

Article

Reformulation in Early 20th Century Substandard Italian

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Abstract

This study investigates reformulation in a substandard variety of Italian, *italiano popolare*, from the early 20th Century, focusing on a collection of letters and postcards from semi-literate Sicilian peasants during World War I. The analysis identifies three reformulation markers: CIOÈ, ANZI, and VUOL DIRE. These markers are affected by hypercorrection, interference, and structural simplification, reflecting the sociolinguistic dynamics of *italiano popolare*. Additionally, the study of these markers sheds light on the relationships between reformulation and related discourse functions, namely paraphrase, correction, addition, and motivation. By positioning occurrences of reformulation along a continuum between the spoken and written mode, the findings suggest that this discourse function is employed more as a rhetorical strategy that characterizes planned written texts, rather than as a feature of disfluency that is typical of unplanned speech. Ultimately, examining reformulation in *italiano popolare* provides valuable insights into the relationship between sociolinguistic variation and language change in the beginning of the 20th Century, a key phase in the spread of Italian as a national language.

Keywords: reformulation; orality; writing; letter writing; *italiano popolare*; Sicilian; historical pragmatics; historical sociolinguistics



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1. Introduction: A Pragmatic–Diachronic Study of Italian in the Early 20th Century

Recent research has highlighted the 20th century as “a linguistically special space”, in particular for Romance languages (Pons Borderia & Salameh Jiménez, 2024). The specificity of this century has been pointed out for diachronic linguistics, due to both the technological innovations that yielded unprecedented quality and quantity of data, and the profound transformations that marked the so-called short century (Hobsbawm, 1994). From this perspective, this study offers an empirical investigation of the semantic and pragmatic function of reformulation in Italian, focusing on substandard written use from the early 20th century.

The beginning of the last century was a fundamental phase in the linguistic history of Italy (De Mauro, 1970), which was unified as a modern national state only in 1861. The very diffusion of Italian as the standard language hinged upon the sociopolitical changes brought about by the 20th century, involving three main forces: new social conditions resulting from industrialization, migration flows, and urbanization; the development of the public schooling system, and therefore an increase in literacy rates; and the spread of mass media, namely the press, radio, cinema, and finally, television. Thanks to these forces, the population slowly acquired Italian, which for centuries had been limited to higher social classes in writing. The spread of Italian meant a dramatic functional reduction in the local languages, i.e., the many Italo-Romance varieties.

A pivotal moment in Italy's linguistic history was World War I, a tragic event that contributed to linguistic unification of the Italian population. The experience of war fostered the spread of an actual national language, which enabled communication among people from different regional origins, especially soldiers. Besides the use of a standard language in speech, writing was the second major effect of World War I, as letters and postcards were the only means of communication between soldiers and their families. In a nutshell, the war triggered a boom in the acquisition of Italian and writing by the entire population, in a way that had never occurred before, and despite any difference in age, gender, origin and even literacy level. The outcome of this outstanding diffusion was the emergence of a social variety of the language, *italiano popolare* (lit. 'people's Italian'), i.e., "a substandard social variety spoken and written by uneducated or low educated people, who use dialect¹ as their mother tongue and as their usual means of communication" (Alfonzetti, 2017, p. 250).

This study tries to capture this crucial moment in Italian linguistic history. The data consist of a collection of private letters and postcards written precisely in *italiano popolare* during World War I, the Di Raimondo Correspondence (henceforth, DRC). Di Raimondo was the surname of a family of semi-literate peasants from Modica, a town in Sicily. Although Sicilian-speaking and hardly capable of writing, the family engaged in epistolary practice and produced an intense correspondence. Forgotten for about a century, this correspondence has now been studied and edited as a collection (Scivoletto, 2024), comprising two hundred texts by almost twenty writers. Exploring this kind of text allows us to expand the width of linguistic data used to understand diachronic threads in a language. Letter writing is a prominent example of a textual type (Bergs, 2004) that encompasses pragmatic complexity (Fitzmaurice, 2002) as well as sociolinguistic variability, the latter allowing us to understand linguistic histories from below (Elspass, 2012).

After detailing the substandard variety of Italian (Section 2) and the data under scrutiny (Section 3), the article introduces the object of study. Reformulation is presented, addressing first its definition and then its markers in Italian (Section 4). Three types of reformulation markers emerge in the DRC (Section 5): CIOÈ (Section 5.1), ANZI (Section 5.2), and VUOL DIRE (Section 5.3). In conclusion (Section 6), two resulting issues are discussed: how the markers instantiate different values in the written/spoken continuum (Section 6.1) and how this function relates to neighboring ones in a semantic-pragmatic map (Section 6.2).

