

Annick Paternoster

5 *Che ti venga* NP, a conventionalised impoliteness formula for Italian disease curses (14th–20th century)

Abstract: This essay argues that the Italian formula *che ti venga* NP is a conventionalised linguistic expression of impoliteness, particularly as a disease curse, from the fourteenth to the twentieth century. Still used in contemporary Italian, examples such as *che ti venga il gavocciolo* ('may a plague sore take you') appear in medieval legislative texts and judicial records. Theologically, these curses were deemed sinful and blasphemous.

Drawing on two historical corpora – the *CORpus Diacronico dell'Italiano* (CODIT) and an eighteenth-century corpus of Carlo Goldoni's dramatic oeuvre – the study finds 132 instances of the curse. Quantitative analysis examines subjunctive and pronoun use, word order, intensifiers, and disease nouns, revealing a preference for severe illnesses like the plague and rabies. The qualitative analysis focuses on rare benedictive uses, reinforcing the hypothesis that *che ti venga* NP is predominantly impolite. Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century pedagogical texts provide further metapragmatic evidence of its conventionalised status. This interdisciplinary approach fills a research gap by highlighting the syntactic stability of the *Che ti venga* NP phrase over centuries, paving the way for cross-cultural comparisons of similar expressions.

Keywords: *Che ti venga* NP, disease curses, cursing, Italian, impoliteness, conventionalised expressions, maledictions, swearing

1 Introduction

This paper was prompted by an analysis of *impoliteness* in the theatre play *La Lena*, written by Ludovico Ariosto and performed in 1528 at the Este court in Ferrara (Paternoster 2015: 131–165). Renaissance comedies portray conflict, disorder, corruption, etc. outside the court, with happy endings celebrating ducal rule. Unsurprisingly, the genre is rich in impolite exchanges. Lena, an aging prostitute

Annick Paternoster, University of Lugano, Istituto di Studi italiani, Palazzo nero, Via Buffi 13, 6900 Lugano, Switzerland, e-mail: annick.paternoster@usi.ch

exploited both by her husband pimp and her lover, directs verbal abuse at anybody thwarting her attempts at making some extra money. The play includes eight occurrences of a *disease curse*, four pronounced by Lena. Examples (1) to (8) come from Ariosto (2007 [1528]):¹

- (1) *Deh, ti venga il malanno!*
oh 2SG.DAT come.SBJV.3SG the calamity
Oh, a calamity strike you! [lit. 'Oh, that to you may come the calamity!']
- (2) *Oh, che ti venga il mal di Santo Antonio!*
oh COMP 2SG.DAT come.SBJV.3SG the disease of Saint Anthony
Oh, Saint Anthony's fire get you! [lit. 'Oh, that to you may come the disease of Saint Anthony!']
- (3) *Cancar ti venga*
canker 2SG.DAT come.SBJV.3SG
'May you rot'² [lit. 'Canker to you may come!']
- (4) *Brutto impiccato, che ti venghi il cancaro!*
nasty hanged.man.VOC COMP 2SG.DAT come.SBJV.3SG the canker
'Nasty man, you deserve to be hanged, may you rot! [lit. 'Nasty hanged man, that to you may come the canker!']
- (5) *Che la fistola Ti venga!*
COMP the fistula 2SG.DAT come.SBJV.3SG
'A running fistula take you! [lit. 'That to you may come the fistula!']
- (6) *Deh, manigoldo, ti venga la fistula!*
oh hangman.VOC 2SG.DAT come.SBJV.3SG the fistula
'Oh, hangman, a running fistula take you! [lit. 'Oh, hangman, to you may come the fistula!']
- (7) *Doh, che ti venga il morbo!*
oh COMP 2SG.DAT come.SBJV.3SG the plague
'Oh, the plague take you!' [lit. 'Oh, that to you may come the plague!']

¹ In a handful of longer examples, only the part of the example relevant to the curse will be glossed. Respectful uses of the pronouns *voi/vi/vostro* addressing a single recipient are glossed with POL. I provide a free and a literal translation; all translations are mine. Rather than translating with a medical term, I use the historical disease term to maintain the negative valence associated with it. The most helpful bilingual dictionary was Florio (1598).

² *Cancar* indicates a festering or ulcerative sore, a canker. This translation occurs in Palermo (1755: 342).

- (8) *Che venir possa il morbo a mastro Lazzaro*
 COMP come.INF may.SBJV.3SG the plague to master Lazzaro
 ‘May the plague take master Lazzaro’ [lit. ‘That to master Lazzaro may come the plague’]
Che m’ Arrecò alle man questa casipula!
 COMP 1SG.DAT bring.PST.3SG to the hands this hovel
 ‘who got me this hovel’ [lit. ‘who brought me into the hands this hovel!’]

Angry characters wish for diseases – including the plague – or severe misfortune to happen to someone else. Note the recurrent use of the verb *venire* ‘to come’, in the present subjunctive, to express a wish, with or without the conjunction *che* ‘that’. The disease is the subject of the verb, translating to ‘may this disease come to you!’. Less literal translations are ‘this disease get/take you!’. The indirect object is expressed with the personal pronoun of the 2nd person singular *ti* ‘you’, but example (8) uses a Noun Phrase indicating a third person *mastro Lazzaro* ‘master Lazzaro’. Also in (8), *venire* ‘to come’ is used with the modal verb *potere* in the present subjunctive: *possa venire* ‘may come’. These examples suggest *che ti venga* NP is a *conventionalised impoliteness formula* for disease curses (Culpeper 2011: 120–139; see also Culpeper, Van Dorst and Gillings, this volume). I test this hypothesis in two historical corpora.

Research into impoliteness in Old Italian utilises judicial records from central Italian communes (e.g., Marcheschi 1983; Breschi 1994; Fantappiè 2000; Larson 2004). When victims reported verbal abuse to a notary, the offence was noted in Latin, but from the thirteenth century the offensive words were increasingly quoted in the vernacular. *Verba iniuriosa* (literally, ‘unlawful words’, from Latin *in-ius* ‘not-law’) cover insults, strong criticism, curses, and defamation. Historical insults are well researched. Although historians are interested in how insults interact with law, hierarchy and gender, they focus on semantics to uncover the values of Italian medieval society, i.e. purity, loyalty and, mainly, honour (Burke 1987; Lesnick 1991; Dean 2007; Vise 2015, 2025; Lett 2018; Raveggi 2018).³ Dardano et al. (1992) and Alfonzetti and Spampinato Beretta (2012) pioneered studies on the syntactic structure of insults, listing:

- derogatory nouns, which may be accompanied by adjectives: *Sossa puttana marcia* [dirty rotten whore] (Dardano et al. 1992: 13);
- a declarative *tu sei* ‘you are’ with emphasis on the personal pronoun: *Tu se’ uno mentechatto* [you are mad] (Dardano et al. 1992: 15)

³ For a semantic approach on historical insults outside Italy, for French see Delumeau (1989); Gonthier (2007); for Old Frisian Bremmer (1998); for Spanish Madero (1992). Lagorgette (1994, 2003) on French and Jucker and Taavitsainen (2000) on English use a pragmatic approach.

- multifunctional connective *che* ‘that’, for a relative clause or complement clause (or both): *Bastardo mulo che tu se* [A bastard mule that you are] (Dardano et al. 1992: 14)
- rhetorical questions: *No’ avete voi vergogna d’accompagnare le puctane?* [Are you not ashamed of accompanying the whores?] (Dardano et al. 1992: 16).⁴

Since neither Dardano et al. (1992) nor Alfonzetti and Spampinato Beretta (2012) systematically explore curses (imprecations of ill-fortune, *maledictions*), this study fills an empirical research gap.

Section 2 starts by placing curses within current impoliteness research to differentiate them from self-curses, oaths, promises, insults, swearing, and threats. However, whereas contemporary studies examine secular cursing, historical curses invoked supernatural powers and therefore they constituted a different speech act. This section zooms in on the link with theology and the legal history of *verba iniuriosa* in medieval Italy. Section 3 investigates *conventionalisation* through quantitative analysis using two historical corpora, where *che ti venga* NP is mostly maledictive. The few benedictive uses are qualitatively analysed in Section 4. Section 5 finds metapragmatic evidence of conventionalisation in two textbooks for language learning. Section 6 offers concluding remarks and pointers for future research directions.

2 Cursing

2.1 Present-day cursing

The legal perspective highlights the difference between past and present. Historically, curses were punishable by law (see Section 2.3), and their legal consequences today remain a topic of discussion on Italian legal advice websites and forums.⁵ The key point is that the law is not superstitious (Greco 2021); for Italian lawmakers, a curse cannot cause the wished-for disease and the curser has no agency. While cursing is not a criminal offence per se, it can be interpreted as defamation or a threat, both punishable by law. How to unravel these aspects of cursing? What is the link with superstition and how can curses be distinguished from other speech acts?

⁴ On insults in present-day Italian see Alfonzetti (2009, 2017) and Domaneschi (2020).

⁵ <https://forum.finanzaonline.com/threads/e-reato-dire-ti-maledico-a-qualcuno.1920926/>; <https://it.diritto.narkive.com/EZnc0uXl/insultare-e-reato-ma-maledire>; <https://it.quora.com/È-reato-augurare-la-morte-o-una-brutta-malattia-una-scongiura-ecc-a-qualcuno> (accessed 8 January 2025).

Firstly, how do curses fit into impoliteness research? Culpeper (2011: 136) considers present-day curses – such as *damn you!* – conventionalised impoliteness expressions or formulae, routinely evaluated as impolite (see also Dobrushina, this volume, who links forms, impoliteness and curses in Nakh-Daghestanian languages). Impoliteness formulae suggest that “some words and structures are more regularly perceived as impolite than others”.⁶ Terkourafi’s frame-based politeness approach (e.g. 2001, 2005) first theorised the role of conventionalisation, “understood as a three-way relationship between an expression, a context and a speaker”, that is, “an expression is conventionalised for some use relative to a context for a speaker if it is used frequently enough in that context to achieve a particular illocutionary goal to that speaker’s experience” (Terkourafi and Kadar 2017: 182). Thus, frequent use of a polite expression in a particular context makes politeness its default meaning. However, impoliteness may be conventionalised in different ways. Although less frequent, it is more noticeable, it is typically challenged, it is also shaped by exposure beyond direct interactions: “people acquire a knowledge of impoliteness formulae that far exceeds *their own direct experience of usage* of formulae associated with impolite effects”, i.e., by “indirect experience, and in particular metadiscourse” (Culpeper 2011: 130–132, italics in original). Examples of conventionalised curses include “[go] [to hell/hang yourself/fuck yourself]; [damn/fuck] [you]” (Culpeper 2011: 136). Curses wish for something bad to happen to someone, and that is why they are offensive, but in a secular Western European context they are not believed to cause actual harm. With Culpeper (2011: 23) I see impoliteness as a negative evaluation of a behaviour, verbal or not, that is perceived to be offensive or inappropriate, given the expectations of how someone would like to be treated in a certain context. Whether these expectations are more individual or social in nature, offensive behaviour tends to cause strong emotions (Culpeper and Haugh 2021).

Investigating the recurrent phraseology of late-modern French and Spanish votive formulae, López-Simo (2023) distinguishes curses from neighbouring speech acts. Curses are classified as interpersonal routine formulae (López-Simo 2023: 22). *Swearing*, like *Diable!* [What the devil!], is therefore not included in her study, because it does not typically address someone (López-Simo 2023: 23; Lagorgette 2003).⁷ Blessings or benedictions wish for something positive to happen to someone (e.g., *Que Dieu vous garde* [may God protect you]); curses or maledictions wish for something negative (e.g., *Dieu te maudisse* [God damn you], López-Simo 2023: 24). Curses differ from insults, which directly address the recipient with a negative voc-

⁶ <https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/fass/projects/impoliteness/forms.htm> (accessed 8 January 2025)

⁷ Swearing can be offensive if perceived as disrespectful or contextually inappropriate. Culpeper (2018) notes that taboo words primarily intensify impoliteness.

ative (López-Simo 2023: 25)⁸. Curses and threats differ in agency (Duranti 2004). Both want harm to befall the interlocutor, but a threat involves the speaker committing to cause the harm, whilst a curse implies no personal agency. Timing also differs: threats must seem urgent to be maximally efficacious; maledictions may take effect in an indeterminate future (on urgency in threats see Limberg 2009).

Secondly, outside present-day urban society, curses may entail a supernatural or cosmological aspect. Kádár and Szalai (2020) study contemporary ritual curses in the Gabor Roma communities (Transylvania, Romania). The Roma use curses in a supernatural, i.e., an “archetypal” way, attributing a “harmful effect to them” (Kádár and Szalai 2020: 16–17). Examples are “May your mother die! May your grandmother die!” (Kádár and Szalai 2020: 28).⁹ These curses are not to be confused with self-curses. Like López-Simo (2023: 26), Szalai (2023) does not see self-curses as a rite of aggression; rather, they are relationship-forging: the Roma wish harm unto themselves if the recipient does not accept an offer of food, as in the example “May my father die, if you don’t drink that coffee!” (Kádár and Szalai 2020: 16). Self-curses are oaths or promises. In the Old Testament “an oath, or a solemn promise, required an act of conditional self-cursing, or calling upon divine power to inflict dire punishment should the promise be broken” (Ramos 2015: 2). When cursing, the Roma invoke supernatural or cosmological powers to wish harm upon others (and occasionally upon themselves), likely reflecting an old tradition rooted in widely held beliefs that certain words, and specifically curses, possessed the power to cause real-world effects. In short, curses were believed to have magic power.

2.2 Historical cursing

Indeed, historical and contemporary curses fundamentally differ in terms of the speech act involved. Nowadays, curses may aim to intimidate and act as directives, but primarily they fall into the category of expressives, serving as expressions of anger or irritation (Searle 1979). The sincerity condition for an expressive curse is that the speaker genuinely feels the emotion or psychological state conveyed. In contrast, historical curses were believed to bring harm simply by being spoken. While sincere emotions might have accompanied the curse, these feelings were, so to speak, irrelevant to its *efficacy*. Early-Modern witchcraft trials in England

⁸ For Alfonzetti and Spampinato Beretta (2012: 2) insults directly target the interlocutor. For Culpeper (2011: 135) formulaic insults also include “personalized third-person negative references (in the hearing of the target)”.

