, in Cuchi White tutto è già accaduto, e noi siamo arrivati troppo tardi. White fotografa una condizione sempre postuma. Per questo ho parlato, a proposito dei suoi scatti, di illusioni perdute: perché White fotografa la perdita delle illusioni, il momento in cui la vita è passata sopra l'arte, rivelandone la natura ingannevole. L'autrice ritrae la decadenza dei tentativi umani di appropriarsi dei luoghi attraverso l'arte. Le illusioni che ritrae sono illusioni nelle quali non possiamo più credere, arti che non possono più illuderci; eppure il loro continuo ammiccare al nostro occhio con miraggi di altri spazi, e la percezione del tempo che ne ha eroso la forza le rende ancora più misteriose, più ipnotiche.



Figura 12. Sassuolo (dalla serie «Fondali» et fenêtres peintes – Backdrops and painted windows), 1980, 29,5x21 cm, stampa fotografica a colori Cibachrome. ©CSAC 2022



Figura 13. Bologna, Università degli studi (dalla serie «Fondali» et fenêtres peintes – Backdrops and painted windows), 1980, 21x29,5 cm, stampa fotografica a colori Cibachrome. ©CSAC 2022

E l'usura di queste geometrie della percezione ritorna, riconoscibile, anche nel contributo della fotografa in *Esplorazione della via Emilia*. Tra gli sguardi di Ghirri, che rappresenta luoghi che abbiamo sempre avuto davanti pur non avendoli mai visti, e quelli di Manfred William, che dedica primi piani, come fossero reperti di un'indagine, alla terra e a grappoli d'uva, cioè il fondamento dell'attività antropica nella zona, Cuchi White propone la monumentalità dimessa delle statue nella campagna emiliana, nascoste da uno strato di cellophane e nastro adesivo, dove la maestosa opulenza della statuaria classicheggiante lascia il posto alla vulnerabilità della pietra, e dove il biancore abbacinante della neve che ricopre il pavimento rende ancora più evidente l'epidermide grigia, giallognola e sporca dei marmi raschiati dal tempo (Bizzarri e Bronzoni 1986, 34 e 36). Ma ci propone anche uno dei suoi *trompe l'œil*, dove le architetture, gli stemmi nobiliari, le profondità dipinte sulla parete piana di una casa sporcata dal declino celano e al tempo disvelano l'enigma della percezione (Ibid.: 93). Introducendo il volume *Vedute di paesaggio*, il primo che compone *Esplorazione della via Emilia*, Luigi Ghirri parla della necessità di "riuscire contemporaneamente a meravigliarsi, o a restare stupiti come se fosse la prima volta che guardiamo questo territorio stracolmo di storie, segni e memorie" (Ghirri 1986, xi). La fotografa americana si colloca proprio qui: tra la ricerca di prospettive geometriche, allusive, e sorprendenti, e la stratificazione di memorie umane che su quelle geometriche si sono depositate.

La via Emilia di Cuchi White, dunque, è uno spazio di geometrie e illusioni costantemente alluse e nascoste all'occhio umano, che attraverso le cicatrici del tempo dischiudono l'ineffabile stratificazione di storie e di uomini che vi si sono succeduti. Anche la fotografa americana, come Giosetta Fioroni, si interroga e ci interroga sulle modalità di percezione dello spazio. Per Cuchi White, insomma, fotografare è vedere e far vedere come vediamo. Sembra quasi dirci che lo spazio è l'insieme della percezione istantanea, quella che ci fa scambiare una parete per una scena bucolica lontana, e il tempo è ciò che lentamente leviga gli spazi e li riempie di storie, mostrandoci la fallacità di ciò che credevamo di aver visto. La fotografia della sua via Emilia non solo è ontologicamente "insieme una pseudopresenza e l'indicazione di un'assenza" (Sontag 1978, 15), ma ne è anche raffigurazione plastica: la rappresentazione delle geometrie umane e del tempo che costantemente ne disvela l'illusorietà, caricandole di memorie, e conferendo loro una bellezza ipnotica, misteriosa ed enigmatica.

4. *Conclusioni*

Riprendendo una celebre domanda di Mitchell e declinandola al nostro percorso, potremmo chiederci: che cosa vogliono davvero le fotografie di Cuchi White e le immagini di Giosetta Fioroni? (Mitchell 2017, 107-124). Come tutte le immagini, “vogliono essere considerate come individualità complesse che occupano molteplici posizioni e identità” (Ibid.: 124). Certo. Ma più nello specifico, queste immagini vogliono suggerirci il loro modo di vedere e intendere lo spazio. L’analisi dei lavori di Giosetta Fioroni e di Cuchi White, comparati con poesie di Andrea Zanzotto e fotografie che hanno partecipato al progetto curato da Ghirri, ha portato a definire le personali rielaborazioni della campagna veneta e dell’Emilia. L’artista romana, cancellando memorie individuali, biografiche e personali, ha ricreato una campagna popolata di magiche memorie ancestrali, dove appare una natura abitata non dall’uomo, ma dalla sua facoltà immaginativa. La fotografa americana, invece, mostra una via Emilia dove le seduzioni geometriche per l’occhio sono costantemente alluse e deluse, dove tra i veri protagonisti vi è il tempo, che con la sua incessante opera di erosione mostra tutte le illusioni della rappresentazione umana. Questa indagine, dunque, non solo ha permesso di addentrarci nell’opera delle singole artiste, ma ci ha mostrato anche come il loro sguardo ha saputo vedere e ricodificare due luoghi reali, mostrandoceli attraverso nuove prospettive. Le loro opere rientrano in un caso particolare di “usi sociali delle immagini” (Pinotti e Sommaini 2016, 221-266): non sono una documentazione di paesaggi reali, ma una loro riscoperta attraverso sensibilità personali. Le immagini strappano il velo di quotidianità attraverso cui osserviamo questi spazi, mostrandoceli sotto nuove forme e donando loro un nuovo significato.

Nonostante le differenze di mezzi e di occasioni, tra i lavori delle due artiste c’è un punto di contatto. Per entrambe, infatti, la rappresentazione di luoghi definiti non può essere separata dalla riflessione sui mezzi umani per percepire e raccontare lo spazio. Ogni indagine sullo spazio, insomma, è al contempo un’indagine sulle nostre facoltà, e sui nostri limiti, di vivere lo spazio stesso. Per Giosetta Fioroni lo spazio è un luogo reale, che interagisce fatalmente con le nostre memorie profonde, con le nostre facoltà immaginative, quasi che non vi possa essere uno spazio reale che non sia, in qualche modo, anche uno spazio immaginato. Lo spazio, suggeriscono i suoi disegni, è il labile confine dove realtà naturale e immaginazione umana si incontrano. Anche per Cuchi White

ogni fotografia è un confine: lo sfumato limite tra lo spazio piano o plastico dell'arte, e il suo lento danneggiamento e disvelamento da parte del tempo. L'arte, dunque, non come documentazione del reale, ma come sua riconfigurazione, come sua in qualche modo, invenzione. Anzi, di più. Cuchi White utilizza una pratica artistica (la fotografia) per mostrare l'illusorietà dell'arte, in enunciato meta-artistico. Se, come scrive Nelson Goodman, l'arte denota la realtà che vuole rappresentare, e nell'arte "la denotazione è il nocciolo della rappresentazione" (2013, 13), allora la fotografia di Cuchi White indaga proprio i limiti e le possibilità denotative dell'arte stessa: si muove nello sfumato confine delle rappresentazioni simboliche che sta tra arte e realtà.

Dopo aver analizzato i lavori di queste due artiste, viene da chiedersi quali siano i successivi passi da compiere. A questo proposito, penso che la conclusione di questo lavoro possa rappresentare il preludio per un successivo sviluppo, che consisterebbe nell'analizzare le opere di altre artiste del secondo Novecento, delineando così una mappatura di luoghi della penisola attraverso immagini e fotografie che sia anche una riflessione sulle modalità e possibilità di percepire, vivere e raccontare lo spazio. Una sorta di geografia artistica della penisola che, tra le diverse peculiarità artistiche, possa farci riscoprire la realtà che abitiamo, dando centralità alle pratiche che hanno permesso di ridefinire gli spazi della penisola.

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Due umili verghiani. Strategie della soggettivazione
in *Rosso Malpelo* e *Jeli il pastore*

Abstract

In their theory, the naturalists excluded the possibility of representing inner lives of the characters of the Fourth Estate. However, narrative practice reveals a different scenario. In the two analyzed short stories of Giovanni Verga, *Rosso Malpelo* and *Jeli il pastore*, it is shown that, in the case of the two protagonists, Verga resorts to elegiac forms to delineate their primitive and ferocious psychology.

1. *La sociologia dei Goncourt*

Nella nota prefazione-manifesto a *Les frères Zemganno* (1879), Edmond de Goncourt sviluppa delle cruciali riflessioni sul romanzo e sull'arte. Discutendo dell'*Assommoir* e di *Germinie Lacerteux*, da lui definiti dei "brillants combats d'avant-garde", lo scrittore afferma che la meta ultima del "Réalisme" non è descrivere "ce qui est bas, ce qui est répugnant, ce qui pue" (1879, VII).¹ Per Edmond de Goncourt, la riproduzione fedele dei caratteri e delle ambientazioni del Quarto Stato costituisce solo una fase transitoria, il primo passo necessario verso una meta più ambiziosa e lontana: le basse sfere si sono dimostrate un buon laboratorio per temprare la scienza dei documenti umani, ma il vero obiettivo del Realismo è la rappresentazione di "ce qui est élevé, ce qui est joli, ce qui sent bon" (Ibid.: VIII). Nondimeno, l'applicazione dell'"analyse cruelle" di marca zoliana alle alte sfere della società presenta dei problemi difficilmente aggirabili per l'autore:

1 Per una lettura critica di questa prefazione cfr. Ashley 2002, 87-106.

Nous avons commencé, nous, par la canaille, parce que la femme et l'homme du peuple, plus rapprochés de la nature et de la sauvagerie, sont des créatures simples et peu compliquées, tandis que le parisien et la parisienne de la société, ces civilisés excessifs, dont l'originalité tranchée est faite toute de nuances, toute de demi-teintes, toute de ces riens insaisissables, pareils aux riens coquets et neutres avec lesquels se façonne le caractère d'une toilette distinguée de femme, demandent des années pour qu'on les perce, pour qu'on les sache, pour qu'on les *attrape* — et le romancier du plus grand génie, croyez-le bien, ne les devinera jamais ces gens de salon, avec les *racontars* d'amis qui vont pour lui à la découverte dans le monde (Ibid.: IX).

È qui delineata una bipartizione di ordine sociologico nei criteri della rappresentazione dei personaggi in relazione alla loro condizione sociale: uno per la “canaille”, più facile da osservare e dipingere; un altro per le classi alte, impene-trabili e dedite alla dissimulazione, i cui caratteri specifici “ne peuvent se rendre qu'au moyen d'immenses emmagasine-ments d'observations, d'innombrables notes prises à coups de lorgnon, de l'amas-sement d'une collection de *documents humains*” (Ibid.: X). Insomma, se l'“intérieur d'un ouvrier” può essere colto repentinamente con lo sguardo del semplice “observateur” (Ibid.), per la riproduzione fedele di un “salon parisien” (Ibid.) la questione è sensibilmente diversa: lo scrittore dovrà addestrare e acuire lo sguardo, adeguarlo a tipi e ambienti in sommo grado complessi, e accumulare, nel tempo, un numero di rilievi, dati e testimonianze, sufficiente a dar conto di tale complessità

2. Il metodo dell'“osservazione”

La volontà di rifarsi al principio dell'“osservazione obiettiva” è un punto nodale della teoresi di Verga: è più volte ribadito, nei suoi manifesti di poetica, che il compito dello scrittore naturalista è di informarsi e documentarsi scrupolosamente sui luoghi, i costumi e il tipo di umanità che intende ritrarre; di descriverli, “spingendo l'impersonalità al punto di mostrare tutto soltanto dall'esterno”, come se a registrare l'azione fosse una cinepresa che non può leggere nelle menti” (Maffei 2018, 355). Si pensi alla lettera dedicatoria a Salvatore Farina anteposta all'*Amante di Gramigna* (1880): “tu veramente preferirai di trovarti faccia a faccia col fatto nudo e schietto, senza stare a cercarlo fra le linee del libro, attraverso la lente dello scrittore” (Verga 1979, 202). L'autore intende rappresentare le azioni e i comportamenti dei personaggi senza alcun

commento: si tratta di un ideale per così dire 'behaviorista' (*ante litteram*). A differenza di De Roberto, che riteneva l' "analisi psicologica" uno strumento legittimo del Realismo, un metodo del tutto alternativo all' "osservazione", per Verga il romanziere non è abilitato ad insinuarsi nella psiche dei personaggi, in quanto deve limitarsi alle manifestazioni sensibili della loro psicologia: "Per me un pensiero può essere scritto, in tanto in quanto può essere descritto, cioè in tanto in quanto giunge a un atto, a una parola esterna: esso deve essere esterno" (Ojetti 1895, 66).

Si comprende dunque perché Verga ritenesse congeniale la prefazione a *Les frères Zemganno*: anche se l'autore non deprezzò mai i suoi esperimenti siciliani – e non considerò un ripiego la rappresentazione degli umili – le analogie tra questa prefazione e quella ai *Malavoglia* sono numerose, a partire dalla teorizzazione della necessità dell'adeguamento del mezzo espressivo al variare delle classi sociali (un assunto cruciale per il naturalismo italiano).² La persuasione di una maggiore semplicità mimetica del personaggio popolare era infatti comune a entrambi gli scrittori. Un personaggio la cui soggettività può essere dipinta efficacemente con colori semplici, e per mezzo di una psicologia *in actu*: nella teoresi dei veristi, le anime degli umili sembrano prestarsi elettivamente, per la loro elementarità e mancanza di raffinatezze, all'osservazione in vitro, dall'"esterno", comportamentista.

In realtà, nella pratica narrativa, i veristi, trattando questi caratteri, non si limitarono a riportare sulla pagina le loro azioni, gesti e parole, né si preclusero la via dell'introspezione: in diversi casi, gli autori ci danno modo di abitare una soggettività del basso ceto, di percorrerla con agio, spingendosi per introspezione tra le pieghe del suo pensiero; e a tali personaggi è attribuito un vissuto, un'"anima", con cui il lettore può simpatizzare.

I due racconti qui analizzati – *Rosso Malpelo* e *Jeli il pastore* – sono esempi emblematici di tale fenomenologia, oltre che fecondi casi di analisi: si tratta di testi tematicamente affini, perché incentrati su un solo protagonista, precisamente un orfano, di cui si mostrano reazioni, sentimenti e ragionamenti nel suo scontro con la società. Racconti in cui sono adoperate molte delle tecniche con cui i veristi riprodussero la vita psichica degli umili, e attraverso le quali essi conferirono loro dignità e rilievo.