2. A Brief Account of *Italiano Popolare*

As introduced in the previous paragraph, World War I caused *italiano popolare* to surface in an unprecedented way, and the DRC is a prominent example. In fact, a substandard variety of Italian had always been used in non-literary texts (cf. D'Achille, 1990). At the start of the 20th century, it was not the phenomenon itself that was new, but rather its scale. Out of a population of forty million, Italy mobilized four million soldiers, and the national postal service sorted almost four billion letters and postcards (Procacci, 2000, pp. 30, 54). This means a rough estimate of one hundred texts per citizen, and one thousand per soldier in his correspondence with family and friends during wartime. Letter writing took place despite dramatically low rates of literacy. In 1911, 40% of the population was illiterate (De Mauro, 1970, p. 95), with extreme gaps among regions (around 15% in the most industrialized regions, around 60–70% in least industrialized ones; among the latter, Sicily recorded 58%). This massive flow of writing led to a stable sociolect of Italian. The first to observe it was Leo Spitzer, who profited from his job in the Austrian military censorship to read and examine the flow of Italian semi-literate letter writing that came from prison camps (Spitzer, 1921). This pioneering book was translated into Italian only in the 1970s, once Italian sociolinguistics had understood the emergence of *italiano popolare* (cf.

De Mauro, 1970). Later research provided a proper sociolinguistic account of this variety (Berruto, 1987).

Italiano popolare shows a number of characteristic features at each level of linguistic analysis:

- Orthographic deviations, graphic inconsistencies (graphemics);
- Geographic markedness, simplification of clusters (phonetics);
- Malapropisms, reanalysis of derivational morphemes (lexicon and word formation);
- Reduced paradigms, analogical generalization or deletion of markers (morphosyntax);
- Redundancy, underspecification of connectivity relations (textuality).

Besides graphic aspects that depend on literacy levels, we can make sense of the general outline of *italiano popolare* by pointing out three main forces or mechanisms that lie at its basis: interference, hypercorrection, and simplification.

Interference occurs when speakers/writers replicate a linguistic feature from their primary language into the target language, involving every level of the language system, from phonetics to pragmatics. In fact, since speakers/writers do not master a given linguistic variety, they tend to impose their grammar onto it. In the DRC, writers extensively replicate features of the Sicilian system into *italiano popolare*. In Scivoletto (2024, pp. 258–272), a detailed account is provided for the inflected infinitive, the *senza* ('without') negative construction, the *avere* ('to have') deontic construction, the deagentive ditransitive construction, pseudocoordination, and the reduplicated irrelevance construction. A simple example is differential object marking. As a syntactic rule, animate objects in transitive constructions are marked by the preposition *a*, while inanimate ones are not (e.g., *vitti a Martina* 'I saw Martina' / *vitti Roma* 'I saw Rome'). In the DRC we often find the preposition *a* (identical in Sicilian and Italian) in the closing formula of letters and postcards, which is frequently performed by the sentence *saluto a tutti* 'I greet everybody'.

Hypercorrection refers to the tendency of speakers/writers to overextend a given rule or feature of the language, to the extent that they perceived it as typical. This force shows the sociolinguistic strength of the standard variety, which speakers/writers strive to adhere to. In *italiano popolare*, it is often the indirect effect of interference: speakers/writers associate a feature with their primary variety and try to diverge from it, so they overextend a variant they link to the standard variety instead. In the DRC, see the graphic realization of a phonetic variable. In southern Italo-Romance varieties such as Sicilian, speakers increase the length of intervocalic consonants, including voiced post-alveolar affricates (*cugino* [ku'dʒi:no] > [ku'dʒ:i:no]). Both phonetic patterns exist in Italian, and orthography reflects this alternation between short and long affricates, e.g., *cugino* 'cousin' and *coraggio* 'courage'. In the DRC, writers systematically avoid <gg>, perceiving it as a written rendering of Sicilian phonetics, and they reduce it to <g>: e.g., *coraggio* 'courage', *ogi* 'today', or *viaggiare* 'to travel'.