⁹ Cursing a mother and grandmother in front of their (grand)child seems cruel, but the curses are used teasingly, in a safe space where Roma children learn about cursing (Kádár and Szalai 2020: 19–20).

offer a telling example. Culpeper and Semino (2000: 102) note how accusations of witchcraft were often based on the presence of a curse: when an older, poor woman expressed anger by wishing harm on those who had wronged her, “her words could be interpreted as a witch’s curse and be subsequently used against her in court”. In such cases, the interpretation of the speech act ‘curse’ relies on the preparatory condition that the alleged witch is believed to have a pact with a supernatural power such as the devil (Culpeper and Semino 2000: 107–109). Witches’ curses and historical curses more broadly (Danet and Bogoch 1992: 136) align with Searle’s category of declarations (1979: 16–17), where the mere act of speaking the curse was believed to bring harm. This belief is so deeply rooted that, given the appropriate context – such as when spoken by a marginalised elderly woman – a simple outburst of anger could be perceived as a declaration of supernatural hostility (see also Arnovick 1999).

Cursing dates to the ancient world. Kitz (2007: 615, 2014) notes that in the Ancient Near East deities played a central role in executing maledictions since they were viewed “as the agents who would, in one way or another, realize the requested punishment should they judge in the speaker’s favor”. In the Greco-Roman world curses were often written on lead tablets, known as *katadesmos* in Greek or *tabella defixionis* in Latin, invoking Gods to bring the cursed under the curser’s power or inflict harm or disease (Gager 1992: 21); tomb epitaphs contained curses to deter looters. The Bible contains many curses, and in the early Middle Ages Benedictine monks of northern France pronounced liturgical curses against Vikings or unruly feudal lords (Little 1993). Danet and Bogoch (1992: 132) analyse ‘whoever’ curses commonly found in Anglo-Saxon legal documents, “wills, grants or leases of land, and some royal writs”, which were included to deter anyone from violating the writer’s wishes. ‘Whoever’ curses were frequently included in medieval manuscripts to warn against tampering with the document (Baker 2023).

Vecchio (2014) offers a valuable theological distinction between vertical and horizontal dimensions of a curse, affecting either God or other humans. The Church Fathers were primarily concerned with the vertical dimension: when is a curse legitimate and thus efficacious? For sixth-century Gregory the Great, curses were only legitimate when pronounced by a serene judge acting with the righteousness of God (Vecchio 2014: 353). This view is closely tied to the concept of excommunication, where a divine pact grants the Church authority to exclude the damned from eternal salvation (Vecchio 2014: 357). However, private curses driven by anger or vengeance were considered sinful. From the thirteenth century onward, the focus shifted to the horizontal or social dimension of curses, condemning them for their lack of regard for fraternal love (Vecchio 2014: 360). Cursing God’s creations was seen as a violation of the Second Commandment (Fisher 1908). Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa Theologiae* (1920–1942: II-II, q. 76 a. 1) explains that if a man “desires another’s evil, as evil, being intent on the evil itself, then evil speaking will be

unlawful [. . .], and this is what is meant by cursing” (see Casagrande and Vecchio [1987] on the sins of the tongue). Wishing evil on someone was seen as a mortal sin.

Both swearing and cursing were considered sinful, but they also risked being prosecuted as acts of *blasphemy* by the Inquisition, which was particularly active in the latter half of the sixteenth century and throughout the seventeenth century. While the Church showed a certain tolerance for common swearing, the boundary between casual and heretical swearing – which carried severe punishments – was never clearly defined (Biasiori 2024). When cursing someone, the curser implicitly invoked God to carry out the negative wishes. This act was indirectly blasphemous because it usurped divine authority, challenging God’s exclusive right to decide whether to punish someone. The belief in the vertical (blasphemous) implications of cursing is still echoed in the eighteenth-century Italian manual *L’Uomo apostolico* (Maria 1732), a guide for confessors.¹⁰ It includes an *Esortazione X* [Exhortation X] addressing mothers prone to cursing their children, citing examples such as “Che ti venga la Peste; che ti possa rompere il Collo; Che il Diavolo ti porti, ec.” [The plague take you; may you break your neck; may the Devil take you] (Maria 1732: 290):

[. . .] essendo Egli, che per i suoi Giusti Giudizj manda la Peste, la Morte, e gli altri Mali di pena, pare, che si voglia obbligarlo ad eseguire il male iniquamente imprecato. [since it is He, who by His Righteous Judgments sends the Plague, Death, and the other punishing Evils, it appears, that one wants to force Him to execute the evil unjustly imprecated.] (Maria 1732: 290)

The curser is sinfully usurping the role of God. The belief that curses offended both God and the cursed persisted, in Italy, at least into the eighteenth century, but note that *L’Uomo apostolico* enjoyed numerous editions up till the nineteenth century.

2.3 Cursing in Italian communal statutes and trial records

Recognising the potential of curses to disrupt social harmony, secular authorities also sought to regulate their use. Most statute books of fourteenth-century Italian communes covered *verba iniuriosa* (Tardivel: 2020: 303–304). Statute books (or *statuti*) were official collections of laws and regulations that governed city life and they often included specific prohibitions on language, detailing words and phrases that were considered offensive. In a fourteenth-century statute from Le Marche d’Ancona, a province within the Papal State, Tardivel (2019: 92–93) identifies four types of verbal offences: insults (*iniuria*); reproaches (*reimproperatio*), maledictions (*blasfemia*) wishing future harm. The statute lists the following curses:

¹⁰ There exist earlier 1726 and 1727 editions.

- (9) *che si impeccato* [may you be hanged]
- (10) *che te venga languenaglia* [tongue paralysis take you]
- (11) *che te venga lo carbone* [the carbuncle take you]
- (12) *che vencha lo male de la cadia* [falling-sickness take you]
- (13) *che te venga l'antrace* [a carbuncle take you]¹¹
- (14) *che venga la lepra o vero la malsania* [leprosy or an illness take you] (Tardivel 2019: 93)

Five curses use *che ti venga* NP. Tardivel (2019: 94) notes these curses invoke the worst diseases, highlighting their blasphemous nature as they question the universe created by God. The fourth type of *verba iniuriosa* is calumny.

How are the communal lawtexts applied in the courts of justice? Along with insults, “cursing was certainly the privileged form of verbal abuse in medieval and early modern times” and “the common form of cursing was a disease curse” (Tardivel forthcoming). Studying Bolognese trial documents, Tardivel finds 21 disease curses. A few examples:

- (15) *Te nasca el vermo chano tu e perzerto cativo ribaldo* [the staggers take you, you are a depraved nasty rogue]
- (16) *putana marça quod naschavit tibi mille vermi canes, tu es bastarda et fuisti filia unus meretricis, tu es excommunicata ab ore domini pape, soça putana* [rotten whore may you get a thousand times the staggers, you are a bastard and the daughter of a whore, you are excommunicated through the Pope's mouth, filthy whore]
- (17) *O te nascha la postema in le gola tu vo* [Oh, may you get a pus-filled abscess in your throat]
- (18) *Che te vengina le posteme de santo Antonio in la gola* [May you get St. Anthony's pus-filled abscesses in the throat]

¹¹ Anthrax causes carbuncles, seen in (11).

- (19) *Che dio te dia le mala Pasqua* [God give you misfortune] (Tardivel forthcoming)¹²

Note the use of *nascere* ‘to be born’ as an alternative for *venire* ‘to come’, along with intensifiers like interjections, insults, hyperbole, and body parts (*in la gola*). The presence of these curses in trial records (as mediated by court clerks) and statutes is significant. While my findings from historical corpora appear in literary dialogues, Tardivel’s examples show that the disease curse *che ti venga* NP has currency in speech-based (Culpeper and Kytö 2010: 17), non-fictional documents.

3 Quantitative analysis

3.1 Corpora and method

To investigate the conventionalisation of *che ti venga* NP, this study conducts a quantitative analysis using two historical corpora. First, the CORPUS Diacronico dell’Italiano (CODIT ‘Diachronic Corpus of Italian’, Micheli 2022), a balanced corpus of 33 million tokens from the thirteenth century until 1947. Secondly, a corpus of theatre plays by eighteenth-century playwright Carlo Goldoni: ItalianLISCortIta XVIII secolo – commedie Goldoni with 3,7 million tokens. Compiled by Chiara Ghezzi, it comprises 177 documents amounting to the entire dramatic oeuvre of Goldoni, in a (1955) edition by Giuseppe Ortolani for the collection *Classici Mondadori*.¹³

In both corpora I used the concordancer with initial search strings *ti venga* and *ti vengano* ‘come to you’, 3rd person singular and plural of the present subjunctive of *venire* ‘to come’ with the second personal pronoun singular *ti* ‘to you’ in the oblique case for the indirect object. These searches were complemented by a reverse search using the diseases found, revealing variation in verb forms. The infinitive *venire* or *venir* can be accompanied by *possa*, the 3rd person present subjunctive of the modal verb *potere* ‘may’, also as the inversion *venir possa*. Other personal pronouns were found, leading to further searches for new diseases. This resulted in 132 disease curses: 61 in CODIT and 71 in ItalianLISCortIta XVIII secolo – commedie Goldoni.

The quantitative analysis will comprise the following aspects:

- the connective *che* ‘that’;

¹² Literally, a bad Easter. The translations are loosely based on Tardivel (forthcoming).

¹³ Available from <https://liberliber.it/autori/autori-g/carlo-goldoni/> (last accessed 8 January 2025). Goldoni’s comedies are currently being reedited in critical editions for the *Edizione nazionale* ‘national edition’ by the publisher Marsilio, Venice.

- the augurative subjunctive *venga* ‘come’;
- the personal pronouns in a t/v system;
- intensifications;
- the disease noun;
- the maledictive context.¹⁴

3.2 *Che ti venga* NP in CODIT

The CODIT, *Corpus Diacronico dell’Italiano*, compiled by Maria Silvia Micheli, is hosted on the Czech National Corpus website and can be queried through the KonText interface.¹⁵ CODIT is a balanced diachronic corpus of written Italian, containing approximately 33 million tokens. It follows the structure and periodization of the MIDIA corpus,¹⁶ but includes entire texts rather than 8000-token samples. CODIT has five subcorpora: 1) thirteenth century – 1375; 2) 1376–1532; 3) 1533–1691; 4) 1692–1840; 5) 1841–1947. Each subcorpus includes six text genres: essays, literary prose, poetry, letters, scientific texts, and drama. The first subcorpus lacks scientific texts and has fewer tokens, while the others have approximately 6 million each (Micheli 2022). Due to its “speech-related” genres (Culpeper and Kytö 2010: 17), i.e. literary prose, letters and drama, CODIT is useful for analysing interpersonal interactions. However, its relatively small context panel makes context interpretation challenging, although not impossible.

3.2.1 Connective *che* ‘that’

The curses tend to be introduced with the connective *che* ‘that’. Salvi and Renzi (2010: 1211–1218) distinguish between optative and augurative clauses. Optative clauses express a general wish, using the imperfect subjunctive (*A vess’io mille marche d’oro* ‘if only I had a thousand gold marks’); augurative clauses specify the person for whom the wish is intended, whether for his/her benefit or harm, and employ the present subjunctive (*Che tu possa guarire presto* ‘may you recover quickly’). The augurative clause behaves like an elliptic subordinate, depending from a performative verb such as *augurare* ‘to wish’ (Dardano et al. 1992: 19; Salvi & Renzi 2010: 1215). Evans (2007) studies how clauses originally functioning as subordinates

¹⁴ The dataset containing all examples is available from LaRS - Language Repository of Switzerland (Paternoster 2025).

¹⁵ <https://www.korpus.cz/kontext/query?corpname=codit> (accessed 8 January 2025)

¹⁶ <https://www.corpusmidia.unito.it/> (accessed 8 January 2025)

developed into main clauses in their own right in a process called insubordination, whereby the clauses received specialised usages. Evans (2007: 387) lists politeness as an important function of insubordination since “insubordinating ellipsis has the effect of putting the face-threatening act ‘off the record’”. However, when impoliteness is the aim, the presence of the performative verb makes the utterance laborious and formal, undermining its pragmatic effectiveness (Dardano et al. 1992: 16). The insubordinate clause sounds more peremptory. Another difference between optative and augurative insubordinate clauses regards the use of the connective *che*, frequent with the augurative clause, but infrequent with the optative clause (Salvi and Renzi 2010: 2016).

Exceptionally in CODIT, with the disease appearing before the verb, *che* separates the disease (the subject) from the verb, as in (20):

- (20) *Il cancro che vi venga,*
 the canker COMP/REL 2PL.POL.DAT come.SBJV.3SG
 ‘May you rot,’ [lit. ‘The canker that to you may come,’]
messer lo compare di Puglia!
 mister the compeer.VOC from Puglia
 ‘mister compeer from Puglia!’ [lit. ‘mister the compeer from Puglia’]
 (3_PROSA_BANDELLO_NOVELLE)

Besides (20), CODIT only contains one other case of mid-sentence *che*. This mid-sentence *che* has a syncretic function, being both a relative pronoun and a conjunctive (indicated by the gloss COMP/REL; see Dardano et al. 1992: 32 specifically on mid-sentence *che* in disease curses in sixteenth-century comedy). Dardano et al. (1992: 17–20) discuss the hypothesis that this generic *che* is a hyperconnective, a pragmatic indicator of close textual cohesion, which has thematic and information-organizing purposes. It aims to achieve emphasis, particularly in less formal contexts.