2 Cfr. Pellini 2010, 128-135.

3. *Rosso Malpelo*

Uscito per la prima volta, a puntate, sul «Fanfulla», nei giorni 2-3-4-5 agosto 1878, *Rosso Malpelo* è stato il primo dei racconti poi riuniti in *Vita dei campi* (1880) a essere pubblicato dall'autore,³ sulla cui interpretazione si pronunciò lo stesso Verga, in una lettera indirizzata al critico musicale Filippo Filippi, che aveva recensito *Vita dei campi* sulla «Perseveranza di Milano» il 2 ottobre 1880; uno scambio di battute su cui vale la pena soffermarsi.

Restringendo il *focus* su *Rosso Malpelo*, il critico aveva notato una contraddizione fra l'impegno dell'autore a rendere cattivo e “antipatico” il protagonista e l'idea che il fruitore si fa del personaggio durante la lettura, vale a dire l'impressione che Rosso sia “un martire del lavoro, del dovere, un eroe dell'abnegazione e dell'affetto filiale”.

Nella sua risposta, Verga invita il recensore a una maggiore sottigliezza analitica, alla distinzione preliminare tra la voce narrante e l'autore, fondamentale per la comprensione dello spessore problematico del testo:

Il mio studio, in questo come in altri bozzetti simili, è di fare eclissare al possibile lo scrittore, di sostituire la rappresentazione all'osservazione, mettere per quanto si può l'autore fuori dal campo d'azione, sicché il disegno acquisti tutto il rilievo e l'effetto da dar completa l'illusione della realtà, e questo modo parmi racchiuda il nodo di molte cose buone che sono nel detto realismo, l'osservazione diretta, la sincerità della rappresentazione. A questo proposito ti dirò che tutti quei passati imperfetti che mi critichi, sono voluti, sono il risultato del mio modo di vedere per rendere completa l'illusione della realtà dell'opera d'arte, della non partecipazione, direi, dell'autore (1977, 7-8).

Rosso Malpelo è una manifestazione esemplare della fenomenologia dell'“osservazione”, e l'uso estensivo dell'imperfetto, fieramente rivendicato, ne è solo un corollario: l'autore si è limitato a ritrarre oggettivamente la realtà in cui vive il

3 L'opera uscì per una seconda volta a Roma nel febbraio 1880 col titolo *Scene popolari – Rosso Malpelo* nella «Biblioteca dell'Artigiano», edita dalla Lega italiana del “Patto di Fratellanza”. In seguito, *Rosso Malpelo* fu pubblicato, in una terza stesura, nel volume *Vita dei campi* (Milano, Treves, 1880), e infine, in una quarta, nella edizione illustrata di *Vita dei campi* del 1897. Tuttavia, nel 1989 Rossana Melis ha dimostrato che la pubblicazione nella «Biblioteca dell'artigiano» avvenne all'insaputa dell'autore, e che si trattò quindi di un'edizione abusiva (1989, 433-446). Per la storia interna del testo e una critica puntuale delle varianti cfr. Luperini 1976.

giovane minatore. Pertanto, la contraddizione individuata da Filippi non sussiste per Verga: dal momento che chi narra non è *compartecipe* emotivamente con la vicenda, la “simpatia” del lettore per Rosso risulterà all’inverso più autentica, perché non imposta coercitivamente dall’orizzonte prospettico e valoriale dello scrittore:

Rosso Malpelo ti sembra un martire del lavoro e del dovere? Un eroe dell’abnegazione e dell’affetto filiale? Bravo! Questo era lo scopo che mi proponevo, e se ti dai la pena di pensarci su un pochino anche tu, vedrai che questo effetto è tanto più sicuro quanto meno sei messo in guardia, quanto meno diffidi dell’interesse che io che racconto avrei potuto mostrare pel mio protagonista, quanto più la tua simpatia è tua, lasciami la frase, senza esser passata sotto la commozione sottintesa dello scrittore (Ibid.: 8).

L’interpretazione ideologica di Filippi è avallata da Verga: lo scrittore si allinea con il suo recensore.

Ora, che Rosso non sia solo un “martire del lavoro” è evidente: per quanto l’affiorare del sottofondo economico, con le chiare accuse agli sfruttatori, all’ingegnere e al padrone della miniera sia un tema portante (in coerenza con la parallela collaborazione alla «Rassegna settimanale»),⁴ nel racconto si intrecciano diversi livelli di significato.⁵ Piuttosto, interessa rilevare la discrepanza tra l’intenzione esplicitata da Verga e la realizzazione estetica nel suo concreto. Perché non è affatto vero che lo scrittore si limita alla riproduzione oggettiva. Da un lato, il lettore è avvertito fin dall’incipit che l’ottica da cui sono raccontati i fatti non è neutrale, ma ostile e risentita: “Malpelo si chiamava così perché aveva i capelli rossi; ed aveva i capelli rossi perché era un ragazzo malizioso e cattivo, che prometteva di riescire un fior di birbone” (Verga 1987, 50)⁶; d’altra parte, nonostante l’implicito assunto “behaviorista”, il mondo interiore e la *soggettività* di Rosso affiorano gra-

4 Del resto, le pagine sullo sfruttamento dei carusi nelle miniere di zolfo documentato e denunciato con sdegno da Sidney Sonnino sono notoriamente la fonte principale di *Rosso Malpelo*.

5 Per un efficace riassunto cfr. Luperini 2019, 84-93.

6 Come ha scritto Baldi, si materializza un conflitto “tra il punto di vista anonimo di un narratore [...] dello stesso livello mentale e sociale dei personaggi”, e il dispiegamento della vicenda nella sua concretezza: una storia di “violenza e sopraffazione ai danni di un emarginato” (1973, 507-508). Similmente, Spinazzola osserva come il racconto sia costruito su “un procedimento antifrastico, basato sulla accettazione esteriore del giudizio che la collettività porta su Rosso” (1972, 7).

dualmente, isolandosi dal coro di visioni e percezioni. Un coefficiente tutt'altro che marginale per l'ingenerarsi della "simpatia" nel lettore.

La svolta si registra con la morte del padre del protagonista. A causa del lutto, vissuto come un oscuro flagello contro il quale bisogna sfogarsi cupamente, la malignità della vita è introiettata dalla coscienza di Malpelo, che diviene a sua volta carnefice:

Rosso Malpelo ti sembra un martire del lavoro e del dovere? Un eroe dell'abnegazione e dell'affetto filiale? Bravo! Questo era lo scopo che mi proponevo, e se ti dai la pena di pensarci su un pochino anche tu, vedrai che questo effetto è tanto più sicuro quanto meno sei messo in guardia, quanto meno diffidi dell'interesse che io che racconto avrei potuto mostrare pel mio protagonista, quanto più la tua simpatia è tua, lasciami la frase, senza esser passata sotto la commozione sottintesa dello scrittore (1987, 58).

Il personaggio è osservato dall'"esterno", e i suoi dialoghi sono registrati in presa diretta. Ma si tratta di dialoghi dalla funzione monologica, con i quali il personaggio verbalizza la sua visione del mondo a un interlocutore muto, che ricopre un mero ruolo strutturale. Identificandosi nella parte che gli altri gli hanno imposto, quella del diverso, dell'escluso, del capro espiatorio, Malpelo ne assume anche la logica utilitaristica e violenta, teorizzata in una lucida e disperata visione materialistica del mondo.⁷

Sono altresì rilevanti, nel testo, zone in cui il narratore accede alla sfera psichica *stricto sensu* del personaggio:

Certamente egli avrebbe preferito di fare il manovale, come Ranocchio, e lavorare cantando sui ponti, in alto, in mezzo all'azzurro del cielo, col sole sulla schiena, – o il carrettiere, come compare Gaspare che veniva a prendersi la rena della cava, dondolandosi sonnacchioso sulle stanghe, colla pipa in bocca, e andava tutto il giorno per le belle strade di campagna; – o meglio

⁷ La critica ha messo l'accento sull'indole speculativa di Rosso. Luperini ha visto nel protagonista un interprete lucido della "filosofia progressista, atea e materialistica" di Verga (2019, 89); e Baldi ha sostenuto che il personaggio "non agisce mai immediatamente e spontaneamente" ma piuttosto in seguito a "una conquista intellettuale": "le sue azioni malvagie sono infatti assolutamente gratuite, svincolate da ogni immediato fine utilitario, e paiono obbedire unicamente ad una volontà dimostrativa, all'intento 'scientifico' di verificare nella pratica le teorie elaborate" (1973, 524). Ha recentemente insistito sull'influsso del pensiero leopardiano in *Rosso Malpelo* Manuele Marinoni (2022, 348-361). Sulla logica, la filosofia e il linguaggio di Rosso è infine sempre fondamentale lo saggio di Asor Rosa (1973, 63-81).

ancora avrebbe voluto fare il contadino, che passa la vita fra i campi, in mezzo al verde, sotto i folti carrubbi, e il mare turchino là in fondo, e il canto degli uccelli sulla testa. Ma quello era stato il mestiere di suo padre, e in quel mestiere era nato lui. E pensando a tutto ciò, indicava a Ranocchio il pilastro che era caduto addosso al genitore (1987, 181. Il corsivo è mio).

Il narratore riproduce indirettamente i pensieri – e i desideri – di Rosso, conferendogli una tonalità elegiaca, come un sentire poetico. Ma l'abbandono è soffocato sul nascere, in quanto subentra la persuasione dell'immutabilità del destino (in corsivo), che induce Rosso a seguire fatalisticamente le orme del padre.

Non si tratta di un caso isolato. Ancorché contaminati con l'affiorare di una voce allotria e tendenziosa, compaiono nel racconto altri momenti di tenerezza:

Malpelo se li lisciava sulle gambe, quei calzoni di fustagno quasi nuovi, gli pareva che fossero dolci e lisci come le mani del babbo che solevano accarezzargli i capelli, così ruvidi e callosi com'erano. Quelle scarpe le teneva appese a un chiodo, sul saccone, quasi fossero state le pantofole del papa, e la domenica se le pigliava in mano, le lustrava e se le provava; poi le metteva per terra, l'una accanto all'altra, e stava a contemplarsele coi gomiti sui ginocchi, e il mento nelle palme per delle ore intere, rimuginando chi sa quali idee in quel cervellaccio. (Ibid.: 183. Il corsivo è mio).

Malpelo accarezza nostalgicamente i calzoni che erano stati di Mastro Misciu (tolti al cadavere dopo il suo ritrovamento nella miniera): sono rievocate le uniche manifestazioni d'affetto provate dall'orfano ("gli pareva che fossero dolci e lisci come le mani del babbo"). Ma la voce narrante si insinua nelle maglie del testo (in corsivo), mistificando il momento di sincero abbandono di Rosso.

Anche emblematica è la pagina in cui Malpelo ammira il cielo stellato durante le notti d'estate:

Pure, durante le belle notti d'estate, le stelle splendevano lucenti anche sulla sciara, e la campagna circostante era nera anch'essa, come la sciara, ma Malpelo stanco della lunga giornata di lavoro, si sdraiava sul sacco, col viso verso il cielo, a godersi quella quiete e quella luminaria dell'alto; perciò odiava le notti di luna, in cui il mare formicola di scintille, e la campagna si disegna qua e là vagamente – allora la sciara sembra più brulla e desolata. – Per noi che siamo fatti per vivere sotterra, pensava Malpelo, ci dovrebbe essere buio sempre e dappertutto. – La civetta strideva sulla sciara, e ramingava di qua e di là; ei pensava: – Anche la civetta sente i morti che son qua sotterra, e si dispera perché non può andare a trovarli (Ibid.: 185).

Nessun riscatto lirico è concesso al protagonista: “il cielo non esercita su di lui nessun influsso benefico”, in quanto “rimane distante e inaccessibile” (Picone 2001, 561). A partire dall'avversativa “ma”, affiora gradualmente la soggettività del personaggio: la logica di Rosso, che preferisce le tenebre e odia la notte lunare, è contrapposta al pensiero comune (e del narratore)⁸. Ciò appare inequivocabile se si presta attenzione ai suoi pensieri verbalizzati mediante la tecnica del *quoted monologue*,⁹ con cui il giovane minatore dichiara apertamente che per chi vive “sotterra dovrebbe essere buio sempre e dappertutto”.¹⁰

L'assimilazione per contagio della crudeltà che lo circonda, il rovesciamento anticonformistico dei valori, che fa di Rosso un personaggio complesso e bifronte, si rendono infine manifesti, nella coscienza di Malpelo, nella scena in cui il protagonista osserva Ranocchio moribondo al suo capezzale:

Il povero Ranocchio era più di là che di qua, e sua madre piangeva e si disperava come se il figliolo fosse di quelli che guadagnano dieci lire la settimana.

Cotesto non arrivava a comprenderlo Malpelo, e domandò a Ranocchio perché sua madre strillasse a quel modo, mentre che da due mesi ei non guadagnava nemmeno quel che si mangiava. Ma il povero Ranocchio non gli dava retta [...]. Allora il Rosso si diede ad almanaccare che la madre di Ranocchio strillasse a quel modo perché il suo figliuolo era sempre stato debole e malaticcio, e l'aveva tenuto come quei marmocchi che non si slattano mai. Egli invece era stato sano e robusto, ed era malpelo, e sua madre non aveva mai pianto per lui, perché non aveva mai avuto timore di perderlo (Ibid.: 187)

Attraverso la combinazione della rappresentazione narrativa della psiche del personaggio (“si diede ad almanaccare [...]”) e l'indiretto libero di pensieri (“e lo aveva tenuto come quei marmocchi [...]”, “e sua madre piangeva e si disperava come se il figliolo fosse di quelli [...]”, “Egli invece era stato sano e robusto [...]”), è riprodotta l'ottica straniata di Rosso, il quale giunge a negare la possibilità stessa di un affetto materno disinteressato. Un amore per lui incomprendibile, perché rivolto a un essere debole e inetto, che in quanto tale è destinato a soccombere nella lotta per la vita. Non per nulla Ranocchio, stremato dalla

8 Cfr. Luperini 2019, 91-93.

9 Il *quoted monologue* è un pensiero diretto con centro deittico sul personaggio, cioè la trascrizione per così dire stenografica di un discorso che il personaggio rivolgerebbe a se stesso, adoperando per designarsi la prima persona e regolando la tempistica dei verbi sul proprio presente (Cohn 1984, 58-98).