Hypercorrection can also be independent of interference, as proven again by graphemics. In Italian, <h> is a mere graphic symbol (it does not correspond to any sound), and is used in loanwords (e.g., *hotel*), for complex graphemes (e.g., <ch> for [k]), and in the forms of the verb 'to have'. So, orthography distinguishes homophones like *hanno* 'have.PRS.3PL' and *anno* 'year'. In the DRC, as commonly in *italiano popolare*, writers perceive <h> as a symbol of the standard variety, so they generalize it, e.g., *harivato* for *arrivato* ('arrived'). Given that <h> has no phonetic substance, and that Sicilian does not provide any competing orthography (let alone to semi-literates), no interference is at stake.

The third force is simplification, i.e., reduction in structures and consequent generalization of features (Berruto, 1987). In (socio)linguistic typology, it is intended as loss or decrease in complexity, involving processes of regularization of irregularities, increase in lexical and morphological transparency, and loss of redundancy (Trudgill, 2009), three processes converging into the principles of 'isomorphism' (one-to-one correspondence

between function and form) and ‘fewer distinction’ (Miestamo, 2017). Simplification affects languages used by large communities, with looseness of social networks and a high degree of language contact (Trudgill, 2009, p. 98)—precisely like *italiano popolare*, which is the byproduct of the spread of Italian to the wide community of the nation-state. In fact, this sociolect is defined by simplified variants of several sociolinguistic variables (Berruto, 1987): e.g., the auxiliary alternation reduced to one single form (*essere/avere* > *avere*), loss of number agreement in the locative-existential construction (*c’è/ci sono* > *c’è*), double negation reduced to single forms (the type *mangio niente* instead of *non mangio niente*), or the paradigm of relativizers is merged into a single general subordinator (*che*). Some processes of simplification in *italiano popolare* provide evidence for well-known vernacular universals (Chambers, 2004), e.g., the locative-existential construction as a default singular, but most of them offer new cases in point (cf. Scivoletto, 2024, pp. 272–282).

3. The Di Raimondo Correspondence (DRC)

The DRC is a private collection whose texts have been transcribed and published in Scivoletto (2024). The essential information concerning the texts can be summarized as follows: types of documents and their edition, timeframe and location, writers, and the issue of authorship.

- *Documents and Edition*

In addition to various items (loose envelopes, photographs, holy images and prayer cards, money order receipts, blank postcards), the collection contains a total of 204 handwritten texts: 176 postcards, 24 letters, 2 postal cards, 1 telegram, and 1 note. The paper material is preserved in good condition overall, displaying clear handwriting despite some signs of wear (faded characters, stains, torn sections). All the data are presented here following a conservative interpretative edition, which normalizes mainly word boundaries, punctuation and capitalization².

- *Timeframe and Location*

The collection spans the entire duration of Italy’s wartime experience. It begins on 28 June 1915 (a month after the Kingdom of Italy entered the war on May 24) and ends—far later than the armistice of 3 November 1918—on 27 September 1919, when the last member of the family finally joins the long process of repatriation. As for the locations, the correspondence unfolds between home and the so-called *zona di guerra* (‘war zone’). The former is Modica, a densely populated agrotown, while the latter is a term imposed by military secrecy to refer to generic areas affected by the war and especially the frontlines.

- *Writers*

The collection gathers the epistolary writings of the Di Raimondo extended family circle. The immediate family, their friends and in-laws contributed to the correspondence, for a total number of 15 writers. Main protagonists are the four brothers, all soldiers, the older sister with her husband, soldier as well, a younger sister, and the father. The data for this study (15 occurrences of reformulation) are produced by 7 writers: the father Giorgio, all the four soldier brothers Angelo, Orazio, Antonino, and Raimondo, their brother-in-law Giovanni G., and a friend, Angelo F. All the people of the network are peasants with low levels of education and literacy. This raises the question of authorship.

- *Authorship and Scribal Mediation*

In semi-literate letter writing, authorship is not straightforward due to the widespread practice of mediated writing by means of scribes. Only a few texts were written by expert scribes. For instance, the father Giorgio and the uncle Salvatore were too old to have benefited from public schooling (they were born around 1860 and 1870, but in Sicily schools

spread only since the 1880s), so their texts are handwritten by the youngest daughters, Maria and Concettina. Among the soldiers, some wrote by hand themselves, like Angelo, who probably mastered reading and writing in military schools during his previous service in the war of Libya (1911–1912). The less literate ones resorted to fellow soldiers as scribes. Although it is not always possible to disentangle the contributions of authors and scribes (but see Section 5), in most cases they belonged to low social classes and instantiated the same sociolect, *italiano popolare*. It is precisely this social variety of Italian that this study aims to explore, with particular reference to the semantic and pragmatic function of reformulation.