The sentence-initial connective *che*, on the other hand, is present in 69% of the examples in CODIT: 42 out of 61. This is in line with Salvi and Renzi’s analysis (2010: 2016), as in (21):

- (21) *Che ti venga l'anticuore, vecchio cucco!*
 COMP 2SG.DAT come.SBJV.3SG the chest abscess old fool.VOC
 ‘A chest abscess take you, old fool!’ [lit. ‘That to you may come the chest abscess, old fool!’]
 (3_TEATRO_ANDREINI_LO SCHIAVETTO)

All use *che* except for one occurrence of *così* ‘so’, as in (22):

- (22) *Così vi venga il canchero e a voi*
 thus 2PL.POL.DAT come.SBJV.3SG the canker and to 2PL.POL
 ‘So may you rot, you’ [lit. ‘So to you may come the canker and to you’]
e a tutti quegli che non credono
 and to all those REL NEG believe.IND.PRS.3PL
 ‘and all those who believe’ [lit. ‘and to all those who do not believe’]
che io nolla finisca.
 COMP 1SG.NOM NEG_3SG.F.ACC finish.SBJV.1SG
 ‘I won’t finish it.’ [lit. ‘that I won’t finish it’]
 (3_PERS_CELLINI_VITA)

Finally, *che* is absent from 17 curses, as in (23):

- (23) *Oh, ti venga il cancro ne i denti.*
 oh 2SG.DAT come.SBJV.3SG the canker in the teeth
 ‘Oh, may you rot in your teeth’ [lit. ‘Oh, to you may come the canker in the teeth.’]
 (3_TEATRO_CROCE_LA FARINELLA)

Because *che* is uncommon in optative sentences (which are not directed at a specific individual), its presence, especially when delivered in a threatening tone, would alert the hearer to the possibility of a curse. Its pragmatic function is to command attention, and its modern equivalent would be “mark my words”. This usage aligns with the numerous forms of intensification commonly found in curses (see § 3.2.4).

3.2.2 The augurative subjunctive *venga* ‘come’

Section 2.2 highlights that historical curses rely on a higher power to enact the curse, thereby reducing the agency of the speaker. The semantics of *venire* ‘to come’ aligns perfectly with this notion.¹⁷ For *venire* ‘to come’ the *Grande Dizionario della Lingua Italiana* (s.v., henceforward GDLI)¹⁸ lists a meaning related to disease, mentioning curses: “Prodursi in un organismo (una malattia, una sensazione dolorosa, ecc.). – Anche in imprecazioni.” [To occur in an organism (a disease, a painful sensation, etc.). – Also in curses].

¹⁷ It is not a coincidence that Italian can use *venire* for the passive voice.

¹⁸ Consulted at <https://www.gdli.it/> (accessed 8 January 2025)

As seen above, the augurative sentence uses the present subjunctive. In CODIT 72% of occurrences – 44 out of 61 – use the present subjunctive *venga* or its plural *vengano*. There are 9 instances of *possa venir* ‘may come’, as in (24), which is the oldest curse:

- (24) *che venir possa fuoco da cielo*
 COMP come.INF may.SBJV.3SG fire from heaven
 ‘May a fire come from heaven’ [lit. ‘That nothing may come fire from heaven’]
che tutte v’ arda,
 REL all.F.PL 2PL.ACC burn.SBJV.3SG
 ‘to burn you all’ [lit. ‘that may burn you all,’]
generazion pessima che voi siete!
 generation.VOC worst REL 2PL.NOM be.IND.PRS.2PL
 ‘worst generation that you are!’
 (1_PROSA_BOCCACCIO_DECAMERON)

6 examples use the regional form *vegna*. For occurrences in periods 1 and 2, “before the normalization of literary Italian proposed by Pietro Bembo” (Micheli 2022), CODIT metadata mention the regional variety: all examples are from fourteenth-century Tuscan author Franco Sacchetti. The regional form *venghi* appears twice: once in Ludovico Ariosto’s *La Lena* (Tuscan) and once in seventeenth-century Giovanni Della Porta from Naples.

As regards the word order of the augurative sentence, the Subject can either precede the Verb, as in (19), or follow it (Salvi and Renzi 2010: 1216). In CODIT, the subject NP usually follows the main verb and this inversion is present in 50 out of 61 cases, as in (21), (22), (23), (24) and (25):

- (25) *Che vi venga il colèra!*
 COMP 2PL.DAT come.SBJV.3SG the cholera
 ‘Cholera take you!’ [lit. ‘That to you may come the cholera!’]
 (5_PROSA_VERGA_MALAVOGLIA)

Instances like (20) and (26), where the disease – the Subject – precedes the Verb are far less common, with 11 occurrences. These cases are marked and put into focus the disease (for intensification see Section 3.2.4):

- (26) *Che duol ti venga,*
 COMP suffering 2SG.DAT come.SBJV.3SG
 ‘Sorrow strike you’ [lit. ‘That suffering to you may come,’]

o canti tu o no!
 or sing.SBJV.2SG 2SG.NOM or NEG
 ‘whether you sing or not!’
 (1_POES_SACCHETTI_RIME)

While this marked word order could imply a stronger illocutionary force, it can also result from the constraints of meter and rhyme.¹⁹

So far, the most common form is *che venga* followed by a disease. What happens with the Indirect Object indicating the cursed?

3.2.3 The personal pronoun

Old Italian has a t/v system with *tu* for unmarked address and *voi* for deference towards higher rank. Pronoun use is linked to power and social rank: lower and middle classes use a reciprocal *tu* while aristocrats use *voi*, unless close. In the sixteenth century, the pronouns *Lei*, *Ella* start to express deference towards the high-power recipient, usually addressed with a title. *Voi* expresses respect, but it also continues to index social superiority. *Tu* is used amongst lower and middle classes and in top-down exchanges, e.g. between master and servant (Molinelli 2018; Ghezzi 2021). In 31 out of 61 cases, the cursed is addressed with *ti* (or *te* or *t*). *Ti* is used in (26) and in:

(27) *O che ti venga il gavàcciolo, pinchellone!*
 oh COMP 2SG.DAT come.SBJV.3SG the plague sore idiot.VOC
 ‘Oh a plague sore take you, you noddy!’ [lit. ‘Oh, that to you may come the plague sore, idiot!’]
 (3_TEATRO_ANDREINI_LO SCHIAVETTO)

Vi can be a plural *ti*. Plural *vi*, used in (24), (25) and (28), occurs in 8 cases:

(28) *Che venga fuoco del cielo*
 COMP come.SBJV.3SG fire of the heaven
 ‘May a fire come from heaven’ [lit. ‘That may come fire from the heaven’]
che tutte v’ arda!
 REL all.F.PL 2PL.ACC burn.SBJV.3SG
 ‘to burn you all!’ [lit. ‘that may burn you all!’]
 (3_PROSA_BANDELLO_NOVELLE)

19 Of the 11 cases of marked word order – Subject before Verb – 7 appear in verse texts.

In 5 cases *vi* concerns a single recipient. Example (29) occurs in Old Italian when *voi* expresses deference:

- (29) *venir vi possa fame grande e sete,*
 come.INF 2PL.POL.DAT may.SBJV.3SG hunger great and thirst
 ‘May great hunger and thirst come to you’
che d’ogni vostro danno lieto so’.
 since of every 2PL.POL.POSS harm glad be.IND.PRS.1SG
 ‘for of all your harm I am glad.’
 (1_POES_SACCHETTI_RIME)

It follows (26) which is the top-down pronoun use between the same characters in a poem by Franco Sacchetti. The 4 remaining cases of *vi* – as in (20) – all regard the sixteenth century, where *vi* expresses respect. It is, hence, possible to curse someone who is addressed with deference or respect:

- (30) *Che vi vengano tremila cacasangui!*²⁰
 COMP 2PL.POL.DAT come.SBJV.3PL three-thousand bloody fluxes
 ‘The bloody flux take you three thousand times!’ [lit. ‘That to you
 may come three thousand bloody fluxes!’]
 (3_PROSA_BANDELLO_NOVELLE)

Example (30) is a bottom-up curse against a priest, accompanied by physical violence. No curses use deferential *Le*.

The use of second-person pronouns indicates that the curser directly addresses the cursed, who is within earshot and aware of the curse. As far as the context panel allows us to see, one curse using the second person pronoun occurs in a monologue, and another, (31), represents the character’s thoughts:

- (31) *Che ti possa venir la rognà.*²¹
 COMP 2SG.DAT may.SBJV.3SG come.INF the scabies
 ‘The itch get you’ [lit. ‘That to you may come the itch:’]
(dicevo io tra me e me)
 say.IND.IPFV.1SG 1SG.NOM between me and me
 ‘(I said to myself)’

²⁰ *Cacasangue* is a historical term for dysentery.

²¹ *Rogna* is a historical term for scabies.

pezzo d'asino imbastardito tra le sacrestie!
 piece of donkey.voc bastardised among the sacristies
 'piece of bastardised jackass amongst the sacristies!'
 (5_PERS_TANINI_LA VITA DI GIULIO PANE)

Example (31) dates from 1922; it is the most recent within CODIT.

The pronoun for the cursed usually appears as an indirect object of *venga*, but in (28) it appears in a relative clause. In the remaining 17 cases, the cursed is referred to by a proper (32) or a common noun (33), or by a third-person pronoun (34):

(32) *O venga il canchero a Cain!*²²
 oh come.SBJV.3SG the canker to Cain
 'Oh, may Cain rot!' [lit. 'Oh, may the canker come to Cain!']
 (3_TEATRO_ANDREINI_LO SCHIAVETTO)

(33) *Che venga il canchero ai peccati!*²³
 COMP come.SBJV.3SG the canker to the sins
 'May the sins rot!' [lit. 'That the canker may come to the sins!']
 (3_PERS_CELLINI_VITA)

(34) *Che li venga il gavocciolo,*
 COMP 3SG.DAT.M come.SBJV.3SG the plague sore
 'A plague sore take him,' [lit. 'That to him may come the plague sore,']
ignorante che egli è!
 ignorant man REL 3SG.NOM.M be.IND.PRS.3SG
 'the fool that he is!' [lit. 'ignorant man that he is!']
 (3_PROSA_BANDELLO_NOVELLE)

In sum, over two thirds of curses directly address a character in the fictional dialogue. Unmarked *ti* and its plural *vi* (39 cases) are far more common than respectful and deferential pronouns.²⁴ Some curses refer to third parties.

²² Cain is not the biblical figure, but a Jewish character in the play.

²³ In (33) exceptionally the target is not a human being, but a personified entity. The speaker is angry: he sees his current misfortune – he has been wounded in a fight – as divine punishment for sins he committed earlier. The sins themselves are held responsible and cursed as though they were living beings.

²⁴ For Goldoni – see § 3.3.3 – I studied eighteenth-century cases of pronoun switches, where the curse switches to a non-deferential form. This strategy is very common in earlier Italian, however, the limited size of the context panel did not allow to detect cases of pronoun switches in CODIT.

3.2.4 Intensification

Section 3.2.2 discussed a first type of intensification, the marked word order where the disease precedes the verb. There are many other forms of intensification. Culpeper notes that intensification exacerbates offensiveness, making the impolite intent more obvious (2011: 139).

Hyperbole

The hyperbole exaggerates numbers, wishing for multiple episodes of the disease, even three thousand, as in (30). 5 curses include hyperbole:

- (35) *Ribaldo! Che ti vengano Cento cancri!*
 scoundrel.VOC COMP 2SG.DAT come.SBJV.3PL a hundred cankers
 ‘Scoundrel! May you rot a hundred times over!’ [lit. ‘Scoundrel! That to you may come a hundred cankers!’]
 (2_TEATRO_GABRIELE ARIOSTO_STUDENTI)

Body part

Another intensifier is the addition of a body part. CODIT contains three cases:

- (36) *Empio signor, che della robba altrui*
 ‘Impious lord, who with other people’s possessions’
lieto ti vai godendo e del sudore,
 ‘and sweat happily goes enjoying yourself,’
venir ti possa un cancaro nel cuore,
 come.INF 2SG.DAT may.SBJV.3SG a canker into the heart
 ‘may a canker come to your heart’ [lit. ‘may to you come a canker into the heart,’]
che ti porti di peso ai regni bui.
 ‘that carries you at once to the dark realms.’ [lit. ‘which may carry you entirely to the dark realms’]
 (2_POES_BERNI_RIME)

In (36) the reference to the heart makes the curse especially menacing. Incidentally, this example is a striking case of the grammar of impoliteness overriding the deference system (see Section 3.2.3): the second person singular is used to curse (and insult with *empio signor*) a high-power aristocrat, the lord of Rimini Sigismondo Malatesta. Curses (23) and (37) target the mouth:

- (37) *Che li venghi la peste alla lingua!*
 COMP 3SG.DAT.M come.SBJV.3SG the plague to the tongue
 ‘May he get the plague in his tongue!’ [lit. ‘That to him may come the plague in the tongue!’]
 (3_TEATRO_DELLA PORTA_LA SORELLA)

Body orifices make the disease particularly debilitating and humiliating, intensifying the level of taboo.

Multiple diseases

Curse (38) uses two diseases:

- (38) *quello sguaiato tristo facimale, quel disgraziato, quel sciaguratello,*
 ‘that rude, sad rascal, that wretch, that little scoundrel,
che gli venga un gavocciolo, un cassale,
 COMP 3SG.DAT.M come.SBJV.3SG a plague sore a (mortal) fever
 ‘a plague sore take him, a mortal fever,’ [lit. ‘that to him may come a plague sore, a mortal fever;’]
s’è tolto quel pensiero del cervello?
 ‘has he taken that thought out of his mind?’ [lit. ‘has he taken that thought from the brain?’]
 (4_POES_PARINI_ALCUNE POESIE)

Another curse counts three diseases. However, instead of a usage, it is a “mention” (Jucker 2020: 19), where each disease is an example of a different curse. Sixteenth-century short-story writer Matteo Bandello, who is no stranger to disease curses – CODIT contains no fewer than 17 curses from his *Novelle* – writes this metapragmatic comment in (39):

- (39) *I nostri vicini bergamaschi quando sentono alcuno che maledicendo il compagno gli dice:*
 ‘Our neighbours in Bergamo, when they hear someone cursing his companion by saying:’
“Ti venga il cacasangue, la febre, il cancaro”
 2SG.DAT come.SBJV.3SG the bloody flux the fever the canker
 “‘The bloody flux, the fever, the canker take you’” [lit. “‘To you may come the bloody flux, the fever, the canker’”]

e simili imprecazioni, sogliono dire: “Io non so dir tante cose, ma io vorrei che tu fussi morto”.

‘and similar imprecations, they tend to say: “I don’t know how to say so many things, but I wish you were dead”.’

(3_PROSA_BANDELLO_NOVELLE)

For Bandello (or his narrator) the Bergamasque, instead of using a formulaic disease curse, simply wish someone dead.