10 Cfr. Luperini, p. 93.

fatica e dalle sofferenze, muore poco dopo. E per Rosso, la cui casa è vuota e sbarrata, che ha preso atto dell'irrealizzabilità del suo desiderio di una vita diversa, che ha perduto il padre e il suo *alter ego* (nei confronti del quale alternava un affetto protettivo a una sadica quanto pedagogica violenza), il mondo in superficie appare ormai privo di ogni valore. Non gli resta che l'orizzonte funereo, il dedalo delle gallerie sotterranee nel quale si proietta miticamente come un eroe ctonio, genio pauroso e sublime del mondo inferico: “una esclusione dalla vita sofferta nel profondo, ma anche risarcita nell'orgogliosa assunzione di una parte tragica”.¹¹

4. *Jeli il pastore*

Rispetto alle tinte cupe e ‘infernali’ di *Rosso Malpelo*, in *Jeli il pastore* la “regressione” è decisamente più orientata verso un modulo romantico di fuga verso il primitivo.¹² In seguito a una gestazione problematica, che significativamente condusse Verga a un riassetto radicale delle situazioni narrative su cui si impernia il racconto (dal narratore testimone di ascendenza ‘rusticale’ alla narrazione eterodiegetica, che propizia l'emersione della mente finzionale del protagonista), la novella uscì parzialmente sulla rivista *La Fronda* nel febbraio 1880, per poi essere pubblicata in versione integrale nella *princeps* di *Vita dei campi*.¹³

11 Marchese 1983, 140. Non per caso, come ha notato recentemente Castellana, è soprattutto nel finale che il tono di leggenda popolare – che serpeggia in *Rosso Malpelo* nella sua interezza – “prende il sopravvento sull'aspetto realistico-documentario”, avvolgendo la “di sacralità e di mistero» la vicenda del protagonista, che come la Lupa condividerebbe molti dei tratti del “capro espiatorio, così come sono stati descritti da René Girard” (2022, 71-86).

12 Sull'ambientazione e sul livello eidetico-visuale delle due novelle cfr. Riccobono 2009, 377-389.

13 Prima di arrivare ad un testo per lui idoneo, l'autore passò attraverso tre riscritture (J1, J2, J3), apportando numerosi – e talora radicali – cambiamenti. Nelle prime due redazioni a prendere la parola è infatti un personaggio dello *storyworld*, ideale proiezione diegetica dello scrittore borghese, che traccia un ritratto del protagonista (il cui nome è in origine Jele). Tali redazioni risalgono al novembre del '79 (come si legge nel margine superiore del manoscritto: «15 Nov 1879»), e sono entrambe incompiute, benché si differenzino tra loro per scelte narrative. Più precisamente, il primo abbozzo ha un carattere frammentario (sono numerose le lacune e le parole risultate illeggibili), e si conclude con la separazione tra il pastore e una fanciulla di cui si è invaghito, la quale è destinata in matrimonio con un giovane

Il racconto ripercorre la vita di un giovane pastore dal carattere gentile, giudizioso e affettuoso, dalla sua giovinezza solitaria al suo tentativo di inserirsi nell'ordine sociale: ma al pari di Rosso, egli è un emarginato «che la società in un modo o nell'altro respinge o ignora» (Asor Rosa 1973, 43). Del resto anche in Jeli è possibile intravedere la figura di “un martire del lavoro e del dovere”: il guardiano di cavalli (e di pecore) che è licenziato dal fattore in seguito alla morte del puledro *stellato*; l'orfano privo di ogni affetto che accetta passivamente il suo fato avverso fino all'epilogo, quando per l'esplosione della gelosia uccide don Alfonso, l'amico di infanzia che gli ha sottratto l'amore.

La strategia narrativa si differenzia profondamente da *Rosso Malpelo*: siccome il narratore emerge a tratti scopertamente, e i passi di narrazione polifonica sono marginali e meno intricati, la soggettività del protagonista si distingue in maniera nitida nel testo, stagliandosi su una campitura che le fa da sfondo. Tuttavia, l'emersione dei pensieri di Jeli si riscontra soprattutto nella seconda parte della novella, giacché la mediazione degli eventi è inizialmente affidata al narratore:

Ah! le belle scappate pei campi mietuti, colle criniere al vento! i bei giorni d'aprile, quando il vento accavallava ad onde l'erba verde, e le cavalle nitrivano nei pascoli! i bei meriggi d'estate, in cui la campagna, bianchiccia, taceva, sotto il cielo fosco, e i grilli scoppiettavano fra le zolle, come se le stoppie si incendiassero! il bel cielo d'inverno attraverso i rami nudi del mandorlo, che rabbrivivano al rovaio, e il viottolo che suonava gelato sotto lo zoccolo dei cavalli, e le allodole che trillavano in alto, al caldo, nell'azzurro! le belle sere di estate che salivano adagio adagio come la nebbia [...] (Verga 1987, 11).

È il desiderio di una vita in armonia con il respiro delle stagioni. Non si tratta di una proiezione dei pensieri di Jeli, né le parole con cui il desiderio è descritto sono quelle del personaggio; ad intervenire è la voce narrante, che nega esplici-

benestante; mentre J₂ è considerevolmente più esteso, ma sembra arretrare nel finale: qui, infatti, Jeli visita la casa di Marineo dove la famiglia della ragazza si è trasferita. J₃ si presenta invece come un organismo narrativo concluso: analogo, in quanto a plot e struttura diegetica, all'autografo che l'autore inviò in tipografia. Non per nulla, dopo aver costruito un episodio di raccordo, ambientato alla fiera di Vizzini (contenuto in una sola carta), e aver seguito brevemente le vicende dei due protagonisti dopo la separazione, Verga inserì il secondo troncone del racconto, che non subì significativi mutamenti nel testo del 1880 (cfr. Verga 1987, “Appendice I”, 131-178). Sullo studio della variantistica del testo cfr. Di Silvestro 2017 e Pellini 2012, 44-49. Sul riassetto delle situazioni narrative mi permetto di rimandare a Scaravilli 2021, 203-226.

tamente tale dimensione al soggetto finzionale: “Jeli, lui, non pativa di quelle malinconie”. Il protagonista è presentato come una figura mitica (“Era piovuto dal cielo, e la terra l’aveva raccolto” [...]; “era proprio di quelli che non hanno né casa né parenti”) (Ibid.: 16); un umile che intrattiene un rapporto profondo, misterioso e spontaneo con la natura: un fanciullo autosufficiente, nato e cresciuto tra gli animali.

Jeli, ha scritto Asor Rosa, è “un Individuo puro” che viene dall’ “infanzia dell’uomo” (1973, 57). Fin quando rimane nei confini dell’idillio di Tebidi, egli non patisce le pene del desiderio: “Insomma, purché ci avesse la sua sacca ad armacollo, non aveva bisogno di nessuno al mondo” (Verga 1987, 13). La conoscenza del mondo del personaggio è presentata come primordiale, di carattere puramente istintivo: “conosceva come spira il vento quando porta il temporale, e di che colore sia il nuvolo quando sta per nevicare” (Ibid.:14). Al contrario di Rosso Malpelo, egli non è dotato di una coscienza lucida, né di un particolare acume: “Le idee non gli venivano nette e filate l’una dietro l’altra, ché di rado aveva avuto con chi parlare, e perciò non aveva fretta di scovarle e distrigarle in fondo alla testa [...]” (Ibid.). Emerge a più riprese, nel racconto, la sua difficoltà ad esprimersi: Jeli ha un rapporto privilegiato con i suoi puledri, e comunica più facilmente con loro che con gli uomini. Non per nulla la comunanza tra il pastore e il mondo animale costituisce un’isotopia del testo: oltre a “reagire spesso alla maniera degli animali”, Jeli “comprende il linguaggio delle bestie, legge nel gran libro della Natura, dove venti, nevi, piogge, hanno tutti un preciso significato per lui” (Asor Rosa 1973, 57). È quindi significativo che il primo contatto tra il “primitivo” (Russo 1995, 102), che legge nel gran libro della Natura, e la società avvenga con la scoperta di un’altra possibilità di leggere la realtà, da cui il personaggio è escluso:

Don Alfonso però rispondeva che anche lui andava a scuola, a imparare. Jeli allora sgranava gli occhi, e stava tutto orecchi se il signorino si metteva a leggere, e guardava il libro e lui in aria sospettosa, stando ad ascoltare, con quel lieve ammiccar di palpebre che indica l’intensità dell’attenzione nelle bestie che più si accostano all’uomo. Gli piacevano i versi che gli accarezzavano l’udito con l’armonia di una canzone incomprensibile, e alle volte aggrottava le ciglia, appuntava il mento, e sembrava che un gran lavoro si stesse facendo nel suo interno; allora accennava di sì e di sì col capo, con un sorriso furbo, ei si grattava la testa. Quando poi il signorino mettevasi a scrivere [...], Jeli sarebbe rimasto delle giornate intere a guardarlo [...]. Non poteva persuadersi che si potesse poi ripetere sulla carta quelle parole che egli aveva dette [...] (Verga 1987, 18-19)

Il narratore si insinua sottilmente nella psiche di Jeli, raffigurato in uno stato di ferina subordinazione rispetto a don Alfonso (“con quel lieve ammiccar di palpebre che indica l’intensità dell’attenzione nelle bestie che più si accostano all’uomo”), e sono descritte le sue sensazioni e il suo incantamento mentre ascolta una musica sconosciuta (“Gli piacevano i versi che gli accarezzavano l’udito [...]).

Un *turning point*: la nascita di una rudimentale cultura e i sentimenti per Mara sono legati in un rapporto analogico nella psiche del personaggio; infatti, la presa di coscienza del valore della parola è ciò che stimola il pastore a confessare all’amico i suoi sentimenti per la fanciulla, e il suo sogno di sposarla quando «avrà sei onze all’anno di salario» (Ibid.: 144). Mara è per Jeli “il primo e decisivo stimolo a farsi uomo tra gli uomini”, ciò che lo induce ad abbandonare lo “stato di natura”, che precede la costituzione della società con le sue strutture e le sue leggi (Asor Rosa 1973, 54).

Il dialogo si interrompe, e inizia una lunga analepsi, in cui è ripercorsa la storia dei due giovani innamorati: mansueto e tardo l’uno, lesta e vana l’altra. Il *flashback* termina quando la fanciulla lascia Tebidi, partendo con la famiglia verso Marineo.¹⁴ La sua assenza è un vuoto incolmabile: “Mara, come se ne fu andata a Marineo [...] si scordò di lui; ma Jeli ci pensava sempre a lei, perché non aveva altro da fare, nelle lunghe giornate che passava a guardare la coda delle sue bestie” (Verga 1987, 26). L’autosufficiente figlio dei campi soffre per la prima volta la solitudine, che è acuita per la perdita recente del padre; e il lettore è ricondotto a un momento cronologicamente posteriore alla precedente interazione: “Egli rivide soltanto la ragazza [Mara] il dì della festa di San Giovanni, come andò alla fiera coi puledri da vendere: una festa che gli si mutò tutta in veleno [...]).

Inizia la seconda parte del racconto. Il “primitivo” si scontra con il mondo ostile degli uomini attraverso una serie di tappe significative; e il catalizzatore di tutte le sue relazioni sociali, nonché causa prima dei suoi tormenti, è Mara.¹⁵ Il pastore che viveva felice e spensierato nella sua Arcadia diviene ora triste e incline alle “malinconie”; sicché il narratore asseconda sempre più la prospettiva del personaggio, cui è delegata per ampi tratti la *mediacy*. In altri termini, esso

14 È l’episodio con cui si concludono le prime due redazioni.

15 Ha evidenziato la tensione psicologica di questo racconto Bigazzi 1975, 36-44.

diventa un personaggio *riflettore* (nell'accezione stanzeliana).¹⁶ Nella notte in cui accompagna la mandria dei cavalli alla fiera di San Giovanni, l'istanza diegetica dà agio al personaggio di mostrare il suo mondo interiore: Jeli racconta ad Alfio – in un lungo dialogo, che assume la funzione e l'andamento di un monologo – del suo amore d'infanzia, che spera di incontrare a Vizzini. Ma tale rievocazione gli è fatale: distrattosi un attimo, smarrisce il puledro *stellato*, che precipita nel burrone. L'orfano perde il lavoro, non prima di aver visto il fattore finire rapidamente, con un colpo di schioppo, l'animale in fin di vita; perdita dolorosa che costituisce un episodio centrale nel suo un percorso di formazione – o per meglio dire di “deformazione”, come l'ha definito Angelo Marchese (1983, 219-220) – che coincide con l'ingresso del personaggio nel consesso sociale, di cui apprende a sue spese le leggi e i meccanismi. Perché “i cavalli che gli sono affidati, da liberi compagni di vita, si trasformano in merce”: “la logica del mercato si rivela dominante in tutti gli aspetti dell'esistenza” (Pellini 2012, 43). Accanto all'idillio si affaccia la realtà, con la sue storture e le sue aberrazioni.

Partito alla ricerca di un nuovo padrone, Jeli vaga sconcolato per il paese, ma basta l'incontro con Mara per ritrovare conforto e speranza. E una volta arrivato in piazza, può ammirare lo svolgersi della festa:

Arrivando in piazza, Jeli rimase a bocca aperta dalla meraviglia: tutta la piazza pareva un mare di fuoco, come quando s'incendiavano le stoppie, per il gran numero di razzi che i devoti accendevano in cospetto del santo, il quale stava a goderseli dall'imboccatura del Rosario, tutto nero sotto il baldacchino d'argento. I devoti andavano e venivano fra le fiamme come tanti diavoli, e c'era persino una donna discinta, spettinata, cogli occhi fuori della testa, che accendeva i razzi anch'essa, e un prete colla sottana in aria, senza cappello, che pareva un ossesso dalla devozione (Verga 1987, 33-34).

16 La teoria di Franz Karl Stanzel si impernia sul concetto di *mediacy*, con il quale si designa la facoltà di un'istanza narrativa di mediare un contenuto finzionale. Secondo Stanzel, tale mediazione può avvenire essenzialmente in due modi: in maniera esplicita, per mezzo di un narratore, o implicitamente, grazie a un personaggio cosiddetto *riflettore*, un personaggio cioè attraverso la cui soggettività i contenuti vengono filtrati. Quando la mediazione è affidata al personaggio *riflettore*, si materializza ciò che il narratologo definisce situazione narrativa figurale, cioè quel tipo di narrazione in terza persona in cui il lettore ha la sensazione di un'esperienza diretta degli eventi narrati, come se il racconto si producesse da sé. Le opere di Stanzel non sono mai state tradotte in Italia. Sta mediando nei nostri studi le idee stanzeliane Paolo Giovannetti (2012, 217-238).