4. Reformulation and Its Markers in Italian

Since the earliest studies (Antos, 1982; Gülich & Kotschi, 1983; Roulet, 1987), reformulation has been understood as a discourse operation or relation. Reformulation occurs when speakers or writers rephrase an element of speech. This discourse function is typically performed by means of particular discourse structuring markers³, i.e., reformulation markers. European languages have rich inventories, including dedicated markers with a transparent meaning-form association, such as Eng. *in other words* (together with its translation equivalents in the other languages). Reformulation can also be performed by more complex and multifunctional markers, e.g., Eng. *I mean* (cf. Schiffrin, 1987). Through reformulation markers, a segment of talk or text is re-elaborated into one that only partially corresponds to the previous, in order to reach a communicative goal. This goal varies, leading to multiple semantic and pragmatic meanings of reformulation (specification, generalization, summary, etc.). Researchers have extensively explored its complex array of subfunctions and subtypes (cf. del Saz Rubio & Fraser, 2003; Murillo Omat, 2007), its pragmatic motivation (e.g., Blakemore, 1993, in relevance-theoretic terms), and its rhetorical or stylistic value (Cuenca, 2003). In recent years, studies have focused on new aspects, e.g., considering sign languages (Meurant et al., 2022) or employing experimental techniques (Salameh Jiménez, 2021).

The core idea about reformulation is the rough correspondence, i.e., the only partial equivalence, that is performed by means of this discourse relation. In her relevance-theoretic approach, Blakemore (1993) refers to “interpretive *resemblance*”. Gülich and Kotschi (1995, p. 42) state that “some kind of ‘variation’ is at least *suggested*” between the two segments, so that “this variation often implies that reformulation is more than a strict paraphrase” (Cuenca, 2003, p. 1072). In fact, the notions of paraphrase and reformulation have been tightly related since the first works on the topic (Gülich & Kotschi, 1983), so that reformulation has been traditionally divided into paraphrastic and non-paraphrastic (Roulet, 1987). While the paraphrastic reformulation sets a relation of equivalence between two elements at the same hierarchical level, non-paraphrastic reformulation provides a retrogressive interpretation of the first segment (Rossari, 1990, 1994), so that the second segment can re-elaborate the first in many respects (reduced, expanded, adjusted, etc.). This distinction has been widely accepted (Gülich & Kotschi, 1995; Cuenca & Bach, 2007; Dal Negro & Fiorentini, 2014; Fiorentini & Sansò, 2017; Rossari et al., 2022).

A strong proposal has been put forth by Pons Bordería (2013), who argues for a specific notion of reformulation coinciding with its non-paraphrastic type. A proper relation of reformulation establishes partial identity between the two formulations. When a full equivalence is at stake, the discourse relation is of a different kind, paraphrase. In a parallel way, Pons Bordería (2013) disentangles reformulation from a related function, correction. The latter is often treated as a subtype of the former (Gülich & Kotschi, 1983, 1995; Rossari, 1994; Bazzanella, 1995; Murillo Omat, 2007). The difference lies in whether the first segment is invalidated by the second: if it is, we are dealing with correction (or

equivalent labels such as rectification). In fact, reformulation markers re-elaborate the first segment in order to refine it, whereas corrective markers serve to discard it.⁴ This theoretical account of reformulation offers a thorough definition and clear distinction among related functions. Distinguishing these functions is also an opportunity for better understanding their relations. Diachrony is a case in point: an evolutionary path is hypothesized, according to which paraphrase is the source for reformulation, and correction its outcome (Pons Bordería, 2013, pp. 164–167).

In sum, reformulation is intended here (in line with Pons Bordería, 2013, but also Ferrari, 2014) as a relation that sets a partial equivalence between segments, whereby the second provides an elaboration of the first. In case of full equivalence, paraphrase is at stake. In case of invalidation of the first segment, we speak of correction. If the second segment has other particular functions, we are dealing with different relations (exemplification, conclusion, and so on).