Exclamation marks

The exclamation mark suggesting an intensified prosody is present from the fourteenth century, in (24) and (26), to the most recent example from 1922, in (31). In all, 38 curses out of 61 have an exclamation mark, over half.²⁵

Emotive interjections

The emotive interjections *o*, *oh*, *deh*, *doh*, *olà* precede the curse. In the GDLI (s.v.) *O* and *Oh*, treated as one lemma, can, besides positive emotions, also express “sdegno, indignazione, rimprovero, ammonizione o, anche, ironia e sarcasmo” [outrage, indignation, reproach, admonition or, also, irony and sarcasm]. *Oh* and *O* introduce 8 curses, as seen, resp. in examples (2) and (27). However, in (40) *oh* expresses surprise:

- (40) *Oh! Che ti venga il bene.*
 oh COMP 2SG.DAT come.SBJV.3SG the good
 ‘Oh! Bless you.’ [lit. ‘Oh! That to you may come the good.’]
 (4_TEATRO_GOLDONI_LE SMANIE PER LA VILLEGGIATURA)

Deh or *Doh* can express “rimprovero, disapprovazione” [reproach, disagreement] according to the GDLI (s.v.). The three cases all come from Ariosto’s *La Lena* as seen in examples (1), (6), and (7). *Olà* is an attention getter, but the GDLI (s.v.) notes its use to emphasise threats and warnings, as in (41).

²⁵ The punctuation raises the issue of the delimitation of the curse. I aimed to retain full sentences, which start with a capital letter and end with a full stop, a question mark, an exclamation mark, making an exception for the semi-colon.

- (41) *Olà, che venga fuoco dal cielo che t' arda.*
 hey COMP come.SBJV.3SG fire from the sky REL 2SG.ACC burn.SBJV.3SG
 'Hey, may a fire come from heaven and burn you!' [lit. 'Hey, may fire come from the sky that burns you.']
 (3_PROSA_BANDELLO_NOVELLE)

Emotive interjections occur in 11 curses.

Insults

Vocative insults appear in (4), (6), (20),²⁶ (24), (27), (31), (35), (36). In (31) *pezzo di* 'piece of' exemplifies impolite categorisation (Alfonzetti and Spampinato Beretta 2012: 3), but it also contains the blasphemy *tra le sacristie* [amongst the sacristies]. In (42) the insult itself is intensified by a crescendo of derogatory adjectives:

- (42) *Tu farai il gavoccio che ti venga,*
 2SG.NOM do.IND.FUT.2SG the plague sore COMP/REL 2SG.DAT come.SBJV.3SG
 'A plague sore take you,' [lit. 'You'll get the plague sore, that may come to you,']
sozzo cane, unto, bisunto!
 dirty dog.VOC greasy double greasy
 'dirty, disgusting, right filthy dog!'
 (3_PROSA_BANDELLO_NOVELLE)

15 curses in CODIT contain insults. Sometimes, the derogatory comment is not a vocative. In (34) and (38) it refers to a third party and is a criticism (*reimproperatio*) rather than an insult.

Swearing

Swearing is blasphemous (see Section 2.2) and can be considered impolite because it breaches moral and religious expectations. Culpeper (2018) notes how taboo words are largely used to intensify other forms of impoliteness, as seen in (31) which is blasphemous. (43) contains swearing:

- (43) *Al corpo di Cristo, io ci vo' entrar dentro e far questione con questo parmegiano tirasassi,*
 'By the body of Christ, I want to enter inside and deal with this stone-throwing Parmesan,'

²⁶ In (20) the honorific title is mock-polite.

che gli vengano mille cacasangui!
 COMP 3SG.DAT.M come.SBJV.3PL A thousand bloody fluxes
 ‘the bloody flux take him a thousand times over!’ [lit. ‘that to him may come a
 thousand bloody fluxes!’]
 (3_PROSA_BANDELLO_NOVELLE)

Overall, only 16 examples out of 61 are not intensified in one form or another:

- (44) *Papagallo volesti dire,*
 ‘Parrot you meant,’
che ti venga il grosso.
 COMP 2SG.DAT come.SBJV.3SG the big one
 ‘a plague sore take you.’ [lit. ‘that to you may come the plague sore.’]
 (3_TEATRO_ARETINO_CORTIGIANA)

As an intermediate conclusion, the most frequent pattern in CODIT is *che ti venga* NP with some form of intensification.

3.2.5 The Noun Phrase

The diseases used in curses strongly relate to the taboo sphere. A common curse invokes the plague, which was extremely dangerous. Curses use infectious diseases and parasitic infestations like dysentery, cholera, malaria, scabies. Symptoms such as fever, rashes, bloody diarrhoea, vomiting, purulent, festering sores, severe itchiness are particularly unpleasant and stigmatising. Some curses invoke veterinary diseases – *l’anticuore*, *la pipetola*²⁷ –, reducing the cursed to the state of an animal. Others wish for sustained misfortune: *malanno*, *ritenso*, *rovello* mean, respectively, a year of bad luck, an accident, torment. Others bring on inevitable death, by *fuoco*, *tuono*, *saetta da cielo*, resp. ‘heavenly fire’, ‘thunder’, ‘lightning’. Over time, the link to the actual disease may have weakened: *canchero* and *rogna*, the GDLI (s.v.) observes, were also used as metaphors for misfortune. Figure 1 shows the raw figures for the distribution of diseases and (mis)fortune²⁸ over the five historical periods in CODIT:

²⁷ *L’anticuore* or ‘anticor’ is a tumour in proximity of the heart in four-legged domestic animals, e.g. horses. *La pipetola* is Neapolitan dialect for *pipita* (see <http://www.vesuvioweb/>, accessed 8 January 2025), a disease of the tongue in birds, especially in chickens.

²⁸ There is, indeed, one benedictive use.

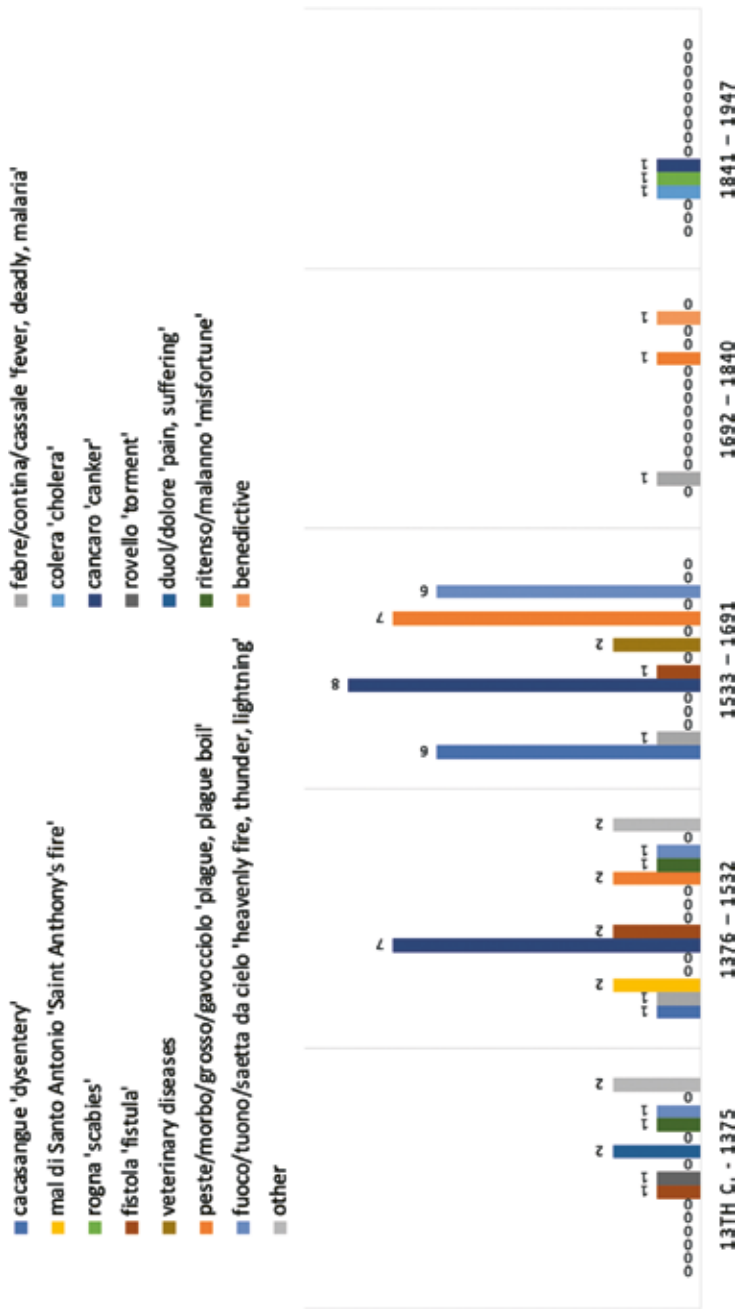


Figure 1: Distribution of different diseases and (mis)fortune in the curse *che ti venga* NP over the five historical periods in CODIT²⁹.

²⁹ Note that there are slightly more diseases than curses: example (38) includes two diseases and (39) three.

In Figure 1, the most frequent condition is a festering canker, with 7 occurrences in period 2 and 8 in period 3, followed by 7 cases of the plague in period 3. Dysentery has 6 occurrences in period 3, as do maledictions wishing for a heavenly fire, thunder or lightning. The disease choice roughly corresponds to epidemics: the plague causes two epidemics in Italy, in the fourteenth and the seventeenth centuries, and the first cholera epidemic occurred in the 1830s, with an 1881 cholera curse in CODIT. Generally, the impoliteness strategy is to curse someone with the most dangerous, debilitating and humiliating disease of the time.

Regardless of the type of NP used, Figure 1 shows an increase in disease curses until the seventeenth century followed by a drop from 1692 onwards. This trend in the occurrences of curses across CODIT is visualised in Figure 2 with normalised figures for the total amount of curses per historical period:³⁰

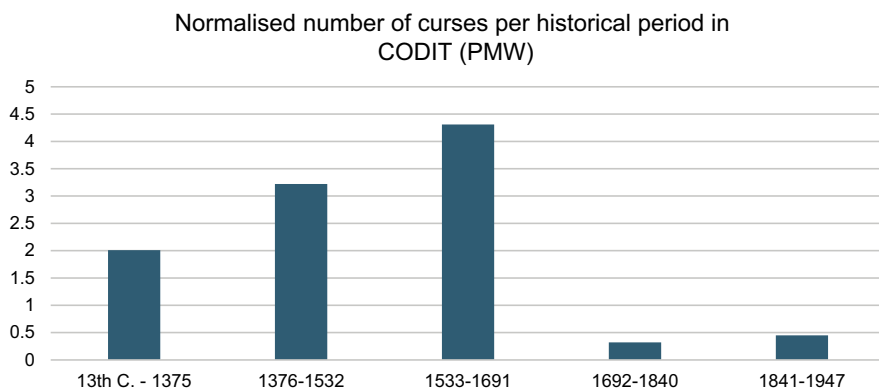


Figure 2: Distribution of number of curses using '*che ti venga* NP' per historical period in CODIT (normalised frequencies per million words).

From the thirteenth century to 1691, curses steadily increase, peaking in Period 3. There is some risk of bias here: Trifone (2000: 135, 2019) and D'Onghia (2011), leading scholars of Italian drama, point out that sixteenth- and seventeenth-century drama made ample use of impoliteness to entertain audiences: consequently, the numbers in periods 2 and 3 may be overrepresented, at least in part. Note that over the five periods a third of examples occur in theatre texts, 23 out of 61. From 1692 curses sharply decline. Within period 3 (see raw figures in Figure 1), most cases, 24, take place in the sixteenth century, and only 5 in the seventeenth century, all before 1615. After 1615, curses virtually disappear: there are no cases between 1615 and

³⁰ I provide normalised frequencies given that the first period in CODIT contains a much lower number of tokens compared to the later periods, ca. 4 million instead of 6 million.

1691, the entire second half of period 3, with only 3 in both periods 4 and 5. The rigorous prosecution of blasphemy by the Inquisition in the sixteenth and seventeenth century (Nash 2007) clearly played a key role in reducing the prevalence of curses in written texts intended for publication, but it is equally true that high-brow theatre evolved towards tragedy, with high-ranking protagonists using less scurrilous language. The numerous curses in Goldoni's plays (see Section 3.3), despite being subject to censorship by the *Esecutori contro la bestemmia* [Executors Against Blasphemy], can be attributed to the diminishing persecution of blasphemy in the second half of the eighteenth century, influenced by the growing impact of Enlightenment ideals, which allowed such language to be somewhat tolerated in theatrical contexts.

3.2.6 Maledictive context

The expectation is for maledictions to appear in contexts where characters are arguing. Almost all appear in fictional dialogues. The contexts range from angry rants to heated arguments and isolated outbursts. Example (30) is uttered in an angry rant, (45), by a cleric angry at his superior, a priest who has lost a valuable coin:

- (45) *E narrò al chierico la perdita del doppio ducato. Come il giovine sentì la pazzia del messere, se gli rivolse con il più brutto viso che poté e disse: – Oimè, che sento! che vi vengano tremila cacasangui! E ch' avete voi voluto fare, uomo da poco e da meno assai ch'io non dico? Voi adunque avete restituito un doppione perchè non era così di peso come la vostra avara ingordigia avrebbe voluto, [. . .].* 3_PROSA_BANDELLO_NOVELLE [And he told the cleric of the loss of the double ducat. As soon as the young man heard the man's madness, he turned to him with the ugliest face he could muster and said: – O my goodness, what do I hear! May the bloody flux get you three thousand times! And what have you wanted to do, man of little worth and far less than I say? You have returned a double ducat because it was not as heavy as your avaricious greed would have wished]

The priest remains silent. Other curses form part of heated arguments, here in (46) where a husband scolds his wife:

- (46) – *che questa traditora pisana sarà venuta a Lucca per volermi governare. Che fussi io stato in letto con la quartana quel dì che mi venne voglia di prender moglie pisana, chè tutti tutti, uomini e donne, sète traditori! Che venga il fuoco dal cielo che t'arda, rea femina che tu sei! – A questo, Beatrice che del marito teneva poco conto, per più farlo adirare gli rispose: – A la croce di Dio che*

avete una gran ragione a dir questo [. . .]. 3_PROSA_BANDELLO_NOVELLE [– That this traitorous Pisan woman will have come to Lucca to govern me. If only I had stayed in bed with a bad fever the day I felt like taking a Pisan wife, because all of you, all men and women, are traitors! May the heavenly fire come to burn you, wicked woman that you are! – At this, Beatrice, who cared little for her husband, to make him angrier, answered him: – By the cross of God, you have a good reason for saying this]

Beatrice swears and replies with sarcasm. At times, the curse is a mere angry outburst, in an otherwise non-conflictual exchange, as in (47):

- (47) [. . .] *che vogliono sapere?*” domandò comare Grazia. “*Vogliono sapere se è vero che la Lia se la intendeva con don Michele, e che suo fratello ‘Ntoni abbia voluto ammazzarlo per tagliarsi le corna; me l’ha detto l’avvocato.*” “*Che vi venga il colera! – soffiò loro lo speziale facendo gli occhiacci. – Volete che andiamo tutti in galera? Sappiate che colla giustizia bisogna dir sempre di no, e che noi non sappiamo niente.*” Comare Venera si rincantucciò nella mantellina, ma seguì a borbottare.” 5_PROSA_VERGA_MALAVOGLIA [what do they want to know?” cousin Grazia asked. “They want to know if it’s true that our Lia was carrying on with Don Michele, and that her brother ‘Ntoni wanted to kill him to revenge himself; the lawyer told me so.” “Cholera take you both! – the chemist hissed with an angry glare. – “Do you want us all to go to prison? Know that with the men of law you always have to say no, and that we don’t know anything.” Cousin Venera curled up in her cape, but continued to mutter.]