Il narratore riporta fedelmente le sensazioni di Jeli: è la percezione indiretta libera. La *contrainte* a cui il narratore si sottopone obbedisce alla strategia dello straniamento: il guardiano di cavalli è inesperto di ciò che sta accadendo, e osserva meravigliato uno spettacolo che non comprende. Ma vedendo Mara danzare con massaro Neri, Jeli si sente nuovamente perduto:

Jeli [...] andava dietro la comitiva come un cane senza padrone, a veder ballare il figlio di massaro Neri colla Mara, la quale girava in tondo e si accoccolava come una colombella sulle tegole, e teneva tesa con bel garbo una cocca del grembiale, e il figlio di massaro Neri saltava come un puledro, tanto che la gnà Lia piangeva come una bimba dalla consolazione [...] (Ibid.: 34).

Le similitudini zoomorfe (in corsivo) rispecchiano la sfera linguistica e psichica del pastore: è indubbiamente una visione in soggettiva. L'orfano vede il suo sogno svanire, ma gli tocca assistere a una scena ancor più dolorosa:

Jeli non ne poteva più dalla stanchezza, e si mise a dormire seduto sul marciapiede, fin quando lo svegliarono i primi petardi del fuoco d'artificio. In quel momento Mara era sempre al fianco del figlio di massaro Neri, gli si appoggiava colle due mani intrecciate sulla spalla, e al lume dei fuochi colorati sembrava ora tutta bianca ed ora tutta rossa. Quando scapparono pel cielo gli ultimi razzi in mucchio, il figlio di massaro Neri si voltò verso di lei, bianca in viso, e le diede un bacio (Ibid.: 35).

Alla vista del bacio, l'emergere dello sconforto: "Jeli non disse nulla, ma in quel punto gli si cambiò in veleno tutta la festa [...], e tornò a pensare a tutte le sue disgrazie, che gli erano uscite di mente" (Ibid.).

Passa del tempo. Jeli trova lavoro come pecoraio alla Salonia, e impara presto il mestiere. Ma un giorno gli giunge voce della relazione tra Mara e il Signorino. Addolorato per la notizia, ripensa alla sua infanzia a Tebidi; e Verga concede al suo 'eroe' un'ampia zona introspettiva:

Mentre conduceva al pascolo le pecore tornò a pensare a Mara, quando era ragazzina, che stavano insieme tutto il giorno e andavano nella valle del Jacitano e sul poggio alla Croce, ed ella stava a guardarlo col mento in aria mentre egli si arrampicava a prendere i nidi sulle cime degli alberi; e pensava anche a don Alfonso, il quale veniva a trovarlo dalla villa vicina, e si sdraiavano bocconi sull'erba a stuzzicare con un fuscellino i nidi di grilli. Tutte quelle cose andava rimuginando per ore ed ore, seduto sull'orlo del fossato, tenendosi i ginocchi fra le braccia, e i noci alti di Tebidi, e le folte macchie dei valloni, e le pendici delle colline verdi di sommacchi, e gli ulivi grigi che si addossavano nella valle come nebbia, e i tetti rossi del

casamento, e il campanile «che sembrava un manico di saliera» fra gli aranci del giardino. – Qui la campagna gli si stendeva dinanzi brulla, deserta, chiazzata dall'erba riarsa, sfumando silenziosa nell'afa lontana (Ibid.: 38).

Una rievocazione dell'idillio, che si sostanzia nei toni e nelle forme dell'elegia; un'elegia potenziata dalla leva poetica del narratore, che si avvale della psiconarrazione per tradurre nel suo linguaggio le fantasie liriche del personaggio, che ripensa ai tempi in cui Mara e don Alfonso rallegravano le sue giornate (“tornò a pensare a Mara [...]”, “e pensava anche a don Alfonso [...]»), «Tutte quelle cose andava rimuginando per ore ed ore»).

Nella parte finale della novella, Mara sposa Jeli per coprire la sua relazione con il Signorino. Ma il pastore non sospetta nulla, e crede ciecamente alla fedeltà di sua moglie:

Mara era bella e fresca come una rosa, con quella mantellina bianca che sembrava l'agnello pasquale, e quella collana d'ambra che le faceva il collo bianco.

[...]

Infatti Mara non era nata a far la pecoraia, e non ci era avvezza alla tramontana di gennaio, quando le mani si irrigidiscono sul bastone, e sembra che vi caschino le unghie, e ai furiosi acquazzoni, in cui l'acqua vi penetra fino alle ossa [...]. Almeno Jeli sapeva che Mara stava al caldo sotto le coltri, o filava davanti al fuoco, in crocchio colle vicine, o si godeva il sole sul ballatoio, mentre egli tornava dal pascolo stanco ed assetato [...] (Ibid.: 41)

Ai suoi occhi, Mara rimane sempre pura e innocente, una principessa da trattare con cura e con riconoscenza per averlo scelto. La cecità di Jeli, che non conosce la gelosia, è resa evidente dal narratore popolare, che mostra il punto di vista degli abitanti del paese, che sono a conoscenza delle magagne della sua consorte, e lo sbeffeggiano alle sue spalle: “e non osava soffiarsi il naso col fazzoletto di seta rosso, per non farsi scorgere; ma i vicini e tutti quelli che sapevano la storia di don Alfonso gli ridevano sul naso”.¹⁷

La scoperta avviene solo nell'epilogo, quando, davanti a lui, e nonostante il suo divieto, la moglie accetta l'invito di don Alfonso, che le chiede un ballo (“Non andare! – disse egli a Mara come don Alfonso la chiamava perché venisse a ballare cogli altri. – Non andare, Mara! – Perché? – Non voglio che tu vada! Non andare!”):

¹⁷ Ivi, p. 165.

Mara si strinse nelle spalle, e se ne andò a ballare. Ella era rossa ed allegra, cogli occhi neri che sembravano due stelle, e rideva che le si vedevano i denti bianchi, e tutto l'oro che aveva indosso le sbatteva e le scintillava sulle guance e sul petto che pareva la Madonna tale e quale. Jeli s'era rizzato sulla vita, colla lunga forbice in pugno, così bianco in viso, così bianco come era una volta suo padre il vaccajo, quando tremava dalla febbre accanto al fuoco, nel casolare. Tutt'a un tratto, come vide che Don Alfonso, colla bella barba ricciuta, e la giacchetta di velluto e la catenella d'oro sul panciotto, prese Mara per la mano per ballare, solo allora, come vide che la toccava, si lanciò su di lui, e gli tagliò la gola di un sol colpo, proprio come un capretto (Ibid.: 47).

Preso atto del tradimento, la catastrofe è inevitabile: “gli tagliò la gola di un sol colpo, proprio come un capretto”. Trascinato davanti a un giudice, senza aver opposto resistenza, a Jeli non resta che un grido di dolore: “– Come! – diceva – non dovevo ucciderlo nemmeno?... Se mi aveva preso la Mara!...” (Ibid.).

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Laureatosi in Filologia moderna all'Università di Napoli Federico II con una tesi sulla narrativa di Federico De Roberto, Guido Scaravilli ha recentemente conseguito il titolo di perfezionamento alla Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa (in cotutela con l'Université libre de Bruxelles), discutendo una tesi dal titolo *Soggettività e Quarto Stato: modalità della rappresentazione interiore nella narrativa realista e naturalista*.

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RECENSIONI

Elsa Charani Lesourd, *Le roman kaléidoscope. Confessions d'un Italien d'Ippolito Nievo*, Aix-en-Provence, Presses Universitaires de Provence, 2022, 298 pp., € 22,00.

L'attenzione che Elsa Charani Lesourd dedica a Ippolito Nievo in questo volume ha origine negli ultimi anni del secolo scorso, quando la studiosa ha incominciato a occuparsi dello scrittore friulano, dopo aver affinato lo sguardo sul panorama letterario di poco anteriore agli anni in cui visse e operò l'autore delle *Confessioni*, lavorando a una tesi di dottorato sul romanzo storico italiano minore (1822-1834), discussa presso l'Università di Nancy, dove attualmente insegna.

Nel tempo questo interesse è andato crescendo e ha trovato la sua consacrazione in alcuni contributi in lingua italiana (tra cui la biografia *Ippolito Nievo. Uno scrittore politico*, Venezia, Marsilio, 2011) e francese, oltre che nella fondazione della rivista di studi nieviani «PISANA», arrivata oggi al quarto numero.

Il libro qui recensito è la sua ultima fatica, consegnata ai tipi universitari della Provenza (PUP), e vi sono raccolti articoli scritti e diffusi negli anni, rivisti e rielaborati in occasione della nuova pubblicazione. Ma non si tratta di una semplice collezione di saggi precedentemente redatti, bensì di un insieme organico e sensato. Questo pregio va ricondotto in primo luogo all'esistenza di un progetto di ricerca ben chiaro a Charani, che da sempre si è concentrata su alcuni aspetti del romanzo, e in secondo luogo all'accurata architettura del volume. Esso, infatti, si articola in tre grandi sezioni, ciascuna delle quali fa riferimento alla dimensione temporale in cui è calata la lettura critica del capolavoro nieviano: *Métissages, le passé littéraire; Décryptages, le présent politique. Pour une lecture historique de la fiction; Intuitions du futur, actualité du roman*.

La prima sezione comprende quattro saggi che indagano il rapporto delle *Confessioni* con la tradizione letteraria.

Il primo di essi è dedicato al sostrato ariostesco del romanzo, che si lascia indovinare facilmente per la frequente menzione dei personaggi e dell'autore dell'*Orlando furioso*. Per questo motivo non è passato inosservato agli oc-

chi dei critici, che non hanno mancato di sottoporlo all'attenzione. Eppure, il montaggio qui proposto di tutte le tessere ariostesche presenti nel romanzo – anche quelle minute e occasionali che un lettore comune tende a rimuovere subito o a sottovalutare, considerandole meri stereotipi sfornati da una memoria letteraria – restituisce l'idea nuova di una presenza massiva e modellizzante del poema. Non stupisce allora che Italo Calvino, felice rifacitore delle trame congegnate da Ariosto, nutrisse una singolare predilezione per Nievo, da lui annoverato tra i più grandi scrittori italiani dell'Ottocento.

Oltre ai prelievi intertestuali, Chaarani segnala qualche “similitude de structure”, quali la presenza di “digressions”, “personnages corollaires” e la tripartizione del racconto in “trois grandes lignes narratives, dominées chacune par un héros” (27). Ma a convincere maggiormente è la ricostruzione della filigrana epica delle *Confessioni*, in cui la studiosa coglie a pieno la dialettica tra riuso della tradizione e spinte modernizzanti. L'approdo nieviano al romanzo storico appare così ancor più consapevole se si considera come antenato del genere proprio il poema epico-cavalleresco.

Gli altri tre saggi esplorano le relazioni tra il romanzo di Nievo e testi a lui più prossimi.

Il primo dei tre si sofferma sul ribaltamento parodico cui l'autore delle *Confessioni* sottopone gli “ingrédients de base du roman historique italien” (39), supinamente impiegati da molti scrittori del primo Ottocento: la descrizione iniziale del castello e il suo assedio, le figure del falso monaco e del fuorilegge simpatico, l'amore impedito dal padre della fanciulla e l'epilogo matrimoniale.

Tra le diverse soluzioni proposte da Nievo in diretta antitesi con quelle presenti negli altri esemplari del sottogenere storico, *Promessi sposi* inclusi, la studiosa annovera la profusione dei sommari; l'orientamento centrifugo, che produce un “élargissement des perspectives géographiques” e, di conseguenza, “une ouverture à de grands problèmes historiques” (42); infine, un diverso rapporto tra storia e finzione: laddove “Manzoni utilise les documents historiques pour qualifier les personnages de sa fiction”, nel capolavoro nieviano “de nombreux personnages de Fratta subissent au contraire une disqualification au moyen de comparaisons avec des éléments ou des personnages historiques disproportionnés” (esempi: la cucina di Fratta paragonata al Duomo di Milano o il Conte all'imperatore Tito, 43).

La parodia nieviana del genere non consisterebbe solo nel capovolgimento scoperto delle sue forme e strutture canoniche, ma anche in pratiche più sottili, brillantemente intuite da Chaarani. L'irrisione del romanzo storico scottiano,

ad esempio, viene concentrata nei primi cinque capitoli, che precedono quelli in cui si fa spazio ai “drames de l’histoire”: “Nievo prouve donc empiriquement que l’on peut écrire un roman historique scottien sans recourir à l’histoire plus qu’à un cadre” (40). Con straordinaria finezza lo scrittore suggerirebbe che l’intera tradizione dei romanzi storici è fatta principalmente di romanzi di costume, dove la storia è solo un elemento accessorio, privo di incidenza.

Un altro saggio si fonda sull’idea che il discorso dell’ottuagenario intorno alle figure storiche di Napoleone e Byron sia modellato su due testi in particolare, rispettivamente un articolo di Mazzini apparso nel 1832 sulle colonne de «La Giovine Italia» e la *Confession d’un enfant du siècle*. L’ipotesi cautamente formulata da Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo sulla possibile lettura nieviana del capolavoro di Alfred de Musset (Mengaldo 2011: 154) si trasforma in una tesi (“Nievo avait donc certainement lu le roman”, 49) sostenuta da una serie di somiglianze che interessano segnatamente gli incipit dei due romanzi (51), mentre la conoscenza e l’assimilazione dello scritto mazziniano da parte di Nievo sarebbe attestata dalla comunanza di immagini e motivi: l’indizio più consistente risiede nell’immagine di un intero popolo plagiato da Bonaparte (“s’assunse di pensare per trenta milioni di cittadini”, Mazzini 1956: 176 / “C’era una grande intelligenza che pensava per noi”, Nievo 1999: 1147). Muovendo da tali premesse, il discorso della studiosa s’inoltra, come di consueto, in considerazioni sulle consonanze e le dissonanze tra i testi analizzati, con l’obiettivo di definire le specificità dell’opera di Ippolito Nievo.

Il quarto e ultimo saggio della prima sezione è dedicato all’influenza che la narrativa di George Sand esercitò sulle *Confessioni*. Nello specifico l’attenzione di Chaarani si ferma su tre romanzi della prolifica scrittrice: *Mauprat*, *Consuelo* e *La comtesse de Rudolstadt*. Le analogie delle *Confessioni* col primo sono sorprendenti, tanto da certificare che Nievo derivò almeno in parte da esso l’immagine di un vecchio narratore ottuagenario: pure in *Mauprat* ce n’è uno, e il suo racconto autobiografico ruota intorno alla sua storia d’amore con la cugina Edmée e al proprio percorso di formazione morale e politica che lo porta a raggiungere il Continente Nuovo, dove combatte al fianco di La Fayette in occasione della Rivoluzione Americana. Anche qui l’abile individuazione di affinità strutturali – che non si limitano a quelle menzionate – è seguita dalla ricerca di analogie testuali.