The curse aims at boosting the warning not to reveal anything.

Two usages are mock-impolite. The antiphrastic use depends on the hearer (or reader) recognising the routine impoliteness, thereby reinforcing the disease curse’s status as a conventional expression:

- (48) [. . .] *raccontar le genealogie veneziane esser un Tullio, ma nel resto dimostrarsi il maggior sciocco del mondo. A la fine il vecchio mutata la voce e il modo di parlare, ridendo disse: – Io so che sète galanti uomini a non riconoscer il vostro Girolamo pittore. Che vi venga il gavocciolo, “poëtis quae pars est”.³¹ – Fu subito riconosciuto, e risolvendosi il tutto in riso, egli se n’andò in una camera, e spogliatosi l’abito da comedia si rivestì i suoi panni e ritornò in sala*

³¹ *Poëtis* corrects *poftis*: the original in CODIT appears to misrender a letter with a trema, likely due to scanning and OCR issues.

[. . .]. 3_PROSA_BANDELLO_NOVELLE [telling Venetian genealogies like a real Cicero, but otherwise proving himself the world's greatest fool. At the end the old man changed his voice and manner of speaking and, laughing, he said: – I know that you gentlemen do not recognise your painter Girolamo. A plague sore take you, some “poets” you are. – He was immediately recognised, and the whole thing ending in laughter, he went into a room, and removing his comic garb, he put on his own clothes and returned to the hall]

The painter in (48) is familiar to his audience. He laughs before cursing them, to signal the joking intent, adding a mock-impolite insult. The ensuing laughter confirms the uptake of banter.

The second example, (49), appears in a poem with the title *A scusa d'un francesimo scappato nel precedente sonetto* [Apology for a Frenchism That Escaped me in the Previous Sonnet] in which the young Carducci jokingly addresses the purist linguists, defenders of Italian:

- (49) [. . .] *balii de la lingua, affeddiddio Che questo a punto a punto è il vostro caso, E voi potete pur darmi di naso Menando gran rumor del fatto mio. Guardivi sant'Anton come rimaso D'un franciosismo al laccio or son anch'io; E cancher venga al nemico di Dio Che pria la rima n'arrecò in Parnaso. Ch'io veggio correr fuori a gran baldanza, Pur me ammiccando con un risolino, Molti linguisti di molta importanza. E' vanno per consigli a l'Ugolino.* [. . .] 5_POES_CARDUCCI_JUVENILIA [minders of our language, for God's sake, This precisely is your case, And you may rightly mock me, Making a great noise about my mistake. May Saint Anthony protect you, For now I too have fallen into the trap of a Frenchism; And may the enemy of God rot Who first brought rhyme to Parnassus. For I see many linguists of great importance, Running out boldly, though they Wink at me with a little smile, And going for advice to Ugolino.]

Being a poet himself, Carducci's curse against whoever invented rhymed poetry cannot be taken too seriously.

Out of the 61 curses found, one is a mention rather than a usage, one is an example in a grammar book,³² one is part of a song,³³ two are mock-impolite and one is a polite, benedictive usage, which will be discussed in Section 4. The routinised context is one of impoliteness.

³² Example (24) also figures as a grammar example regarding preposition use in 2_PROSA_BEMBO_PROSE DELLA VOLGAR LINGUA, from 1525.

³³ [cantando] *Venir vi possa el diavolo allo letto, Dapoi ch'io non vi posso venir io!* 2_TEATRO_MACHIAVELLI_MANDRAGOLA [(singing) May the devil visit you in bed, as I myself am not allowed there].

3.2.7 Conclusion

In CODIT, the phrase *che ti venga* NP, followed by an exclamation mark, is a recurrent, stable form, hence a formula. In contrast, the formula occurs with additional, optional slots, which allow for ample creativity as regards intensification. Curses target equals and social inferiors using *ti*, but respectful or deferential pronouns are also possible. The frequency of the disease curses peaks from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century, favouring lethal and debilitating diseases or severe ill-fortune. Disease nouns and intensification with insults, body orifices and swearwords place the curse into the taboo sphere. The context is largely maledictive and impolite, hence *che ti venga* NP it is a conventionalised impoliteness expression.

3.3 *Che ti venga* NP in ItalianLISCortIta XVIII secolo – commedie Goldoni

With 23 CODIT curses in drama texts, exploring an all-theatre corpus is logical. Carlo Goldoni's (1707–1793) extensive oeuvre is ideal for pragmatic investigation due to its interactive nature and representation of all social classes. Goldoni transformed the commedia dell'arte into more realistic plays with rounded characters and complete scripts, using more natural language (Matarrese 2010).

ItalianLISCortIta XVIII secolo – commedie Goldoni³⁴ comprises 71 occurrences of *che ti venga* NP.

3.3.1 Connective *che* 'that'

In CODIT, sentence-initial *che* appeared in about two thirds of the curses. In Goldoni, this percentage is 80%:

- (50) *Che ti venga la rabbia!*
 COMP 2SG.DAT come.SBJV.3SG the rabies
 'Rabies get you!' [lit. 'That to you may come the rabies!']
 (*Pamela nubile*, 1750)

Only 13 out of 71 curses have no *che*:

34 Hosted on <https://www.sketchengine.eu/> (accessed 8 January 2025).

- (51) *Venga la stizza, venga la rabbia*
 come.SBJV.3SG the fury come.SBJV.3SG the rabies
 ‘May the fury, may rabies get’ [lit. ‘May come the fury, may come the rabies’]
a chi m’ ha fatto metter in gabbia
 to REL 1SG.ACC have.IND.PRS.3SG do.PST.PTCP put.INF in cage
 ‘whoever has had me put in a cage’ [lit. ‘to who has had me put in a cage.’]
 (*Arcifanfano re dei matti*, 1750)

Example (51) is part of a libretto and matches the verse and rhyme scheme. Mid-sentence *che* is not found.

3.3.2 The augurative subjunctive *venga* ‘come’

Goldoni uses the present subjunctive *venga* for augurative clauses. Only example (52) has *vegna*, from the Bergamasque dialect spoken by servant Truffaldino:

- (52) *Mo se l’ è qua, in casa, in sala,*
 ‘But if he is here, in the house, in the drawing room,’
che ve venga el malanno
 COMP 2PL.POL.DAT come.SBJV.3SG the misfortune
 ‘bad luck to you!’ [lit. ‘that to you may come the misfortune.’]
 (*Il servitore di due padroni*, 1745)

One curse, (53), uses modal *possa*:

- (53) *Sposa la pastorella, vaga, gentile e bella,*
 marry.IMP.2SG the shepherdess fair gentle and pretty
 ‘Marry the shepherdess, Faire, gentle and pretty,’
Che ti possa venir la caccarella.
 COMP 2SG.DAT may.SBJV.3SG come.INF the diarrhoea
 ‘May you get the shitty.’ [lit. ‘that to you may come the squirts.’]
 (*Le virtuose ridicole*, 1752)

In each and every case, the disease (Subject) follows the Verb *venga*; it never precedes.

Based on the presence of *che*, the Verb form *venga* and the consistent word order, disease curses in Goldoni appear even more formulaic compared to those in CODIT. This uniformity in Goldoni can be attributed to the distinct composition of the two corpora. While CODIT is a compilation of sources of diverse origins and his-

torical periods, the Goldoni corpus represents the language use of a single author within a specific text type and period.

3.3.3 The personal pronoun

In the eighteenth century, *voi* is the unmarked pronoun: it expresses respect, even in top-down relationships. *Ella* or *Lei* express formality and deference, whereas *tu* is particularly marked to express reduced distance (Molinelli 2018). 50 curses use this marked *ti* form. Only 11 curses have *vi*: 8 express respect, and 3 refer to a plural recipient. In (52) Truffaldino addresses a social superior with *vi*; in (54) *vi* is used for an inferior, Brighella:

- (54) *Non mi parlate di perdere,*
 NEG 1SG.DAT speak.IMP.2PL of lose.INF
 ‘Do not speak to me of losing,
che vi venga il malanno.
 COMP 2PL.POL.DAT come.SBJV.3SG the misfortune
 ‘bad luck to you!’ [lit. ‘that to you may come bad luck.’]
 (*Il giocatore*, 1750)

Brighella, who runs a casino, addresses the gambler Florindo with *Lei*. Florindo uses *voi* for Brighella, maintaining his respectful address in curse (54). In (55), *vi* is a plural and refers to multiple women:

- (55) *Vi venga la saetta, che siate maledette.*
 2PL.DAT come.SBJV.3SG the lightning COMP be.SBJV.2PL damned
 ‘May you all be struck by lightning, may you be damned.’ [lit. ‘To you may come the lightning, may you be damned.’]
 (*Il filosofo inglese*, 1753)

In 9 examples a third party is cursed, as in (56):

- (56) *Venga il canchero all’avaraccio.*
 come.SBJV.3SG the canker to the miser
 ‘May the miser rot.’ [lit. ‘May come the canker to the miser.’]
 (*Il ritorno dalla villeggiatura*, 1761)

One curse has no indirect object:

- (57) *Venga* *lo cancro*.
 come.SBJV.3SG the canker
 ‘Go rot.’ [lit. ‘May come the canker.’]
 (*La cameriera brillante*, 1753)

Appearing within a substantial quote, curse (57) does not interfere with the inter-personal dynamic of the characters. No curse uses deferential *Le*.

Whereas CODIT has 31 cases with *ti* out of 61, Goldoni uses *ti* in 50 cases out of 71. Both Molinelli (2018) and Ghezzi (2023) analyse eighteenth-century personal pronouns based on Goldoni, noting that *tu* is used in asymmetrical exchanges, with a higher-class member addressing someone of lower class, say master to servant, and among lower classes. Characters can temporarily switch from *voi* to *tu* in close interactions, when distance is reduced for a positive or a negative reason (Molinelli 2018; Ghezzi 2023). This aligns with the use of *ti* in curses, however, its use is influenced by a dramatic device that was hardly present in the CODIT curses: the aside. Most uses of *ti* occur in an aside, addressing the audience, while the characters on the stage cannot hear. Therefore, it is useful to compare the pronoun use in the asides with on-record uses between the same characters: the aside may serve as a safe space because an on-record curse would be inappropriate given its impoliteness. For this comparison, I slightly adapt my method and make use of the entire play.³⁵

Out of 50 cases of *ti*, in 6 a master addresses a servant, as in (58) and (67), where *ti* is used out- and inside curses, which are all on record:

- (58) *Va* *ora, che ti venga* *il malanno*
 go.IMP.2SG now COMP 2SG.DAT come.SBJV.3SG the misfortune
 ‘Go now, bad luck to you’ [lit. ‘Go now, that to you may come the misfortune.’]
 (*gli dà una spinta, lo fa muovere, e vede in terra lì due zecchini*).
 ‘(he gives him a push, makes him move, and sees the two coins lying on the ground).’
 (*Il giocatore*, 1764)

The stage direction shows Florindo pushing his servant to the side.

³⁵ The context panel in the Sketch Engine concordancer provides access to extensive extracts of the script, but the formatting makes navigating turn-taking arduous. Metadata provide a link to a digital version of the play in the Ortolani edition on <https://liberliber.it/autori/autori-g/carlo-goldoni/> (accessed 8 January 2025)

Three other cases of on-record *ti* regard symmetrical exchanges between servants (59) or friends:

- (59) *Io? che ti venga il fistolo!*
 1SG.NOM COMP 2SG.DAT come.SBJV.3SG the fistula
 ‘Me? A running fistula take you!’ [lit. ‘Me? That to you may come the fistula!’]
 (*La vedova spiritosa*, 1757)

In (60) the friends are aristocrats:

- (60) *Che ti venga la rabbia nel dorso;*
 COMP 2SG.DAT come.SBJV.3SG the rabies in the back
 ‘Rabies get you in your back;’ [lit. ‘That to you may come the rabies in the back;’]
 (*La favola de’ tre gobbi*, 1749)

A count and a marquess dispute the love of a gentlewoman. Outside arguments, they use *voi*; during arguments, they switch to *tu*. 6 on-record curses, indeed, ‘downgrade’ *vi* to *ti* (as in (73), to express increased closeness). Middle-class Lelio addresses gondolier Tita with respectful *voi*, switching to *ti* in curse (61):

- (61) *Che ti venga la rabbia, barcaiuolo del diavolo.*
 COMP 2SG.DAT come.SBJV.3SG the rabies boatman.VOC of the devil
 ‘Rabies get you, boatman of the devil.’ [lit. ‘That to you may come the rabies, boatman of the devil.’]
 (*La putta onorata*, 1748)

On-record *ti* (15 cases out of 50) is used either for a master cursing a servant or among equals. The pronoun may be ‘downgraded’ from *vi* to *ti*. Put differently, these are the contexts allowing for an on-record curse with *ti* and there are no cases where an inferior curses a superior with *ti*.

The most frequent use of *ti* (an intriguing 35 cases out of 50) is off record: in asides, monologues, or when the cursed is hard of hearing or off-stage. Except for three cases (cursing two servants and a cat), the 32 remaining off-record curses target someone usually addressed with respectful *voi* or deferential *Ella/Lei*:

- (62) *(Che ti venga la rabbia) (da sé)*
 COMP 2SG.DAT come.SBJV.3SG the rabies (to himself)
 ‘(Rabies get you!) (to himself)’ [lit. ‘(That to you may come the rabies) (to himself)’]
 (*Il padre di famiglia*, 1750)

Earlier, Ottavio addressed the cursed, Florindo, with *voi*.

- (63) *(Oh, che ti venga la rabbia!)*
 oh COMP 2SG.DAT come.SBJV.3SG the rabies
 ‘(Oh, rabies get you!)’ [lit. ‘(Oh, that to you may come the rabies!)’]
 (*Le avventure della villeggiatura*, 1761)

Costanza addresses Vittoria with *Lei*, but in the aside she curses her with *ti*.

Nearly half of Goldoni’s curses occur off-record, involving a downgrading of the address pronoun. While these asides signal the curser’s anger to the public, the recipient remains unaware, and there is no impoliteness uptake. That the usual pronoun is *voi* or *Ella/Lei* indicates that the respect or the deference for the target likely prevents an on-record curse. The presence of curses in asides confirms their conventionalised use for impoliteness: Goldoni relies on the audience recognising the curse as too impolite when targeting a character usually addressed with a respectful or deferential pronoun. Because the curse is conventionalised for impoliteness, it can only go on-record under certain conditions: with inferiors or amongst equals (whether servants or aristocrats). Nevertheless, some on-record curses – examples (52) and (70) – use *vi* from a servant to a middle-class person. No curse uses deferential *Le*, a finding identical for CODIT. Note that an offended aristocrat may challenge the speaker to a duel.

On or off record, the dominating pronoun is *ti* and *che ti venga* is the most frequent formula.

3.3.4 Intensification

Intensification by having the disease in front of the Verb is not found in Goldoni, neither is hyperbole.

Body part

Body parts only appear in two cases. Interestingly, one is part of a play set in the sixteenth century:

- (64) *Che te venga lo canchero in mezzo dello core.*
 COMP 2SG.DAT come.SBJV.3SG the canker in middle of the heart
 ‘The canker strike you in the middle of your heart’ [lit. ‘That to you may come the canker in the middle of the heart.’]
 (*Torquato Tasso*, 1755)

The intensification recalls example (36) and Goldoni probably tries to give a Renaissance ‘flavour’ to the curse. Example (60) uses *dorso* ‘back’. The protagonists are hunchbacks (the *gobbi* of the title). The curse targets their deformity and the addition of *nel dorso* is both referential and an intensification.

Double curses

In CODIT one curse used two diseases. In Goldoni, examples (51) and (55) contain two curses.

Insults

Insults are found in (61) and here:

- (65) *Che ti venga la rabbia, lacchè del diavolo!*
 COMP 2SG.DAT come.SBJV.3SG the rabies valet.VOC of the devil
 ‘Rabies get you, valet of the devil!’ [lit. ‘That to you may come the rabies, valet of the devil!’]
 (*La vedova scaltra*, 1748)

- (66) *Che ti venga la rabbia, ragazzo impertinente!*
 COMP 2SG.DAT come.SBJV.3SG the rabies boy.VOC insolent
 ‘Rabies get you, insolent boy!’ [lit. ‘That to you may come the rabies, insolent boy!’]
 (*Il medico olandese*, 1756)

Not only can masters curse servants openly (see Section 3.3.3), but they can also add insults without fear of an impolite countermove. Example (69) brings the total to 4.

Emotive interjections

Interjections were frequent in CODIT; in Goldoni they occur in a small minority. 7 cases use *Oh!*:

- (67) (*Oh! che ti venga la rovella!*)
 oh COMP 2SG.DAT come.SBJV.3SG the torment
 ‘(Oh! May you be tormented!).’ [lit. ‘(Oh! That to you may come the torment!).’]
 (*Il ritorno dalla villeggiatura*, 1761)

The only other interjection is *ah*, occurring once:

- (68) *Ah che ti venga la rabbia!* (verso il palazzino)
 ah COMP 2SG.DAT come.SBJV.3SG the rabies towards the house
 ‘Ah rabies get you! (in the direction of the house)’ [lit. ‘Ah that to you may come the rabies! (towards the house)’]
 (*Il ventaglio*, 1764)

Exclamation marks

The exclamation mark occurs in 29 cases, e.g. examples (65) to (68). While in CODIT over half of the curses had an exclamation mark, here the proportion is reduced to just over 40%.

Swearing

There are 3 examples of a swearword. In examples (61) and (65) *diavolo* is a swearword inside an insult, like in (69):

- (69) *Che ti venga la rabbia, Dottor del diavolo!*
 COMP 2SG.DAT come.SBJV.3SG the rabies doctor.VOC of the devil
 ‘Rabies get you, Doctor of the devil!’ [lit. ‘That to you may come the rabies, Doctor of the devil!’]
 (*Il cavaliere e la dama*, 1749)

Overall, intensification by means other than the exclamation mark is infrequent and nearly half of the curses, 34, have no intensification. This contrasts with CODIT, where most curses are intensified. The trend seen above for Goldoni is continuing: *che ti venga* is highly recurrent as a formula, showing little variation. There is also less creativity at the level of intensification compared to CODIT.

3.3.5 The Noun Phrase

The trend towards a reduced palette of formal choice is continuing when considering the disease nouns, as shown in figure 3:

Rabies predominates, appearing as *rabbia* and *stizza*. Given the CODIT strategy that curses invoke the most dangerous, debilitating and humiliating disease of their time, the history of rabies epidemics gives interesting insights:

In 1691, then again in 1693, a major epidemic of animal rabies (especially among dogs) was reported in several Italian provinces [. . .]. In 1779, a number of people and domesticated

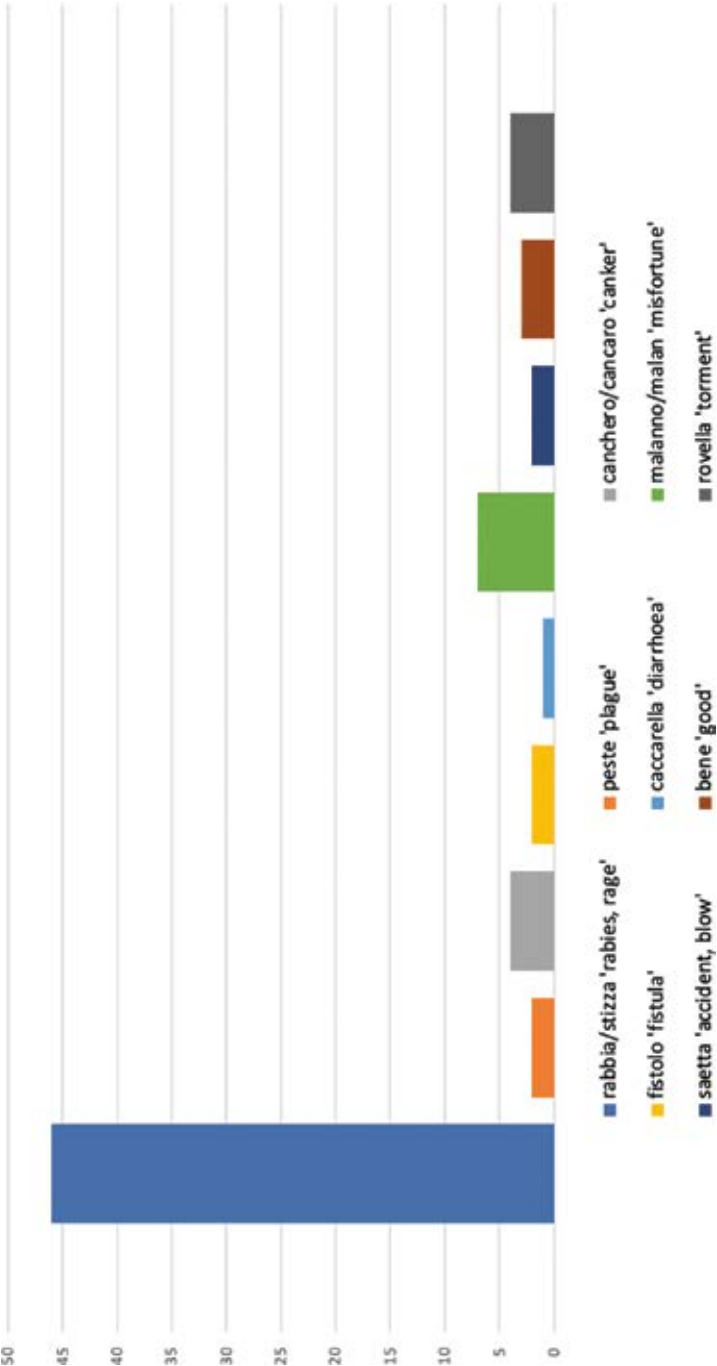


Figure 3: Distribution of different diseases and (mis)fortune in the curse *che ti venga NP* in Italian LIS. Cortina XVIII secolo – commedie Goldoni.

animals were bitten in the district of Belluno [*sic*] by a mad wolf, and many died. (King et al. 2004: 17; see also Müller et al. 2015).

Belluno was Venetian territory. Rabies, always fatal, caused mass hysteria during seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European epidemics (see Pastoureau 2018; Rao 2018 on the fear of wolves in modern times). Goldoni's dramatic oeuvre, therefore, follows the CODIT impoliteness strategy: curse with the deadliest disease available. Rabies has been described since the ancient world (King et al. 2004), and the Italian word for anger, *rabbia*, derives from the disease. For the lemma *rabbia* the GDLI (s.v.) includes the *che ti venga* curse within the first meaning of the term, 'rabies'; however, it can also be used "nel signif. generico di accidente, malanno" [in the generic meaning of accident, bad luck]. In *stizza* the metaphorical meaning of 'rage', 'fury' prevails. New is *caccarella* 'diarrhoea'.

3.3.6 Maledictive context

Outside asides and monologues, where an impolite uptake is excluded, *che ti venga* NP has a maledictive use. As in CODIT, it appears in longer arguments (70) or as an isolated angry outburst (71):

- (70) FLAMINIO *Venite qui, acchetatevi. Consento che Zelinda vi dica tutto.*
 LINDORO *Non vo' sentir altro.*
 TOGNINA *(a Lindoro) Ma ascoltateli, che vi venga la rabbia.*
 ZELINDA *(a Lindoro) Il signor Don Flaminio. . .*
 LINDORO *È un cavaliere indegno.*
 FLAMINIO *Ah temerario! se non rispettassi Zelinda!!!*
 TOGNINA *(a Flaminio) Fermatevi! (a Lindoro) Andate via!*
 LINDORO *Non crediate di spaventarmi. . . Ma saprò farmi conoscere. (parte)*
La gelosia di Lindoro, 1764³⁶

[FLAMINIO Come here, calm down. I allow Zelinda to tell you everything.
 LINDORO I don't want to hear any more. TOGNINA (to Lindoro) But listen to them, rabies get you. ZELINDA (to Lindoro) Sir Don Flaminio. . . LINDORO Is an unworthy gentleman. FLAMINIO Ah reckless man! if it weren't for Zelinda!!! TOGNINA (to Flaminio) Stop! (to Lindoro) Go away! LINDORO Don't think you scare me. . . But I'll make you respect me. (leaves)]

³⁶ See footnote 35 for the bibliographical reference.

Lindoro is jealous of Don Flaminio's attentions to his wife Zelinda, though Don Flaminio loves Barbara. Lindoro burst in on Zelinda and Don Flaminio in the presence of Tognina, Barbara's maid. Don Flaminio wants to explain, but Lindoro refuses to listen. Tognina urges Lindoro to listen, boosting her request with a curse. Zelinda starts explaining, but is interrupted by Lindoro, who insults Don Flaminio. Don Flaminio replies with another insult and threatens violence. Tognina tries to stop Flaminio, and requests Lindoro leave. Lindoro leaves, threatening revenge.

In (71) the scene represents two aristocrats. Madama di Bigné is bored and host don Alessandro brings her an almanac:

- (71) ALESSANDRO *Qui non ho che il lunario.*
 MADAMA *Oh sì, sì, quest'è un libro che divertir mi suole.*
Presto si legge, e presto si lascia, se si vuole.
 ALESSANDRO *Eccol, per obbedirvi.*
 MADAMA *Dov'è il corrente mese?*
Che vi venga la rabbia: un lunario francese?
 ALESSANDRO *Madama, non intende?*
 MADAMA *La lingua l'ho studiata*
Quindici o venti giorni, poi mi sono annoiata. Il cavalier
giocondo, 1755

[ALESSANDRO Here I have but an almanac. MADAMA Oh yes, yes, now there's a book that tends to amuse me. Soon you read it, and soon you leave it, if you want. ALESSANDRO Here it is, to obey you. MADAMA Where is the current month? Rabies get you: a French almanac? ALESSANDRO Madama, you do not understand? MADAMA I have studied the language Fifteen or twenty days, then I got bored]

When *Madama* notes the almanac is in French, she is irritated and curses her host (using respectful pronoun *vi*). Alessandro shows attentiveness with his question, and *Madama* replies cooperatively. Her anger is limited to the curse. If Don Alessandro is offended, he does not show it. In sum, when on the record, the curse appears in arguments or in isolated outburst, rarely in angry rants. It is not used for the purpose of banter.

3.3.7 Conclusion

Compared to CODIT, Goldoni uses more sentence-initial *che*, he almost always uses *venga*, and he never puts the disease before the verb. The use of *ti* is also up. There

are fewer types and occurrences of intensification and fewer disease nouns. In other words, the phrase *che ti venga* followed by a disease noun, mainly *rabbia*, is recurrent and highly formulaic in Goldoni. The predominance of *rabbia* supports the CODIT cursing strategy: rabies is always lethal, with epidemics in Italy at the end of the seventeenth century, and frequent rabid wolf attacks in the eastern Dolomites in the eighteenth century.

Goldoni's asides act as safe spaces for cursing with the downgraded pronoun *ti* indicating a temporary lapse in respect or deference. The aside is evidence that the audience is expected to recognise the curse as too impolite for the context. *Che ti venga* NP is mainly maledictive, however, the Goldoni corpus contains three benedictive cases: *che ti venga il/del bene* 'bless you', one of which also appears in CODIT. These examples will be subjected to a qualitative analysis in Section 4.