La seconda sezione comprende saggi in cui si propone una “lecture historique” (103) della finzione nieviana. Una delle idee che informano maggiormente questo volume è che “tout événement fictionnel et privé pourrait être lu comme

la transposition métaphorique d'un événement historique et collectif" (115). La lettura del romanzo si trasforma perciò in un audace tentativo di decodificazione ("décryptage"): è una strada difficile, quasi mai intrapresa dai critici se non per brevi tratti, al fondo della quale si possono trovare tesori vergini. Chaarani, insomma, è persuasa che la cattedrale finzionale innalzata da Ippolito Nievo sia sostenuta da un'architettura storica. Impossibile menzionare tutti gli episodi di cui la studiosa indovina l'antifona storico-politica, ma eccone qualcuno: Carlino distratto dalla folla rivoltosa di Portogruaro, dove si è recato per cercare soccorso per l'impotente dama Badoer, simboleggerebbe i giacobini che, invece di "défendre, l'arme à la main, cette Italie séculaire figurée par une vieille dame sans défense", si sono smarriti "en courant après les superbes chimères d'une liberté et d'une égalité" (108). Così dietro Carlino che rinuncia, pur a malincuore, alla sterile Pisana per sposare Aquilina si nasconderebbe l'Italia costretta ad arrendersi all'invasore (nel nome di Aquilina sarebbe alluso il rapace che si stagliava sugli stemmi dei due dominatori d'Italia: prima i francesi, poi gli austriaci) e ad accantonare gli ideali patriottici e rivoluzionari (rappresentati da Pisana). Infine la biografia di Carlo sarebbe ricalcata su quella di Napoleone, il quale ripudiò Giuseppina di Beauharnais, che non poteva dargli un erede, e sposò Maria Luisa d'Austria.

Insomma, le traiettorie che seguono i personaggi d'invenzione nel romanzo non sono meno vincolate alla Storia di quanto lo sia in apparenza quella di un personaggio realmente esistito al di fuori della *fiction*: anche per i primi lo scrittore ha ripercorso i capricciosi moti della storia, travestendoli di eventi individuali e scelte private. È perciò eloquente il giudizio che Chaarani formula in altro contesto: "C'est donc l'histoire qui dicte ses lois à la fiction et non l'inverse" (45). Anche l'identità di Aglaura – sconvolta dalla doppia scoperta di essere non greca ma veneziana, sorella non di Spiro ma di Carlino – celerebbe una sottotraccia storica: il personaggio per la studiosa incarna una "bivalence symbolique" (125), rammentando ora Venezia ora la patria degli elleni. Ancora: il personaggio di Clara, facilmente eclissato, nell'attenzione dei lettori, dall'esuberanza della sorella Pisana, avrebbe una sua centralità; costruita a partire dalle biografie di santa Chiara, la primogenita del Conte di Fratta sarebbe la personificazione di una Chiesa che rifiuta ostinatamente di essere illuminata dalle idee rivoluzionarie ed egualitarie (Lucilio) morendo così paralizzata per il suo immobilismo ideologico.

Ciò che nuoce a questi bei saggi è uno scialo di congetture non sempre necessarie. Per il personaggio del dottor Lucilio, ad esempio, vengono avanzate ben cinque ipotesi di motivazione onomastica, e non tutte convincono. Tal-

volta Chaarani è così persuasa di una sua tesi, avvalorata da un certo numero di spie testuali e indicatori di vario genere, che la vede confermata anche da segnali discutibili. La lettura di questo libro a un certo punto obbliga a posare sulla scrivania la lente filologica – che si attiene al dato positivo, verificabile – e ad abbandonarsi all'avventura di un'indagine appassionata, dove le ipotesi si moltiplicano, non essendo sempre tenute a freno da un principio che le legittimi. Del resto è la stessa autrice a suggerire questa postura avventurosa al suo lettore, con la dichiarazione programmatica che apre il volume: “Le kaléidoscope est un jeu solitaire: les images forcément fugitives que l'on y observe sont marquées par la subjectivité de celle ou de celui qui les voit” (11).

La terza e ultima sezione raccoglie una serie di saggi in cui il romanzo è osservato dalla specola del XXI secolo.

Il primo saggio è dedicato al bestiario delle *Confessioni*, governato secondo la studiosa da uno zoomorfismo “laudatif”, “neutre”, “dégradant” (205) o “teinté d'humour, de satire, ou d'ironie” (215). Una delle risorse preziose di questa indagine tematica consiste nel riconoscimento di una persistenza della metaforica animale al di là dei confini della narrativa: il simbolismo dell'aquila e della lumaca, ad esempio, ritorna nelle pagine di *Venezia o la libertà d'Italia* in una maniera che permette al lettore di sostanziare ideologicamente i tropi zoomorfi prima incontrati nel romanzo (207). Più difficile essere d'accordo con le pagine in cui Chaarani parla di un Nievo all'avanguardia, “capable de regarder les animaux sans antropomorphisme, pour ce qu'ils sont” (212): al contrario, l'attenzione elogiativa che l'ottuagenario riserva agli animali ci pare generalmente subordinata a una riflessione problematica sull'uomo (cfr. Della Corte 2023).

Segue un lungo saggio sui “dix destinées féminines” (234) delle *Confessioni*, analizzati e classificati per affinità d'indole e traiettorie esistenziali. Obiettivo della studiosa, che varca il perimetro del romanzo maggiore e guarda anche alle altre opere, è quello di individuare un altro elemento di “intuizione del futuro” nella filogenia dell'autore, desumibile dalla natura emancipata dei personaggi femminili (che viaggiano in piena autonomia: Manzoni fino a venti anni prima l'aveva consentito solo a Renzo) e dalla condotta di certi personaggi maschili, che si dedicano spesso ad attività tradizionalmente muliebri (su tutte, la cura degli infanti). Come giustificare allora certe tirate misogine nel capolavoro di Nievo? Chaarani propone di distinguere “discours du narrateur”, che si caratterizza per “une extrême ambiguïté voire une tendance à la contradiction”, e “affabulation”, in cui si ravvisa “un net progressisme dans la présentation et le traitement des personnages

féminins” (241). Questo problema non si poneva Marcella Gorra, quando più di mezzo secolo fa si limitava a esaltare il “sorprendente anacronismo” dello scrittore, “in anticipo di almeno tre quarti di secolo” (Gorra 1963: 276) riguardo alla rappresentazione delle donne in termini di indipendenza ed eguaglianza all’uomo.

Il libro si chiude con due saggi tenuti insieme dall’idea di un Nievo che si lascia alle spalle la tradizione romantica, anche laddove il romanzo sembra accoglierne qualche retaggio. Il primo di questi saggi è imperniato sul tema della memoria: la forte tensione verso il futuro renderebbe quella dell’ottuagenario distante se non estranea alla nostalgia e al passatismo di un certo romanticismo à la Chateaubriand (cfr. 245-251). Il racconto della Storia, pur essendo filtrato dalla “mémoire individuelle défaillante” di un vecchio (255), che può alterare la successione degli eventi e influenzare la descrizione dei suoi figuranti, non è monolitico, in quanto uno stesso episodio è sovente considerato da una molteplicità di punti di vista cui il narratore attinge tramite il ricorso a una “mémoire collective” (259), irrobustitasi negli anni.

Il distacco nieviano dalle pose e gli stilemi del romanticismo è oggetto anche dell’ultimo capitolo, dove si legge che nelle *Confessioni* “la relation d’analogie entre texte et musique implique l’idée de tromperie” (264): il discorso lirico è formulato per ingannare, sottomettere. Secondo Chaarani, l’ottuagenario – e dietro di lui l’autore – prende le distanze dalla retorica ampollosa di Leopardi, Lucilio, Giulio, oltre che propria, quando è stato sedotto da un linguaggio superato come dal canto di un cigno morente (cfr. 263-269). Più originale risulta la lettura del romanzo con gli strumenti forniti rispettivamente dalla teoria girardiana del desiderio mimetico e dalla narratologia. Il ricorso a *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque* permette di inquadrare non solo la basilare logica triangolare per cui un personaggio desidera ciò che altri desiderano (es.: Pisana attratta da Lucilio, Giulio e Raimondo perché stimati dal salotto Frumier a Portogruaro) ma anche l’attivazione del desiderio nell’altro per mezzo di terzi (es.: Lucilio instilla il desiderio di lui in Clara cercando prima di piacere alla nonna). Gli strumenti narratologici rilevano le diverse modalità di resa polifonica che sbiadiscono i confini del “soggetto” narrante: l’indiretto libero; la presenza di testi (lettere, diari, memorie) vergati da vari personaggi; la postura eterodiegetica del narratore-personaggio quando riporta nel dettaglio scene cui non ha potuto assistere (cfr. 269-272).

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Michela Compagnoni, *I mostri di Shakespeare. Figure del deforme e dell'informe*. Roma, Carocci 2022, 172 pp., € 19,00.

Premiato con il premio *AIA/Carocci Doctoral Dissertation Prize 2021*, questo volume di Michela Compagnoni è un gradito contributo al dibattito critico sul concetto di mostruosità che si è sviluppato in modo più intenso negli ultimi decenni. L'autrice si è ricavata una nicchia nello sterminato panorama degli studi sulla mostruosità nel Rinascimento proponendo un'esplorazione del mostruoso in Shakespeare in termini fisici ed epistemologici. Il volume si pone in linea di continuità con l'ottimo studio di Mark Thornton Burnett (*Constructing 'Monsters' in Shakespearean Drama and Early Modern Culture*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), uno dei punti di riferimento nel variegato orizzonte critico dell'autrice, che spazia da Michel Foucault ai *disability studies*. Mentre Burnett conduce un'indagine più ampia che include Christopher Marlowe e Ben Jonson oltre a Shakespeare, Compagnoni si concentra sul corpus shakespeariano, analizzando i processi di 'mostrificazione' a cui i personaggi sono soggetti attraverso il filtro della categoria del deforme/informe. I due termini emergono come due delle molteplici facce della mostruosità che, nonostante siano in opposizione, "dialogano, si contaminano, si sovrappongono" (12).

L'autrice prende in esame cinque opere appartenenti a generi diversi che coprono l'intero arco della carriera del drammaturgo: dal dramma storico della fase giovanile (*Richard III*) alle tragedie della fase matura (*Macbeth*, *Othello* e *King Lear*) fino al *romance*, con uno degli ultimi drammi della sua produzione (*The Tempest*). L'introduzione illustra con rigore scientifico la metodologia adottata, chiarendo la scelta di perseguire un approccio che privilegia il testo rispetto alla *performance* al fine di riuscire a cogliere la forte polisemia e l'instabilità che la mostruosità può avere solo nella forma scritta. Come sostiene Compagnoni, una lettura del testo orientata agli aspetti performativi "costringe a scelte inevitabilmente riduttive dell'indefinitezza e ambiguità tipiche delle raffigurazioni del mostruoso deforme/informe in questi drammi shakespearia-

ni” (13). La scelta è giustificata in maniera convincente, tuttavia qualche accenno ad allestimenti e adattamenti cinematografici avrebbe potuto arricchire l’indagine profonda, attenta e puntuale sviluppata nel volume.

L’introduzione offre anche uno stimolante excursus sul concetto di mostruoso nel periodo *early modern*, creando uno sfondo storico-culturale molto nitido su cui proiettare l’analisi delle opere. La scienza dell’epoca, con l’interesse per la vivisezione e l’anatomia, la teoria degli umori, la fisiognomica, le esplorazioni geografiche e le conquiste coloniali diventano quindi filtri attraverso cui esaminare i mostri che popolano i cinque drammi oggetto di indagine.

Compagnoni prende in esame tre ambiti epistemici, cioè il corpo, lo sguardo e il linguaggio, a cui viene dedicato un capitolo ciascuno. Il primo esamina due simboli della deformità fisica nell’immaginario collettivo, Richard III e Caliban, che incarnano rispettivamente una mostruosità storica, tragica e interiorizzata e una esotica e romanzesca, mostrando come la loro deformità, che è al tempo stesso informità, trascenda “le barriere della pelle e dei corpi” (34) e si riversi nell’interiorità sfuggendo ogni classificazione e definizione. Come dimostra l’autrice in maniera persuasiva, la loro mostruosità è composita, in quanto frutto di contaminazioni, riscritture e manipolazioni storiche e culturali, è costantemente diversa, variando in base allo sguardo che la scruta, ed è auto-rappresentata dagli stessi protagonisti, rivelando così la poliedricità ma anche la frammentazione del loro io. Il capitolo mette in luce come i due personaggi condividano “una traccia mostruosa del materno” (40), che segna la loro nascita e li perseguita per tutta la loro esistenza rendendoli simili a una mola, una massa informe che si genera nell’utero in luogo di un feto. Se alla fine Caliban appare come una mola, “this thing of darkness”, (*The Tempest*, 5.1.275) nelle parole di Prospero, Richard III viene inghiottito in un modo simile dall’oscurità, morendo fuori scena e sparendo dalla vista degli spettatori. La loro mostruosità intercetta questioni cruciali del pensiero politico, medico, scientifico e religioso dell’epoca, aprendo una riflessione sui concetti di sovranità, potere, virilità e *performance* di genere.

Il secondo capitolo è dedicato a *Macbeth* e *Othello*, che tratteggiano due diverse immagini di mostruosità: una più implicita, ma non meno potente, nella tragedia scozzese, e una molto più pervasiva e percettibile nel dramma del Moro di Venezia. In entrambe lo sguardo è uno strumento di conoscenza che non aiuta a definire ma deforma i personaggi, il tempo e i generi. Compagnoni nota che in queste due tragedie il mostruoso si configura come “l’improvviso

insorgere del rovescio delle cose, la sovversione delle strutture e la mutazione delle forme del mondo” (79) ed è legato a una distorsione dello sguardo. In *Macbeth* la morte violenta di Duncan, il cui corpo è deturpato, profanato e privato di ogni forma di regalità, subisce un processo di mostrificazione attraverso le parole e gli sguardi degli altri personaggi e dà il via a una serie di deformazioni che interessano molteplici dinamiche, generando un caos informe. La deformazione emerge chiaramente a livello di corpo politico, temporale e di genere. Le profezie delle streghe, invece, sembrano corrispondere al momento in cui le strutture del tempo si deformano, creando un tempo sospeso fuori dalla storia. I loro vaticini, ambigui e anfibolici, hanno in sé l’idea della deformazione dei corpi e della psiche della coppia di protagonisti e suggeriscono una ibridazione fra maschile e femminile. In *Othello*, lo sguardo di Iago insieme al suo linguaggio, deformato e deformante, distorcono la realtà e trasformano il Moro e gli altri personaggi in mostri. Il protagonista “diventa agente e vittima di una mostruosità sempre più prossima alla dimensione dell’informe, mentre Desdemona, al contrario, nella morte ritrova una forma granitica e tremendamente immutabile” (119).