4 Benedictive examples

All examples use *che ti venga il/del bene* 'bless you', literally, 'may good come to you'.³⁷ The analysis follows a chronological order.

4.1 *La sposa sagace*, 1758, Act III, Scene 3

Donna Barbara, the daughter of Don Policarpio, has secretly pledged to marry the Count of Altomare. The servant Moschino reveals Barbara's secret to her father Policarpio:

- (72) MOSCHINO [...]
Finge di non curarsi di ritrovar marito;
Eppure il matrimonio l'ha messa in appetito.
E sa con artificio l'amante aver presente,
E burlasi di tutti, e alcun non sa niente.
 POLICARPIO *Oh che ti venga il bene! non lo credeva mai.*
 MOSCHINO *Ascoltate, signore, che cosa io penetrai.*

³⁷ An Italian grammar for English speakers (Roster 1875: 292) includes *Che ti venga il bene*, translated as 'Bless the man!' in a list of "Interjections", suggesting the phrase is more a discourse marker than a genuine blessing.

[MOSCHINO She pretends not to care about finding a husband; Yet she has worked up an appetite for marriage. And knows with artifice to have her lover present, And mocks all, and some know nothing. POLYCARPIO Oh bless you! I never believed it. MOSCHINO Listen, sir, to what I understood]

The revelation catches Policarpio by surprise. *Oh che ti venga il bene!* expresses gratitude towards the servant. Nevertheless, it can also be an interjection to express surprise or perplexity ('Heaven!'), without invoking a real benediction. Both interpretations are polite, whether a genuine blessing, or a sign of attentiveness towards the servant.

4.2 *Le smanie per la villeggiatura*, 1761, Act I, Scene 5

This example, (73), also figures in CODIT. Leonardo and his sister Vittoria prepare to depart for their summer residence, discussing Ferdinando. They agree he is a parasite, but Leonardo argues he enhances the family's reputation by being a perfect guest. Ferdinando, visiting, gossips about last summer, revealing he was snubbed by the aging hostess, whom he was serving as *cicisbeo*, a young man acting as a devoted companion or escort to a married woman, especially in eighteenth-century Italian society. This revelation surprises Vittoria:

- (73) VITTORIA *Oh! che ti venga il bene. Con un giovanetto di ventidue anni?*
 FERDINANDO *Sì, e mi piace di dire la verità; era un biondino, ben cincinato, bianco e rosso come una rosa.*
 LEONARDO *Mi maraviglio di lui, che avesse tal sofferenza.*
 FERDINANDO *Sapete, com'è? È uno di quelli che non hanno il modo, che si appoggiano qua e là, dove possono; e si attaccano ad alcuna di queste signore antichette, le quali pagano loro le poste, e danno loro qualche zecchino ancor per giocare.*
 VITTORIA *(È una buona lingua per altro).*
 [VITTORIA Oh! bless you. With a young man of twenty-two? FERDINANDO Yes, and to be honest, he was a blond chap, well-coiffed, all rosy and cream. LEONARDO I am surprised, that he tolerated as much. FERDINANDO You know how it is. He's one of those who can't pay their way, who lean in here and there, wherever possible; and they attach themselves to some aging ladies who pay their trips and give them a few coins to gamble with. VITTORIA (He is well-spoken, by the way).]

Che ti venga il bene expresses Vittoria's surprise and empathy, indicated by the pronoun change from *vi* to *ti*. However, like in (72), it can also function as a discourse marker signalling attentiveness. The public knows Vittoria considers Ferdinando a necessary evil: there is an element of *Schadenfreude*, that this parasite was publicly snubbed. That this may not be a genuine blessing is confirmed by Vittoria's aside to her brother, where she coldly evaluates Ferdinando's conversational skills. Nonetheless, even as a discourse marker it is still polite.

4.3 *Il ventaglio*, 1764, Act II, Scene 1

Il Signor Evaristo, in love with la Signora Candida, buys her a new fan from Susanna's haberdashery. Evaristo asks Giannina, a peasant woman, to secretly deliver it. In her monologue Susanna is frustrated: although she considers herself middle-class, the villagers do not distinguish between her and local peasant women. Susanna is especially jealous of Giannina, having seen Evaristo give her the fan. The passage is sarcastic:

- (74) *Gli hanno donato un ventaglio! Cosa vuol fare una contadina di quel ventaglio? Oh, farà la bella figura! Si farà fresco. . . la. . . così. . . Oh, che ti venga del bene! Sono cose da ridere; ma cose che qualche volta mi fan venire la rabbia. Son così, io che sono allevata civilmente, non posso soffrire le male grazie. (siede e lavora)* [They gave her a fan! What does a peasant girl want to do with that fan? Oh, she'll cut a nice figure! She'll far herself. . . so and. . . so. . . Oh, may it bring you good! It's ridiculous; but these things sometimes make me angry. That's me. I am well-educated and cannot suffer bad manners. (sits and works)]

Oh, che ti venga del bene! follows an "unpalatable question", a challenging rhetorical question (Culpeper 2011: 135). The implied answer to *Cosa vuole fare una contadina di quel ventaglio?* is 'nothing, she will have no use for it at all'. *Oh farà la bella figura!* is sarcastic, mocking the idea of a peasant woman fanning herself. Susanna then mimics Giannina, pronouncing the sarcastic blessing 'may it bring you good!' meaning 'damn you!'. Susanna finds the situation laughable and is angry about Giannina crossing class boundaries. By changing from the third-person reference to second-person address *ti*, Susanna makes the curse more engaging (as a mock dialogue within a monologue).

4.4 Conclusion

Che ti venga il/del bene can be a genuine blessing expressing gratitude or commiseration, or a discourse marker indicating attentiveness after a revelation. Both are polite. However, it can also be sarcastic, expressing the speaker's anger. The rarity of *che ti venga il/del bene* (3 out of 71 Goldoni curses), with one being clearly sarcastic, supports the hypothesis that *che ti venga* NP is strongly biased for impoliteness (see also Dobrushina, this volume, who finds strong constructional biases in Nakh-Daghestanian curses too).

5 Metapragmatic evidence of conventionalisation

Metapragmatic evidence of conventionalisation comes from historical textbooks for learners of Italian as a foreign language. The late-seventeenth-century French-Italian textbook *Le Maître italien* by Giovanni Veneroni enjoyed “numerous further editions and adaptations until the end of the eighteenth century” (Betsch 2019: 41–42). The manual includes a section called *Pour souhaiter du mal* ‘to wish ill’ (Veneroni 1687⁵: 327) listing 11 formulae, three of which include (*che*) *ti venga*: *ti venga la rabbia*; *che ti venga il canchero*; *che ti venga la cacarella* ‘may you get rabies, a canker, the quirts’, which are proposed as translations for the French *La rage te puisse venir*; *qui te puisse venir un chancre*; *puisse tu avoir la foire*. Notably, Veneroni’s list of blessings lacks the *che ti venga* phrase. Similarly, a textbook for British learners of Italian has no *che ti venga* phrases in blessings, but the list of formulae *To wish Ill* includes three occurrences of *che ti venga* with a disease: “*Ti venga la peste* or *la rabbia* pox or plague take ye”; “*Ti venga il canchero* mayst thou rot or be rotted” (Palermo 1755: 342–343).³⁸

These historical textbooks confirm the impoliteness interpretation of *che ti venga* NP: “wish ill”; “souhaiter du mal”. The presence of the formula further underscores its status as a conventionalised expression. Moreover, the remarkable editorial success of Veneroni’s manual may have contributed to its wider conventionalization. For seventeenth- and eighteenth-century learners of Italian these textbook entries served as prescriptive mentions of linguistic usages, providing the kind of indirect experience Culpeper identifies as crucial to the conventionalisation process of impoliteness formulae (§ 2.1).

³⁸ Palermo’s grammar is partially based on Veneroni’s (De Gasperin 2016).

Similarly, the use of *che ti venga* NP in theatre may have had a comparable conventionalising effect on audiences, as well as on readers of the novels and poetry in which the expression appears.

6 Concluding remarks

This essay demonstrated that Italian *che ti venga* NP is a conventionalised impoliteness formula for disease curses between the fourteenth and the twentieth century. These curses were not only impolite but also blasphemous, sinful, and legally punishable, posing risks with the cursed, the law, and God. Evidence comes from legislative, judicial, theological, and linguistic metasources. Quantitative data from two historical corpora show that most of the 132 occurrences are maledictive: appearing in arguments, they invoke the disease that is most lethal and debilitating at the time; they are exacerbated by further use of taboo words, in insults, swearwords, body orifices, etc. Very few uses are mock-impolite or polite. The corpora produced slightly different findings. In Goldoni, the phrase *che ti venga* NP appears more formulaic and less intensified. Goldoni's curser uses asides with a 'downgraded' address pronoun. I took the asides to be evidence of the conventionalisation for impoliteness with the audience. One limitation of this study is the difference in textual genre between the two corpora analysed. The higher degree of formulaicity observed in Goldoni's works may be attributed to the fact that this corpus consists only of theatrical texts by a single author, whereas the CODIT corpus encompasses a broader range of genres over a significantly longer time span. This discrepancy in corpus composition may influence the results, making direct comparisons more challenging. The CODIT includes alternative disease curses showing a closer association between one verb and one disease. Of 13 curses with *nascere* 'to be born' in CODIT, 9 have *vermocane* 'gid, staggers' – further examples are (15) and (16), which originate outside CODIT –, whilst *venire* allows for a large variety of Noun Phrases. Ultimately, to curse someone with a disease, the go-to phrase is *che ti venga*. It is a construction specialised for this purpose.

Historical contrastive pragmatics is a promising research avenue (e.g. López-Simo 2023). The English Historical Book Collection (EEBO, ECCO, Evans) corpus on Sketch Engine returns curses such as: 'the pox take you'; 'that the gallows take you'; 'the devil take you'; 'a vengeance take you all'; 'a murrain take you'; 'plague take you all'. The verb *to take* has the disease as the Subject with the cursed undergoing the action as Direct Object. The curser is, grammatically speaking, not part of the curse, just as with Italian *venire*.

This applies for present-day disease curses, offering scope for further contrastive research. Italian disease curses still use *che ti venga* NP. The Italian Web 2020 corpus (itTenTen20) returns, amongst others, these curses: *Che ti venga un attacco di tourette davanti al vescovo mentre fai la cresima a tuo figlio*. [May you have an attack of tourette's in front of the bishop when you present him your son to be anointed]; *Che ti venga un accidente, brutta puttana* [An accident take you, ugly whore]; *Che ti venga un infarto bastardo bastardoBASTARDO!!!* [A heart attack take you, bastard bastardBASTARD!!!!]. Note the following metapragmatic comments, also from Italian Web 2020:

- (75) *C'at vegna un Ocse (che ti venga un Ocse, come fosse una malattia incurabile)*
[May an OECD take you (as if it were an incurable disease)]

When the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) met in Bologna in 2000, a local protester wore a T-shirt with this slogan. Using *che ti venga* with a Noun Phrase turns the noun *ipso facto* into a disease. I also found *che ti venga del bene*. Spooked by a dog, a man utters a curse:

- (76) rientro rapidamente con “c'at vena un cancher” (trad. dal dialetto: “che ti venga del bene!”) [I quickly go back inside with “may you rot” (translated from dialect: “bless you!”)]

Che ti venga del bene is clearly impolite and a pragmatic reversal may have taken place, as is the case for uses with *benedetto* ‘blessed’ as in *benedetto ragazzo* ‘foolish boy’.

The Dutch Wikipedia page on *verwensingen* ‘curses’ states that disease curses are “typisch Nederlands” [typically Dutch].³⁹ The Dutch Web 2020 corpus (nlTenTen20) contains numerous examples (search string *krijg de* ‘get the’). Here is a handful: *Krijg de tyfus* [get typhoid fever]; *krijg de tering* [get consumption]; *krijg de kanker* [get cancer]; *krijg de pest* [get the plague]; *krijg de jicht* [get gout]. With the verb *krijgen* ‘to get, receive’ the cursed is undergoing the action, and the curser is not part of the curse.

Disease curses prefer a dangerous disease in a syntactic structure that avoids giving agency to the curser. Contrastive pragmatics may yet bring up more parallels between more languages.

39 <https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Verwensing> (accessed 8 January 2025)

Acknowledgements: I am very grateful to the reviewers and editors, especially Jonathan Culpeper and Daniel Van Olmen, for their insightful comments, which greatly improved the paper (the usual disclaimers apply). I specifically thank Federico Barbierato and Pierroberto Scaramella for providing me the opportunity to engage with historians of blasphemy in Italy during the workshop *Cursing God, Blasphemy and its Repression in Early Modern Italy (15th-19th Century)* organised at the University of Bari, December 2024.

References

Sources

- Aquinas, Thomas. 1920–1942. *The “Summa Theologica” of St. Thomas Aquinas*. Literally translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province. 2nd and revised edn. London: Burns Oates and Washbourne. 22 vols. Retrieved from <https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.506372/page/n5/mode/1up>.
- Ariosto, Ludovico. 2007 [1528]. *La Lena*. Edited by Stefano Bianchi. Milan: Rizzoli.
- Goldoni, Carlo. 1955. *Tutte le opere*. Edited by Giuseppe Ortolani. Milan: Mondadori.
- Maria, Gaetano. 1732. *L'uomo apostolico istruito nella sua vocazione al confessionario colle avvertenze de Sacri canoni, e de Santi padri, massimamente di San Carlo Borromeo*. Brescia: Rizzardi.
- Palermo, Evangelist. 1755. *A Grammar of the Italian Language*. London: A. Millar.
- Roster, P.L. 1875. *A new Italian grammar on a plan which will greatly facilitate a practical as well as a theoretical knowledge of the language*. Florence: Bencini.
- Veneroni, Giovanni. 1687⁵. *Le maître italien* [. . .]. Cinquième édition. Revue, corrigée et augmentée par l'Auteur. Paris: Étienne Loyson.

Dictionaries

- Battaglia, Salvatore. 1961–2002. *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana*. Turin: UTET. <https://www.gdli.it/>.
- Florio, John. 1598. *A worlde of wordes, or, Most copious, and exact dictionarie in Italian and English*. London: Arnold Hatfield for Edward Blount. Retrieved from <https://archive.org/details/worldofwordesor00flor/page/168/mode/2up>.