L’ultimo capitolo esamina *King Lear*, in cui il mostruoso è frutto del capovolgimento dell’ordine naturale nel rapporto fra padre e figli/e. Le figlie di Lear sono mostrificate dall’ira del padre, che le trasfigura in creature demoniache, mentre Edgar assume l’identità di Poor Tom, un *Bedlam beggar*, per sfuggire al padre e al fratellastro. La sua mostruosità, come spiega Compagnoni, “incarna l’alterità immonda dei reietti e dei folli che vivono ai margini della società” (131). Egli è contemporaneamente deforme e informe, caratterizzato da una mostruosità che è sia fisica che verbale: il suo linguaggio è disarticolato e segna la sua appartenenza alla schiera dei folli. Egli fa suo lo stile dei mendicanti di Bedlam, frammentato e sconnesso e, al tempo stesso, polifonico, poiché incorpora, spesso adattando, modi di dire, proverbi, filastrocche, versi e frammenti di canzoni. Tom compie il processo inverso alla mostrificazione quando assume nuovamente l’identità di Edgar, riacquistando la sua forma originaria: riprende il *blank verse* abbandonando la prosa, “relegando così l’alterità e la voce polifonica altrimenti incontenibili di Tom”, conclude l’autrice, “in una zona d’ombra di cui non resta altro che un’eco mostruosa” (150).

I mostri di Shakespeare è senza dubbio uno studio meritevole di attenzione e offre un valido contributo agli studi teratologici. La sua forza risiede nella combinazione di molteplici elementi: letture puntuali e persuasive di testi

drammatici molto noti e fra i più scandagliati della critica shakespeariana, una scrupolosa attenzione agli aspetti lessicali e alle molteplici sfumature del linguaggio unite a una base solida ed eterogenea di approcci critici. Il volume offre uno stimolo a esaminare altre opere del canone shakespeariano e della prima modernità attraverso la lente del mostruoso per illuminare aspetti non ancora indagati o non sufficientemente approfonditi.

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Luca Marangolo, *La nascita del dramma moderno. In Shakespeare, Calderón, Racine, Lessing*, Milano-Udine, Mimesis, 2023, 420 pp., € 32,00.

Con un corposo lavoro che tenta una definizione del genere letterario nella sua evoluzione simbolico-formale, Luca Marangolo si inserisce nella folta ed eterogenea tradizione di studi sulla tragedia. L'autore lo fa lavorando, di fatto, sulla lunga durata: da Sofocle a Lessing; ma la tragedia attica e il dramma borghese, rispettivamente nel primo e nell'ultimo capitolo, sono utilizzati come assi prospettici per focalizzare soprattutto le tre esperienze canoniche nella produzione teatrale della prima modernità: Shakespeare, Calderón, Racine. È giusto ripercorrere scorciatamente la tesi generale del libro e alcuni dei casi di studio attraverso cui essa è sostenuta, per restituire la densità della materia concettuale – certamente un merito del libro – chiamata in causa nel lavoro di Marangolo.

Ponendosi in contraddizione con la tesi, sostenuta da Szondi nel *Saggio sul tragico* (1961), dell'indimostrabilità del rapporto fra tragedia in quanto forma e tragico in quanto emozione culturale, lo studioso procede, almeno nell'economia argomentativa del libro così come si presenta nella sua stesura conclusiva, in senso deduttivo, a partire da un'idea teorica forte e vagliandola poi sui singoli campioni testuali. Oltre ad Aristotele e a Hegel, su cui arriviamo a breve, una chiave d'accesso euristica all'idea di tragedia di Marangolo è data dall'interpretazione che Theodor Oudemans e André Lardinois, in *Tragic Ambiguity* (1987), hanno fornito dell'*Antigone* sofoclea: la "cosmologia" antica – in termini lotmaniani, la semiosfera – si qualifica come una cosmologia "interconnessa"; quella moderna procederebbe sempre più verso una struttura "separativa" (62-63). L'intima connessione di cui la tragedia antica sarebbe specchio simbolico è quella fra parola e azione, i cui risvolti formali si realizzano nella *funzione lirica*, quella del coro, e nella *funzione epica*, quella del *mythos*, appunto, dell'azione. La connessione fra queste due istanze restituirebbe, nella tragedia attica, quella che l'*Estetica* hegeliana definisce una "totalità etica", in quanto gioco di

verità discorsiva che postula un esito universale dato dallo scontro tra potenze etiche e caratteri in azione e dall'eliminazione dell'elemento particolare non in grado di adattarsi all'armonia da raggiungere.

Uno degli snodi complessi del libro è sicuramente quello che riguarda l'asse teorico che conduce da Aristotele a Hegel. È il problema del rapporto fra l'idea della tragedia come *rovesciamento*, in quanto dispositivo attraverso cui l'eroe tragico prende coscienza della sua colpevolezza inconsapevole, e quella della tragedia come *scontro tra caratteri* risolto nella coesione tra azione e coro. Un primo nodo affrontato da Marangolo sta nell'interpretazione della tragedia che la grecoità stessa ha fornito col filtro della *Poetica* aristotelica. Sarebbe già la *Poetica* a travisare l'elemento di cosmo arcaico presente della tragedia, poiché Aristotele scriveva in una fase in cui il passaggio, per dirla con Vernant, dall'età del mito a quella della ragione era già in uno stadio avanzato. Come sostiene condivisibilmente Marangolo, la tragedia andrebbe interpretata anelando il più possibile verso l'orizzonte d'attesa storico di quel cosmo. Dunque, quando il *mythos* si struttura attraverso il giogo della colpevolezza inconsapevole, l'eroe tragico è da considerarsi comunque colpevole di *hybris*, poiché la sua colpevolezza non deriva dalla sua *volontà* soggettiva. È l'idea che muove la critica dell'interpretazione di Edipo come colpevole *malgré lui*, che sarebbe fuorviata dal ragionare con strutture di pensiero non interconnesse, ma separative: "in una cultura fondata su semiosfere interconnesse non può esserci differenza fra l'errore in buona fede cui sarebbe tentata di cadere la lettura post-aristotelica (e, in prospettiva, post-cartesiana) dell'*Edipo*, e la grave colpa, che ha conseguenze radicali sulla vita dell'intera comunità tebana" (88). Allo stesso modo, nell'*Antigone*, lo scontro fra Creonte e la protagonista, se letto nei termini di un cosmo interconnesso, non è uno scontro che può dar vita a un procedimento dialettico di sintesi come in Hegel: "nell'universo ambiguo fatto di semiosfere interconnesse non c'è elevazione gerarchica per alcun personaggio, perché non c'è orientamento semantico: qualunque elemento può rivelarsi tragicamente impuro *in quanto* sacro e viceversa" (105). Marangolo si muove con una certa dimestichezza e disinvoltura, prima di tutto, all'interno di una parabola dell'idealismo tedesco, e della sua eredità primonovecentesca, che si è interrogata sulla tragedia e che conduce da Hegel a Lukács, oltre a dimostrare una padronanza della teoria estetica aristotelica e della sua ricezione protomoderna.

Vagliando la continuità, nel moderno, delle funzioni intuite da Hegel, epicità e lirismo, Marangolo sostiene la difficoltà sempre più stringente del-

la coesione del *mythos* in quanto azione dell'eroe e del coro in quanto parola gnomica del dramma. Marangolo descrive questo processo, ad esempio, indugiano sullo slittamento semantico fra parola e azione in *Romeo and Juliet*, in cui la riaffermazione controtempo della loro interconnessione, in contesto ormai separativo, decreta la crisi del rapporto tra fatti e valori. È il processo che si radicalizza con *Hamlet*, in cui il personaggio che dovrebbe essere investito, anche per *interpretatio nominis*, della funzione della parola, Horatio, vive la contraddizione insanabile – dimostrata dagli studi quantitativi del Literary Lab promosso da Franco Moretti a Stanford – di essere funzione dialogica più presente nel sistema dei personaggi, ma di avere un tasso di persuasione pari a zero: “nessun personaggio fra i comprimari delle tragedie che affronteremo (dal Clarín calderoniano, all’Ismene raciniana fino ai personaggi minori dei drammi lessinghiani) ha, al contempo, una simile centralità drammaturgica ed una così bassa caratura retorica” (193). Oltre a una crisi della parola, *Hamlet* e, ancor di più, *King Lear*, sarebbero latori di una crisi dell’azione in quanto crisi dell’equilibrio tra *will* e *reason*, con la differenza che in *Hamlet* la contraddizione trova sbocco in due funzioni testuali apparentemente separate (il principe e il tiranno), mentre in *King Lear* essa si stratifica nella persona del re (cfr. 222), che – come intuito in un saggio storico di Moretti, *La grande eclissi* (1979), pubblicato ai tempi di “Calibano” – vive il paradosso dell’*abdicazione come atto tirannico*.

Con la mediazione dell’egemonia gesuitica, poi, ai tempi di Calderón, il dilemma sui fondamenti trascendenti o artificiali del potere, specchio di un problema più immediato, quello del controllo dell’azione sovrana e della sua limitazione in caso di azione ritenuta illegittima, era affrontato attraverso una complessa operazione teorica, in Diego Saavedra Fajardo, Juan de Mariana, Francisco de Quevedo, con effetti sulla prassi del comportamento cortese. Come Marangolo lascia intendere, non ci si poteva esimere dal fare i conti con la tradizione del realismo politico, emersa nelle corti italiane cent’anni prima: il paradigma di controllo delle passioni del *princeps* è un paradigma che verso l’eredità machiavelliana non può che assumere una postura ambivalente. Il teatro di Calderón fu l’elaborazione drammatica di una riflessione giuridica costante nel tessuto politico dell’Impero e, indubbiamente, si presentava come elemento della scena della nuova costruzione ideologica assolutista, nel suo tentativo estremo di ristabilire l’ordine metafisico del potere, narrativizzandone la parabola in un *mythos* di apprendistato cortigiano e gesuitico del *princeps*, il Segi-

smundo de *La vida es sueño*, che conferma la possibilità di un arbitrio libero ma giusto, sconfessando la profezia deterministica di Basilio.

Il capitolo su Racine, poi, è anche un confronto serrato con un classico, *Le dieu caché* (1959) di Lucien Goldmann. Se *Phèdre* ha un ruolo analogo a quello de *La vida es sueño*, cioè quello di salvare la trascendenza *in extremis*, attraverso quella che Walter Benjamin, rifunzionalizzando una formula di Gracián, definirebbe una *ponderación misteriosa*, i drammi intramondani, come *Bajazet* e *Mithridate*, rendono più evidenti le contraddizioni dell'afflato, l'esigenza, nei termini di Goldmann, della *totalità*, ricostruita dopo la sua miniaturizzazione. La parabola della tragedia moderna, riemersa in un'epoca di crisi, è descritta dunque da Marangolo come progressivo diffrangersi del nesso fra parola e azione, fra funzione lirica ed epica, fra coro e *mythos*:

La tragedia si adatta alla modernità perché quest'ultima pensa la sua forma basata sulla gestione dell'ambiguità come una totalità etica: l'impossibilità di adattare il modello della tragedia antica ad un'idea di azione come "totalità etica" è quindi per così dire "il seme corrotto da principio", a causa del quale si innesca il progressivo allentarsi del nesso strutturale tra le due caratteristiche di epicità e lirismo (47).

È un processo, quello tratteggiato da Marangolo, che conduce, in Lessing e nel dramma borghese, all'interiorizzazione dell'istanza lirica dalla pretesa gnomico-universalistica del coro all'essenza espressivo-particolaristica del soggetto moderno.

Il periodo storico che fa da sfondo ai testi teatrali attraversati da Marangolo è caratterizzato da grandi trasformazioni giuridiche, controllate dai sistemi politici in un precario equilibrio, di cui anche la scena teatrale è dispositivo, oltre che medium rappresentativo. Lo scontro fra l'istituto della monarchia e il complesso corpo politico dell'aristocrazia, che aveva percorso tutto il Medioevo, subisce ulteriori scossoni di fronte alla crisi egemonica dell'Impero spagnolo e all'emergere di compagini a vocazione nazional-territoriale, allo scontro tra di esse, ma anche di fronte a tragiche guerre intestine, fra religioni, fra ideologie. Al fondo del conflitto, però, ad esempio, tra cattolicesimo tridentino e le varie anime del protestantesimo, il vero conflitto che si fa strada è quello tra un potere trascendentale e un potere secolare. È un conflitto che si radica nella cultura europea con alcune soglie simboliche ed esperienze "discorsive" cruciali: Machiavelli, Guicciardini e il realismo politico; Lutero, la Riforma, le guerre di religione; Botero e la ragion di stato; Bodin, Hobbes e la sfaccettata teorizzazione dell'assolutismo; la Guerra dei Trent'anni e il nuovo ordine europeo che ne

derivò. Il problema della successione, che si agita come un'ossessione nella gran parte dei drammi politici tra Cinque e Seicento, è il problema del rapporto tra *natura* e *cultura*, come Marangolo ben evidenzia. Il capitale simbolico, e la falsa coscienza, dello stato assoluto fa in modo che non si distinguano i rapporti politici da quelli naturali. Avviene anche stavolta attraverso l'istituzione, ormai artificiale, di un sistema d'interconnessione, ricostruita da Tillyard in *The Elizabethan World Picture* (1942), fra il microcosmo del corpo politico e il macrocosmo della *natura*. È la costruzione ideologica restituita saggiamente da Marangolo attraverso la riproduzione dell'antiporta alla *Sphæra civitatis* di John Case, in cui il corpo politico di Elisabetta, la sua *iustitia immobilis*, abbraccia un modello cosmico di cerchi concentrici (153-155). Il ritorno della tragedia, dunque, è letto da Marangolo come espressione della crisi di questo organicismo trascendentale del potere. La sua funzione sarebbe quella di sconfiggere l'ordine assolutistico da cui essa stessa emergeva.