Corpora and Datasets

- Corpus diacronico dell'italiano (CODIT). Ústav Českého národního korpusu FF UK. 2021. Compiled by M. Silvia Micheli, Prague, <http://www.korpus.cz>.
- Dutch Web (nlTenTen20). 2020. on <https://www.sketchengine.eu/>.

- English Historical Book Collection (EEBO, ECCO, Evans) on <https://www.sketchengine.eu/>.
 Gutenberg Italian. 2020. on <https://www.sketchengine.eu/>.
 Italian Web (itTenTen20). 2020. on <https://www.sketchengine.eu/>.
 ItalianLISCortIta XVIII secolo – commedie Goldoni. Compiled by Chiara Ghezzi, shared on <https://www.sketchengine.eu/>.
 Paternoster, Annick. 2025. The conventionalised impoliteness formula ‘che ti venga NP’ in two historical corpora, CODIT (13th century to 1947) and Goldoni’s drama works (2nd half 18th Century) (Version 1.0) [Data set]. LaRS – Language Repository of Switzerland.

Secondary literature

- Alfonzetti, Giovanna. 2009. Gli insulti: alcuni criteri di categorizzazione. In Salvatore Carmelo Trovato (ed.), *Studi linguistici in memoria di Giovanni Tropea*, 67–78. Alessandria: Edizioni dell’Orso.
- Alfonzetti, Giovanna. 2017. *Questioni di (s)cortesia. Complimenti e insulti*. Avellino: Sinestesia Edizioni.
- Alfonzetti, Giovanna & Margherita Spampinato Beretta. 2012. Gli insulti nella storia dell’italiano. Analisi di testi del tardo medioevo. In Barbara Wehr & Frédéric Nicolosi (eds.), *Pragmatique historique et syntaxe: actes de la section du même nom du XXXIe Romanistentag allemand, Bonn, 27 septembre-1er octobre 2009*, 1–21. Frankfurt-Berlin: Peter Lang.
- Arnovick, Leslie K. 1999. *Diachronic Pragmatics: Seven Case Studies in English Illocutionary Development*. Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Baker, Eleonor. 2023. *Book Curses*. Oxford: Bodleian Library.
- Betsch, Michael. 2019. Address forms in grammars and textbooks of West and South Slavic languages in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. In Annick Paternoster & Susan Fitzmaurice (eds.), *Politeness in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, 39–74. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Biasiori, Lucio. 2024. Taking the Name of the Lord in Vain in Early Modern Italy. *Church History and Religious Culture* 104. 340–358.
- Bremmer, Rolf H. Jr. 1998. Insults hurt: verbal injury in late medieval Frisia. In Rolf H. Bremmer Jr, Thomas S.B. Johnston & Oebele Vries (eds.), *Approaches to Old Frisian Philology*, 89–112. Amsterdam/ New York: Rodopi.
- Breschi, Giancarlo. 1994. Atti criminali recanatesi, edizione commentata. In Francesco Bruni (ed.), *L’italiano nelle regioni. Testi e documenti*, 484–486. Turin: UTET.
- Burke, Peter. 1987. Insult and blasphemy in Early Modern Italy. In Peter Burke, *The Historical Anthropology of Early Modern Italy: Essays on Perception and Communication*, 95–109. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Casagrande, Carla & Silvana Vecchio. 1987. *I peccati della lingua. Disciplina ed etica della parola nella cultura medievale*. Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana.
- Culpeper, Jonathan. 2011. *Impoliteness. Using language to cause offence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Culpeper, Jonathan. 2018. *Taboo language and impoliteness*. In Keith Allan (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Taboo Words and Language*, 28–40. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Culpeper, Jonathan & Michael Haugh. 2021. The metalinguistics of offence in (British) English: A corpus-based metapragmatic approach. *Journal of Language Aggression and Conflict* 9(2). 185–214.
- Culpeper, Jonathan & Merja Kytö. 2010. *Early Modern English Dialogues. Spoken Interaction as Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Culpeper, Jonathan & Elena Semino. 2000. Constructing witches and spells. Speech acts and activity types in Early Modern England. *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* 1(1). 97–116.
- Danet, Brenda & Bryna Bogoch. 1992. “Whoever alters this, may God turn his face from him on the day of Judgement”, Curses in Anglo-Saxon legal documents. *Journal of American Folklore* 105. 132–65.
- Dardano, Maurizio, Claudio Giovanardi & Massimo Palermo. 1992. Pragmatica dell’ingiuria nell’italiano antico. In Giovanni Gobber (ed.), *La linguistica pragmatica. Atti del XXIV Congresso della Società di Linguistica Italiana* (Milano, 4–6 settembre 1990), 3–37. Rome: Bulzoni.
- Dean, Trevor. 2007. *Crime and Justice in Late Medieval Italy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- De Gasperin, Vilma. 2016. Rules and Grammars of Italian in Eighteenth-century England: The Case of Giuseppe Baretti. *The Italianist* 36(3). 429–446.
- Delumeau, Jean (ed.). 1989. *Injures et blasphèmes*. Paris: Imago.
- Domaneschi, Filippo. 2020. *Insultare gli altri*. Turin: Einaudi.
- D’Onghia, Luca. 2011. Aspetti della lingua comica di Giovan Battista Andreini. *La lingua italiana. Storia, strutture, testi* 7. 57–80.
- Duranti, Alessandro. 2004. Agency in language. In Alessandro Duranti (ed.), *A Companion to linguistic anthropology*, 451–473. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Evans, Nicholas. 2007. Insubordination and its uses. In Irina Nikolaeva (ed.), *Finiteness: Theoretical and Empirical Foundations*, 366–431. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fantappiè, Renzo (ed.). 2000. *Nuovi testi pratesi dalle origini al 1320*, 2 vols. Florence: Accademia della Crusca.
- Fisher, John. 1908. Cursing. In *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 4. New York: Robert Appleton Company. Retrieved via <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04573d.htm>.
- Gager, John G. 1992. Introduction. In John G. Gager (ed.), *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World*, 3–41. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gonthier, Nicole. 2007. «Sanglant Coupaul!» «Ordre Ribaude!» *Les injures au Moyen Âge*. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes.
- Ghezzi, Chiara. 2021. Verticality and horizontality in Italian address forms. In Chiara Ghezzi, Piera Molinella & Luis Unceta Gómez (eds.), *Politeness between cognition and culture from Latin to Italian and Spanish*. [Special Issue] *Studi Italiani di Linguistica Teorica e Applicata* 50(3). 648–666.
- Greco, Angelo. 2021. “Augurare la morte sui social è reato?” https://www.laleggepertutti.it/483685_augurare-la-morte-sui-social-e-reato (accessed 8 January 2025).
- Jucker, Andreas H. 2020. *Politeness in the History of England. From the Middle Ages to the Present Day*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jucker, Andreas H. & Irma Taavitsainen. 2000. Diachronic Speech Act Analysis: Insults from Flyting to Flaming. *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* 1(1). 67–95.
- Kitz, Anne Marie. 2007. Curses and Cursing in the Ancient Near East. *Religion Compass* 1. 615–627.
- Kitz, Anne Marie. 2014. *Cursed Are You! The Phenomenology of Cursing in Cuneiform and Hebrew Texts*. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns.
- Kádár, Dániel Z. & Andrea Szalai. 2020. The socialisation of interactional rituals: A case study of ritual cursing as a form of teasing in Romani. *Pragmatics* 30. 15–39.
- King, Arthur A., Anthony R. Fooks, Michel Aubert & Alexander I. Wandeler (eds.). 2004. *Historical Perspective of Rabies in Europe and the Mediterranean Basin*. Paris: OIE.
- Lagorgette, Dominique. 1994. Termes d’adresse, acte perlocutoires et insultes: la violence verbale dans quelques textes des XI^e, XV^e et XVI^e siècles. *Senefiance* 36. 317–332.

- Lagorgette, Dominique. 2003. Les syntagmes nominaux d'insulte et de blasphème: analyse diachronique du discours marginalisé. [Special Issue]. *Thélème: Revista complutense de estudios franceses*. 171–188.
- Larson, Pär. 2004. Ingiurie e villanie dagli Atti podestarili pistoiesi del 1295. *Bollettino dell'Opera del Vocabolario italiano* 9. 349–354.
- Lesnick, Daniel R. 1991. Insults and threats in medieval Todi. *Journal of Medieval History* 17(1). 71–89.
- Lett, Didier. 2018. *Crime, genre et châtement: Hommes et femmes face à la justice au Moyen Age (XIIe–XVe siècle)*. Paris: Armand Colin.
- Limberg, Holger. 2009. Impoliteness and threat responses. *Journal of Pragmatics* 41(7). 1376–1394.
- Little, Lester K. 1993. *Benedictine Maledictions: Liturgical Cursing in Romanesque France*. Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press.
- López-Simo, Mireia. 2023. Formules votives négatives en français et en espagnol: de la malédiction à l'expulsion. *Estudios de Traducción* 13: 21–35.
- Madero, Marta. 1992. *Manos violentas, palabras vedadas. La injuria en Castilla y León (siglos XIII–XV)*. Madrid: Taurus Humanidades.
- Marcheschi, Daniela. 1983. *Ingiurie, impropri, contumelie ecc. Saggio di lingua parlata del Trecento cavato dai libri criminali di Lucca per opera di Salvatore Bongi. Nuova edizione rivista e corretta*. Lucca: Pacini Fazzi.
- Mattarese, Tina. 2010. Goldoni, Carlo. In Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana (ed.), *Enciclopedia dell'italiano*, [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/carlo-goldoni_\(Enciclopedia-dell'Italiano\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/carlo-goldoni_(Enciclopedia-dell'Italiano)/) (accessed 8 January 2025).
- Micheli, M. Silvia. 2022. CODIT. A new resource for the study of Italian from a diachronic perspective: Design and applications in the morphological field. *Corpus* 23.
- Molinelli, Piera. 2018. Sociocultural and Linguistic Constraints in Address Choice from Latin to Italian. In Kate Beeching, Chiara Ghezzi & Piera Molinelli (eds.), *Positioning the Self and Others. Linguistic Perspectives*, 51–79. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Müller, Thomas, Conrad Martin Freuling, Patrick Wysocki, Micha Roumiantzeff, Jean Freney, Thomas Christoph Mettenleiter & Adriaan Vos. 2015. Terrestrial rabies control in the European Union: historical achievements and challenges ahead. *The Veterinary Journal* 203(1). 10–77.
- Nash, David. 2007. *Blasphemy in the Christian World. A History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pastoreau, Michel. 2018. *Le loup. Une histoire culturelle*. Paris: Le seuil.
- Paternoster, Annick. 2015. *Cortesi e scortesi. Percorsi di pragmatica storica da Castiglione a Collodi*. Rome: Carocci.
- Radtke, Edgar. 1994. *Gesprochenes Französisch und Sprachgeschichte. Zur Rekonstruktion der Gesprächskonstitution in Dialogen französischer Sprachlehrbücher des 17. Jahrhunderts unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der italienischen Adaptionen*. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer.
- Ramos, Melissa Dianne. 2015. *Spoken Word and Ritual Performance: The Oath and the Curse in Deuteronomy 27–28*. Los Angeles: University of California Los Angeles dissertation.
- Rao, Riccardo. 2018. *Il tempo dei lupi*. Turin: UTET.
- Raveggi, Sergio. 2018. Il lessico delle ingiurie contro le donne. In Anna Esposito, Franco Franceschi & Gabriella Piccinni (eds.), *Violenza alle donne. Una prospettiva medievale*, 129–150. Bologna: Il mulino.
- Salvi Giampaolo & Lorenzo Renzi (eds). 2010. *Grammatica dell'italiano antico*. 2 vols. Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Searle, John R. 1979. *Expression and Meaning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Szalai, Andrea. 2023. When a curse is not impolite: Insistence in rites of hospitality in Romani interaction. Paper presented at SymPol 2023, 14th Symposium on Politeness. (Im)Politeness studies: new frontiers, synergies and perspectives, Universidade da Madeira, 3–5 July, 2023.

- Tardivel, Chloé. 2019. Le délit d'injure verbale d'après les statuts communaux de la Marche d'Ancône (Italie, XI^e–XV^e siècles). *Questes* 41. 85–105.
- Tardivel, Chloé. 2021. Giudicare la violenza verbale alla fine del Medioevo. In Didier Lett (ed.), *I registri della giustizia penale nell'Italia dei secoli XII–XV*, 301–320. Rome: Publications de l'École française de Rome.
- Tardivel, Chloé. Forthcoming. Words and Deeds: Gender and Social Practices of Verbal Violence in Bologna's Trial Records (1350–1385). Gender, Networks, and Communities in Medieval Europe, <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-02483828v2> (accessed 8 January 2025).
- Terkourafi, Marina. 2001. *Politeness in Cypriot Greek: A Frame-Based Approach*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge dissertation.
- Terkourafi, Marina. 2005. Pragmatic correlates of frequency of use: The case for a notion of 'minimal context'. In Sophia Marmaridou, Kiki Nikiforidou & Eleni Antonopoulou (eds.), *Reviewing linguistic thought: Converging trends for the 21st Century*, 209–233. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Terkourafi, Marina & Dániel Kádár. 2017. Convention and Ritual (Im)Politeness. In Jonathan Culpeper, Michael Haugh & Dániel Kádár *The Palgrave Handbook of Linguistic (Im)Politeness*, 171–195. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Trifone, Pietro. 2000. *L'italiano a teatro. Dalla commedia rinascimentale a Dario Fo*. Pisa/Roma: Istituti editoriali e poligrafici internazionali.
- Trifone, Pietro. 2019. Il teatro tra dire e fare. In Nicola De Blasi & Pietro Trifone, *L'italiano sul palcoscenico*, 7–19. Firenze: Accademia della Crusca.
- Vecchio, Silvana. 2014. Légitimité et efficacité de la malédiction dans la réflexion théologique médiévale. In Nicole Bériou, Jean-Patrice Boudet & Irène Rosier-Catach (eds.), *Le pouvoir des mots au Moyen Âge: Études réunies*, 349–361. Turnhout: Brepols.
- Vise, Melissa E. 2015. *The Threat of the Tongue: illicit speech in Late Medieval Italy, 1250–1450*. Evanston (IL): Northwestern University dissertation.
- Vise, Melissa E. 2025. *The Unruly Tongue. Speech and Violence in Medieval Italy*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