L'autore affronta la complessità del tempo storico, quello dell'assolutismo, in cui si staglia la tragedia moderna, assumendo una postura che sembra animata da una metafora biologica, cara a una tradizione formalista e post-formalista: la scommessa sembra quella di descrivere e interpretare la forma culturale della tragedia come se fosse una forma di vita, descrivibile, strutturalmente, nel suo processo di ontogenesi e, soprattutto, storicamente, nel suo processo di filogenesi; ma con la consapevolezza, fornita dallo Šklovskij lettore di *Guerra e pace*, della storicità cangiante di un *procedimento* a seconda del contesto in cui s'innesta: "quando una forma entra in contatto con un nuovo contesto, viene da esso come forzata dall'interno attraverso un processo di rifunzionalizzazione" (47). Sul quesito riguardante la rinnovata attività, nell'Europa del XVI e XVII secolo, della forma tragica, dopo il suo apogeo nella Atene del V secolo a.C., gli studiosi si confrontano ininterrottamente almeno a partire dai primi romantici tedeschi, dai fratelli Schlegel. Eppure, il dibattito sulle fisionomie del tragico nel moderno non si può definire risolto, soprattutto per l'eterogeneità di approcci (filologico-testuale; storico-semantic, scenico-performativo, teorico-filosofico, ecc.) attraverso cui l'oggetto della tragedia è stato e continua ad essere giustamente affrontato. È un serbatoio di riflessioni potenziali inesauribili, derivate dalla pluralità di contesti e di modalità produttive da cui emerge la drammaturgia europea della prima modernità. Di questa esplosione simbolica, che si realizzò nel teatro europeo tra Cinque e Seicento, è necessario tentare di interpretare in modo più circospetto possibile i tasselli ideologici, provando

a restituirne, pur preservando le specificità delle singole esperienze drammatiche, un'immagine complessiva. A questa esigenza risponde certamente il libro di Marangolo. Nello sviluppare la sua tesi, l'autore seleziona equilibratamente le sconfinite bibliografie sul canone drammaturgico europeo del Seicento. Marangolo riesce a far interagire in modo coerente strumenti euristici attinti da tradizioni di pensiero diverse, riorientandoli nelle forme di una scrittura dimostrativa piuttosto chiara seppur nella complessità degli strumenti chiamati in causa. Il libro si qualifica, dunque, come un innovativo, per ambizione teorica e organizzazione concettuale, strumento di ricerca.

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Giampiero Moretti, *Estetica e comparatistica*, Brescia, Morcelliana, 2021, 142 pp., € 13,00.

Tutti gli scritti di Giampiero Moretti – autore ben noto alla germanistica, in particolare per quanto riguarda lo studio del periodo romantico – testimoniano di un magistero intellettuale segnato da un confronto incessante non solo con gli scrittori tedeschi tra fine Settecento e primo Ottocento, ma specialmente con le questioni teoriche sottese al campo disciplinare dell'estetica, che Moretti ha sempre concepito come una nozione filosofica in senso ampio, non solo in chiave storico-artistica.

Questo volume riflette pienamente questa tendenza, con una ulteriore, significativa questione teorica, già contenuta nella seconda parte del titolo: il fatto cioè che tali interrogativi teorico-estetici appaiano qui collegati – e si vedrà in che modo – al campo della comparazione storico-letteraria. Nel titolo dunque si espongono subito le ragioni più profonde di uno studio del genere, che si presenta nella forma di una sorta di dittico in cui estetica e comparatistica non risultano semplicemente giustapposte, ma combinate in nome di ciò che Moretti definisce, presentando il lavoro, come una “ ‘presa lieve’, che legge senz’altro la letteratura a partire dal suo fondamento estetico, grazie al quale la scrittura poetica, filosofica e/o letteraria è (talvolta) riuscita a individuare e persino a raccontare l’invisibile del e nel reale” (8). In questa dichiarazione di intenti, scritta rivendicando una levità d’approccio che non recede però mai dalla fermezza metodologica, si ritrovano almeno due preziose indicazioni per il lettore: da un lato, una nozione sorprendentemente dinamica della nozione di estetica (sorprendente almeno per chi scrive, che per mestiere si occupa principalmente di letteratura, e dunque parla qui un po’ da profano), come testimonia anche, ad esempio e in tutt’altro contesto, l’ultimo libro di Federico Vercellone (*L’età illegittima. Estetica e politica*, Milano, Raffaello Cortina, 2022); dall’altro perché testimonia di una nozione di letteratura come un dispositivo che racconta dell’invisibile “del e nel reale” – come cioè qualcosa che si pone in diretta comunicazione, intensamente

ma enigmaticamente, con il piano del reale, producendo dunque una serie di “immagini” che acquisiscono e danno al contempo senso.

È in fondo la stessa cosa che Moretti sostiene nel primo capitolo della prima parte che compone questo “dittico” (composto appunto di vari capitoli, che si raccolgono in due parti intitolate rispettivamente “Estetica e letteratura” e “Conradiana”), quando afferma che la svolta ermeneutica e anche antropologica che informa di sé la *Romantik* tedesca tra Sette e Ottocento si fonda su “un’osmosi programmatica di elementi che poggia (e funziona) sulla necessità della trasformazione” di estetica e letteratura, che su questo piano si incontrano e mutano, venendo caratterizzate “come *poetiche* manifestazioni di un’unità in perenne movimento” (16). Quello che insomma programmaticamente viene evocato come un gradiente teorico che segna il piano di intersezione tra estetica e letteratura, è anche – a livello storico – ciò che attraversa e produce il modello programmaticamente metamorfico della *Romantik*. La centralità ermeneutica di questo momento irripetibile e fondativo della letteratura e dello spirito tedeschi si riflette infatti anche nella profonda e originaria interconnessione di estetica e germanistica, come ricorda Moretti in apertura del capitolo successivo (25): che è poi il motivo (inter-)disciplinare che si ricordava in apertura circa la posizione dell’autore rispetto a questo specifico campo di interesse. Sono queste, in fondo, le medesime ragioni che portano poi l’autore, in conclusione di questa prima parte, a parlare di *fine* dell’estetica: partendo cioè da stupore e meraviglia come precondizioni *filosofiche* di un atteggiamento fondamentalmente non filosofico, Moretti segnala infatti come questo atteggiamento abbia portato a una evoluzione dell’estetica che culmina poi con la sua profonda ideologizzazione avvenuta in Germania negli anni Venti e Trenta del XX secolo, specialmente ad opera di Alfred Baeumler (filosofo che sposerà la causa nazista); un processo che esaspererà il “carattere fenomenico-auratico” dell’estetica, che sarà proprio quello cui l’estetica dopo il 1945 rinuncerà (44). In tal modo Moretti constata l’heideggeriana fine della metafisica, che sarà anche fine della filosofia (e quindi dell’estetica) intesa come fine della sua *presenza* (e sarebbe interessante incrociare questa diagnosi con quella simile di De Martino); una fine però che ha portato con sé anche la liquidazione di qualsiasi altro orizzonte fondativo che la disciplina intenda darsi – la fine del fine dell’estetica, insomma, per dirla con un gioco di parole che usa anche l’autore.

A questa altezza del ragionamento Moretti aggiunge una serie di riflessioni sulla teoria della letteratura, che aprono alla seconda parte dello studio: se cioè l’esperienza estetica “non nasce né si sviluppa all’interno di una teoria e, ancor meno, di una riflessione filosofica sull’arte”, ciò implica che “l’esperienza sensibile

di una dimensione vitale che viene gradualmente identificata come ‘estetica’ si presenta [...] nella forma di un *impatto* con ‘qualcosa’ che viene vissuto come ‘bello’” (83). Tornando cioè alle fonti teoretiche dell’estetica (quelle per intenderci della *Romantik* nella sua fase migliore) l’autore propone una riattivazione in senso teoreticamente “forte” dell’estetica in quanto esperienza che, concentrandosi sulla “sensibilità, che è fundamentalmente e implicitamente comparativa” (86), realizza una nuova estetica *comparativa*, che proprio in quanto tale rifugge dalle tentazioni ideologizzanti che l’hanno “infettata” nella prima metà del secolo scorso. Il che significa concretamente: postulare, anzi praticare una estetica comparatistica che sia “in costante ampliamento verso ‘l’altro e il diverso’, non fissandoli in una sorta di galleria figurale priva di fondamenti, ma considerandoli come categorie ermeneuticamente dense e teoreticamente fondative.

È dunque a partire da queste ampie, forti e assolutamente condivisibili premesse che lo studio si apre alla seconda parte, che intende mettere in pratica tali postulati teorici verificandoli in una serie di case-studies tutti organizzati intorno alla figura di Joseph Conrad, su cui Moretti esprime idee e propone angoli interpretativi originali e convincenti: dalla rilettura di *Cuore di tenebra* partendo da Bachofen, cioè dalla connessione tra mito e simbolo (che è una delle *issues* teoretiche più rilevanti della *Romantik*); alla relazione della produzione dello scrittore polacco con la nozione (goethiana e romantica) di *Weltliteratur*, in cui ne va – nello specifico in *Under Western Eyes* – della nozione “comparativa” tra le letterature ed i mondi, e dunque anche del processo di rinvenimento della sua verità intesa come “amalgama spirituale capace di modellare narrativamente i ‘fatti’” (115); al riesame, infine, de *La linea d’ombra* alla luce di categorie specificamente tedesco-estetiche come *Stimmung*, “che nella narrazione di Conrad assume l’aspetto del *cambiamento* nel passaggio dalla giovinezza alla maturità” (123) – un cambiamento, sottolinea Moretti, che non è solo interiore, ma che intende accordare l’essere umano con l’assoluto.

Un libro prezioso, insomma, che esplora territori noti, ma con strumenti di indagine del tutto nuovi, sia nella loro correlazione che – soprattutto – nella loro applicazione fecondamente (cioè teoreticamente) interdisciplinare, che si mantiene lieve nell’esposizione delle sue linee programmatiche, ma senza dubbio forte nella rivendicazione di un suo statuto ontologicamente ben fondato.

GABRIELE GUERRA
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Emanuela Piga Bruni, *La macchina fragile. L'inconscio artificiale fra letteratura, cinema, televisione*, Roma, Carocci, 2022, 180 pp., € 19,00.

La macchina fragile rappresenta un esempio virtuoso di integrazione critica multidisciplinare fra i *consciousness studies*, i *science fiction studies* e l'intelligenza artificiale. In questo volume, Piga Bruni propone un'indagine della coscienza riarticolata attraverso l'ipotesi del postumano, a partire dalla trattazione di una selezione di testi letterari, cinematografici, televisivi e d'animazione del genere sci-fi. Le opere fantascientifiche prese in esame offuscano i confini tra naturale e artificiale tramite la rappresentazione dell'uomo-macchina (robot, cyborg o androide). Piga Bruni interroga la condizione eccezionale, perturbante, indecifrabile della macchina antropomorfa definendola "fragile", e sottolineando come in questa fragilità l'umano non possa che rispecchiarsi. La scelta di adottare un approccio comparativista ha il merito di aprire lo sguardo del lettore verso un ampio orizzonte testuale, evidenziando come l'interesse della *science fiction* per la coscienza sia in realtà un fenomeno transnazionale le cui declinazioni locali sono soggette ad una ricorrente contaminazione.

Nel primo capitolo viene introdotto il dilemma ontologico relativo ai confini della coscienza, facendo riferimento principalmente a Douglas R. Hofstadter. La discussione verte sul discrimine dell'intenzionalità come tratto distintivo nel processo di riconoscimento della coscienza artificiale e di sviluppo dell'autocoscienza artificiale. Dall'ipotesi riduzionista, il discorso muove verso le prospettive offerte dalla psicoanalisi freudiana e lacaniana fino alle istanze filosofiche postumaniste di Donna Haraway e Rosi Braidotti. Dopo aver fornito le chiavi metodologiche, Piga Bruni illustra brevemente la genesi letteraria della creatura artificiale (dal mito di Prometeo, al *Frankenstein* di Mary Shelley, fino ai robot di Isaac Asimov). Le premesse metodologiche e tematiche fanno da sfondo all'argomento centrale del capitolo, e più in generale dell'intero volume, vale a dire quello della relazione tra umano e uomo-macchina. Tale

relazione, che “provoca negli osservatori sentimenti perturbanti (*uncanny*), di disagio e repulsione” (23), dà forma al *topos* del doppio e a quello della rivolta, e, secondo Piga Bruni, conduce inevitabilmente alla necessità rappresentativa del dialogo indiziario/psicanalitico tra umano e creatura artificiale. Gli esempi presi in considerazione provengono dai racconti di Asimov e di Philip K. Dick. Se in Asimov l’interrogatorio si fonda sulle famose “Tre Leggi della Robotica”, Dick inserisce il criterio dell’empatia “per stabilire i confini (e sfumarli successivamente) tra l’umano e il simulacro” (32).

Il secondo capitolo è interamente dedicato all’estetica cyberpunk. Qui, il lettore è invitato a rintracciare le origini dell’ontologia cyborg a partire dagli anni ‘80 e ‘90, quando la tecnologia inizia a farsi spazio “sotto la nostra pelle e dentro le nostre menti” (40). Le riflessioni sull’impatto della tecnologia sul corpo umano e le preoccupazioni sulle conseguenze distopiche del progresso tecnologico su ambiente e società danno origine a opere narrative del calibro di *Ghost in the Shell* (1989-1991), il manga di Masamune Shirow, opera tanto efficace da generare un piccolo universo transmediale. Piga Bruni si concentra sulla trasposizione di *Ghost in the Shell* in anime (1995) e sugli interrogativi sollevati da alcuni dialoghi tra le “macchine morbide” protagoniste della storia di Mamoru Oshii: il confine tra naturale e artificiale, la relazione tra conscio e inconscio, lo scontro tra condizione di servitù e desiderio di autodeterminazione, le conseguenze dell’acquisizione dell’autocoscienza. Il capitolo si chiude proprio con l’autoriconoscimento del cyborg, un atto di trascendenza, letto da Piga Bruni come sintomo della nascita di una coscienza dalla forma ibrida e svincolata dai limiti dettati dall’antropocentrismo.

Westworld (2016-2022), la celebre serie televisiva di Jonathan Nolan e Linda Joy, ispirata dall’omonimo film del 1973 di Michael Crichton, è invece protagonista indiscussa del terzo capitolo. Piga Bruni mette l’accento sui risvolti etici dell’oppressione delle creature artificiali – gli *host* del parco divertimenti a tema West –, sulle connotazioni allegoriche del labirinto di *Westworld*, “metafora della memoria” (84) e “simbolo della complessità” (86) e poi, ancora, sull’emersione della coscienza individuale e collettiva, tassello fondamentale per la rivolta degli androidi. La scelta di offrire una lettura comparata di *Westworld*, di alcune *Ficciones* di Jorge Luis Borges (1944-1946) e dei celebri romanzi di Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland* (1865) e *Through the Looking Glass* (1871), è significativa, poiché segnala al lettore quanto profonde siano le radici di alcuni archetipi del genere fantascientifico. Ancora più utile è il confronto tra

Westworld film e *Westworld* serie, che indica il superamento della dicotomia uomo/creatura artificiale. Dove Crichton adoperava il motivo del guasto tecnico per giustificare la ribellione degli *host*, Nolan e Joy attribuiscono agli *host* quella che Piga Bruni chiama “coscienza artificiale” (77).

Infine, il quarto capitolo è rivolto all’analisi del romanzo di Ian McEwan, *Machines Like Me and People Like You* (2019), un’opera la cui “particolarità [...] risiede nell’inserimento degli stilemi del realismo in una struttura temporale ucronica” (111). A fare da sfondo alla narrazione è una Gran Bretagna alternativa degli anni ‘80 in cui Alan Turing è ancora vivo e la tecnologia è abbastanza avanzata da garantire la produzione di umanoidi perfettamente realistici. Adam è una di queste creature artificiali e, insieme a Charlie e Miranda, i suoi proprietari, è uno dei personaggi chiave del romanzo. Piga Bruni evidenzia come lo scontro tra l’etica razionale di Adam e la morale di Charlie e Miranda – che culmina tragicamente con la distruzione di Adam ad opera di Charlie – non solo ribadisca la condizione di vulnerabilità della creatura artificiale nella duplice accezione di “ferente” e ferito, ma sollevi anche una questione etica: “l’evento rappresentato costituisce, nello spazio del testo, un crimine?” (119). Oltre alla controversia giuridica, è estremamente rilevante il commento alla scelta narratologica di McEwan di raccontare la realtà fittizia esclusivamente dal punto di vista umano. In questa scelta Piga Bruni legge il rifiuto dell’autore di impadronirsi del punto di vista inaccessibile di un’intelligenza non umana. La questione del parlare dell’altro, ma non per l’altro, richiama le istanze dell’ecocritica e della critica postcoloniale e inserisce i *science fiction studies* all’interno di un dibattito accademico di più ampio respiro. Altra intersezione degna di nota è sicuramente quella rilevata all’interno del discorso di Piga Bruni sull’empatia, che rimanda agli *affect studies* e alla comprensione del carattere esperienziale della letteratura. L’analisi di *Machines Like Me* si conclude con il ritorno sul tema della fragilità. Piga Bruni chiarisce come l’idea della macchina fragile sia veicolata da McEwan tramite la risoluzione delle asimmetrie esplicitate nel corso della narrazione, che trovano infine un labile equilibrio nel rispecchiamento cognitivo uomo-macchina e nel riconoscimento di una reciproca vulnerabilità.

A chiudere il volume è un saggio di Christiano Presutti, che colloca storicamente e culturalmente il tema dell’intelligenza artificiale, concentrandosi in particolare sulle alleanze stabilite alla fine del XIX secolo tra scienze e discipline umanistiche. Presutti offre inoltre un brevissimo riassunto dei fiumi di studi

prodotti nel corso dei secoli sulla coscienza e sulla sua replicabilità, sottolineando che ad oggi la coscienza artificiale resta un enigma e che “ipotesi conclusive sono ancora oltre ogni orizzonte di ricerca” (159).

La macchina fragile merita attenzione in più ambiti disciplinari, poiché invita a interrogarsi sul ruolo giocato dalla fantascienza nella problematizzazione dell’idea di coscienza umana e artificiale, adottando un approccio interdisciplinare e transmediale. Il vantaggio dell’adozione di una prospettiva comparativista che raccoglie esempi testuali dal Giappone, dal Regno Unito, dagli Stati Uniti e dall’Argentina, è tuttavia ancora limitato dalla preponderanza di un panorama che raccoglie le culture globali dei paesi sviluppati, soprattutto quella inglese e anglo-americana. In futuro, sarebbe interessante aprire ulteriormente l’indagine, rivolgendosi anche alla fantascienza del sud globale – come quella indiana, medio-orientale e africana –, aggiungendo nuove implicazioni ontologiche ed epistemologiche all’immaginario della creatura artificiale.

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Paolo Tortonese, *L'uomo in azione. Letteratura e mimesis da Aristotele a Zola*. Roma, Carocci, 2023, 196 pp., € 22,00.

A fine Settecento Schiller confessava a Goethe di essersi reso conto che, fino a quel momento, Aristotele era stato capito male. Il libro di Tortonese – *L'uomo in azione. Letteratura e mimesis da Aristotele a Zola*, Roma, Carocci, 2023 – parte da una convinzione simile e tenta di fare chiarezza attorno alla nozione di *mimesis*. Ripercorrendo il tortuoso percorso di questo concetto, l'autore interroga un'idea fortemente instabile partendo dal X libro della *Repubblica* di Platone e arrivando al Naturalismo francese. Si tratta di un itinerario che si assume “il rischio delle ipotesi di lungo periodo” (9) e che mira alla comprensione dell'evolversi – e del corrompersi – dell'idea aristotelica più persistente nella storia della letteratura occidentale.

L'uomo in azione è articolato in tre momenti che ricalcano una struttura dialettica. Agli estremi troviamo la Grecia classica e la modernità tardo ottocentesca, mentre a far da cerniera c'è il Seicento, periodo di transizione che riscrive la teoria aristotelica preparando il terreno per le interpretazioni successive. Ogni capitolo parte da una domanda (*Antichità: imitare o rappresentare?*; *Classicismo: dire il vero o dire bene?*; *Naturalismo: descrivere o raccontare?*) e la trattazione fa leva su un approccio metodologico che si situa conflittualmente sul crinale tra storia e teoria. Sfidando la rigida suddivisione delle discipline accademiche, Tortonese parte consapevolmente da una “posizione scomoda” per far sì che “la teoria diventi storica e che la storia diventi teorica” (9). Perciò, unendo l'“ambizione” dell'idea alla “modestia” del dato, il volume tenta di fare i conti con “la storia di un grande malinteso” (12) e di interrogarsi sul lascito del concetto di *mimesis* lungo i secoli. Concetto che, va precisato, l'autore sceglie di tradurre con ‘rappresentazione’, e non con ‘imitazione’, per sottolineare tanto il richiamo alla tradizione teatrale, quanto la dimensione produttiva dell'attività mimetica.

La ricostruzione storica di Tortonese prende piede dalla smentita aristotelica di Platone e dalla disputa secolare che ne è conseguita. L'autore mette in luce la

valorizzazione della *mimesis* sostenuta nella *Poetica* e sottolinea la valenza filosofica di questo concetto: il racconto, per Aristotele, porta a conoscenza mediante l'innescamento dei meccanismi di funzionamento e riconoscimento della realtà. La dimensione conoscitiva, in breve, risiede nella facoltà di astrazione categoriale della forma da un oggetto: conoscere implica dunque un riconoscere, e la capacità del poeta sta nell'offrire immagini intelleggibili. In questo senso, l'arte viene svincolata dalla sterilità affibbiata dal platonismo e viene connotata in senso dinamico e produttivo. Dalla prospettiva della storia delle idee, la mutazione del concetto è "appassionante" (33), ma l'indagine non si ferma qui perché serve fare chiarezza sulla 'verosimiglianza' – principio di paternità aristotelica distorto da una lunga tradizione ermeneutica. Il verosimile, spiega Tortonese, è un "criterio che permette di riconoscere il buon prodotto mimetico" (32), e produce attivamente conoscenza grazie allo svelamento dei nessi causa-effetto. La risorsa intellettuale del sillogismo, quindi, sta nel cogliere il rapporto analogico tra le cose; l'analogia cessa così di essere specchio ingannatore (Platone) e chiarifica organicamente il legame tra gli oggetti. Ma, dato che "le vie delle idee sono infinite" (33), il principio di verosimiglianza subirà una mutazione nel corso dei secoli e il valore della persuasione, inizialmente posto al servizio dell'atto conoscitivo, assumerà prevalenza assoluta nel classicismo. È per questo motivo che per Tortonese risulta complesso muoversi nel territorio chiaroscuro dei "discepoli e traditori" che hanno forgiato uno "pseudo-Aristotele" (Weinberg, "From Aristotle to Pseudo-Aristotle", *Comparative Literature* 5, 1953, p. 104) rendendo ancor più instabili i suoi concetti.

Dopo aver percorso un itinerario lungo i libri della *Poetica* e aver sottolineato la coerenza di un sistema che non resta estraneo a logica, etica e retorica, il secondo capitolo si sofferma su alcune interpretazioni della verosimiglianza dalla latinità al Seicento. Innanzitutto, per evitare di schiacciare l'eredità aristotelica sul versante poetico, Tortonese ne valorizza la metafisica, spezza la banale opposizione tra il suo empirismo e l'idealismo platonico e quindi corregge la schematizzazione fatta da Meyer H. Abrams in *The Mirror and the Lamp* (Oxford, Oxford UP, 1953). In questo frangente conta soprattutto illustrare quali siano stati i punti di rottura che hanno modificato la concezione della *mimesis*: in breve, a partire dalla trattatistica di Cicerone si indebolisce quel contrasto tra vero e verosimile che, diventando pura *inventio*, rimuove il problema della conoscenza. La preoccupazione per la retorica dunque predomina al punto che l'interesse per il 'convincere' scavalca quello per il 'conoscere', schiacciando così la verosimiglianza sull'opinione comune, sul giudizio morale, sulla *bienséance*. Con soluzione di continuità, da Quintiliano

a Racine, si assiste insomma a una divisione del gusto in segmenti e alla separazione tra coorte e città, come insegna Auerbach. Sebbene per noi oggi, sottolinea Tortonese, “la mescolanza di pregiudizi morali, di preoccupazioni filosofiche e di esigenze retoriche ha qualcosa di inaccettabile” (80), l'emersione di un'istanza censoria diventa imperativa nel classicismo. È la reazione che questa dottrina adotta quando si ritrova a fare i conti con la frattura tra universale e particolare: sarà quindi l'ideale dell'*honnête homme* a mediare tra questi due poli e a incarnare un modo soggettivato di accedere a verità universali. Si tratta di una tappa intermedia in cui l'aristotelismo non scompare, ma cambia pelle: persiste intatta l'idea dell'organizzazione dell'opera mentre muta radicalmente il valore del verosimile, che viene privato della sua dimensione euristica a favore di quella persuasiva.

La terza frattura si situa nell'Ottocento, secolo trattato in un capitolo che si apre con una domanda dall'eco lukácsiana, *Descrivere o raccontare?* Il critico qui affronta quella “dichiarazione di guerra” (87) ai principî neoclassici che reinterpretano ancora la concezione del verosimile. Con i Goncourt la figura dell'*honnête homme* si frantuma e lascia spazio allo scienziato: il narratore trasforma per l'ennesima volta il compito di una *mimesis* che ora non deve più correggere, bensì sconvolgere. Si fa strada dunque una “rivoluzione soggettivista” (94) che mina il primato dell'oggettività pur senza allontanarsi dai principî aristotelici. Infatti, come comprendiamo attraverso il problema della descrizione letteraria – vero tormento per Zola – l'aristotelismo permane sottotraccia e influenza ingentemente la teorizzazione del romanzo sperimentale. Se l'autore dei *Rougon-Macquart* riconosce il primato del Racconto e del Soggetto, questo significa anche che il romanzo non è una mera riproposizione dei fatti, ma che – aristotelicamente – è una forma che presenta un'organizzazione di quegli stessi rivelandone i meccanismi. La finzione, pertanto, continua a mantenere la sua valenza conoscitiva e a tendere alla ricerca del vero. Ma allora, si chiede Tortonese, questo implica che per Zola il romanzo è solo una forma provvisoria? Un genere adottato mentre si attende la nascita di una forma totalmente veridica? Il critico si muove in un conflitto ermeneutico irrisolto convogliando diversi contributi (Hamon, Thorel-Cailleteau, Mitterand) e infine chiarisce che per Zola il romanzo è un “prolungamento logico dell'analisi” (139), ma che tuttavia non bisogna far coincidere totalmente lo scienziato e il narratore. Il merito di Zola, in questo senso, sta nell'aver unito narrativa e ipotesi sperimentale; nell'aver saputo adattare l'aristotelismo alle volontà del naturalismo (142). Conta il fatto che con Zola si giunge finalmente al superamento della pregiudiziale nei confronti della descrizione, si scinde tra

psicologia e morale e, come vuole Auerbach, si conferisce dignità narrativa alla sfera del corporale. Nell'articolata trattazione di Tortonese rimane centrale fino alla fine l'insistenza sul portato aristotelico insito nel naturalismo, poetica che ripristina il principio del verosimile e mette al centro, una volta per tutte, proprio quell'uomo in azione che dà il titolo al volume.

Percorrendo il volume, al lettore non sfuggirà la sorprendente assenza di riferimenti diretti a Lukács, il quale però appare nella sezione finale del libro contenente due "Postille". Si tratta di un dittico finale – *L'ultimo aristotelico* e *L'ultimo retore* – dedicato rispettivamente al critico ungherese e a Genette. Nel primo si riflette sul celebre saggio del 1936 in cui Lukács, dando primato assoluto all'azione, si fa sostenitore di un aristotelismo tanto spinto da portare a una miopia nei confronti di una grossa fetta di letteratura europea. Tuttavia, ciò non porta Tortonese a non riconoscergli il merito di aver chiarito i legami tra naturalismo e modernismo. La seconda postilla, invece, fa i conti con il Genette di *Figure II* senza sottrarsi al conflitto critico: da un lato, per Tortonese sovrapporre la visione di Platone con quella di Aristotele non è filosoficamente accettabile; dall'altro, l'approccio genettiano al testo ha comportato un "divorzio" (168) tra critica e lettura gravido di ripercussioni sul ruolo della prima.

A volume concluso emerge nettamente il primato del valore conoscitivo di un'arte, la letteratura, che da Aristotele in poi si svincola dall'attività meramente estetica battendo nuovi sentieri. Ma oltre alla persuasiva disamina sul problematico percorso del pensiero aristotelico, c'è di più: dopo *L'œil de Platon* (Kimé, Paris, 2006), Tortonese parte ancora una volta da lontano e fuga le incertezze, trasmette un'eredità metodologica utile a far chiarezza su tanta altra letteratura e, tra teoria e storia, tenta coraggiosamente di inseguire la "verità" – "Non si può entrare nel gioco dell'interpretazione [...] senza porsi la questione della verità" (146).

Infine, va detto che tutt'oggi non sembra vano continuare a interrogarsi sul ruolo e sulla fortuna dell'aristotelismo. La recente crescita della non-fiction, della testimonianza e del resoconto letterario segnano, forse, un ritorno – consapevole o meno – a una forma di condanna platonica nei confronti dei mondi finzionali. Perciò, ancora oggi, un richiamo alla teoria aristotelica, intesa nel valore conoscitivo della *mimesis* e nella sua possibile incidenza sull'azione umana, non può che giovare.

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