Reformulation has been examined in Italian by several overviews (cf. Berretta, 1984; Bazzanella, 1986, 1995; Manzotti, 1999; Ciabbari, 2013; Ferrari, 2014). Bazzanella (1995), in her broad approach integrating reformulation with paraphrase, correction, and exemplification, provides a rich lexical inventory: *cioè* ('that is'), *diciamo* ('let's say'), *anzi* ('rather'), *insomma* ('in sum'), and *be'* (reduced form of *bene* 'well'), *voglio dire* ('I want to say'), *in altre parole* ('in other words'), and *leggasi* (an enclitic form of the impersonal verb phrase in the subjunctive mood *si legga*, 'read as follows'). Ferrari (2014) adds other forms: *ossia* ('that is', cf. Sp. *osea*), *vale a dire* ('it means', cf. Fr. *c'est-à-dire*), *ovvero* ('or'), *in breve* ('in short'), *in sostanza* ('in substance'), and more complex expressions such as *in termini più/meno tecnici* ('in more/less technical terms'), *per essere più espliciti* ('to be more explicit'), *detto altrimenti* ('said otherwise', cf. Fr. *autrement dit*), *si intende dire che* ('It is meant to say that').

More detailed analyses have been carried out with respect to particular reformulation markers. Several studies explore the reformulating function of *cioè* in many perspectives (Dal Negro & Fiorentini, 2014; Ghezzi, 2022; Geddo, 2023; Mereu & Dal Negro, 2025). At first Bazzanella (2003), and now Russo (2024) in great detail, have examined the evolution of *anzi* from spatio-temporal meanings ('before', 'in front of') to contrast and correction ('rather'), and Visconti (2015, 2021) has shed light on its reformulation value (cf. also Sainz, 2014). Fiorentini and Sansò (2017) examine colloquial forms in Present-day spoken Italian, showing the cases of *voglio dire* and *nel senso* ('in the sense that'). Interestingly, precisely the forms scrutinized by these studies have been found in the DRC—*cioè*, *anzi*, and a variant of *voglio dire* (with the exception of *nel senso* which is probably a very recent phenomenon)—as the actual reformulation markers employed by writers in their letters and postcards.

5. Reformulation Markers in *Italiano Popolare*

Reformulation has been examined in the 204 letters and postcards of the DRC with an onomasiologic approach. Given the textual function of reformulation as defined above, all the cases that perform this function have been collected, in order to identify the actual reformulation markers used by writers. The analysis includes, in addition to clear-cut cases, several instances in which reformulation overlaps with a different function. This allows us to explore reformulation and better understand its relationship with neighboring functions (Section 6.1). Table 1 shows all the reformulations in the DRC.

In the DRC, a total number of 15 reformulations emerge from 11 texts composed by 7 different writers. This list leads to a small inventory of only three markers: CIOÈ, ANZI, and VUOL DIRE. The variety of speakers rules out an idiolectal bias: no marker is employed by a single speaker, nor does any occur only once, so that all the data resulting from the DRC seems generally shared by the community of writers.

Table 1. Reformulations in the DRC.

N	Context	Text ⁵	Type (Token)
i	<i>il grano ancora non l'ho trebiato, cioè non l'ho ancora pisato</i>	Letter from Giorgio to his son Angelo (2.7.1915)	CIOÈ (<i>ciòè</i>)
ii	<i>noi non abbiamo ancora trebiato, cioè pisato</i>	Postcard from Giorgio to his son Angelo (9.7.1915)	CIOÈ (<i>ciòè</i>)
iii	<i>perché non scrivi con cartolina militare cioè del Regio Esercito</i>	Postcard from Giorgio to his son Angelo (9.7.1915)	CIOÈ (<i>ciòè</i>)
iv	<i>Carissimo padre, vi scrivo giove rispondo ala vostra cartolina</i>	Postcard from Angelo to his father (26.4.1916)	CIOÈ (<i>giove</i>)
v	<i>vi fo sapere che parllo peri la mia sfoltuna, ciove dela mia leceza</i>	Postcard from Angelo to his father (21.8.1917)	CIOÈ (<i>ciòve</i>)
vi	<i>da molto tempo, che non ricevo notizie vostre, cioè dal giorno 15 corrente mese</i>	Postcard from Antonino to his parents (28.2.1918)	CIOÈ (<i>ciòè</i>)
vii	<i>apena arivo vicino dove erovava, ciove dove mi trovava io</i>	Letter from Raimondo to his father (31.5.1919)	CIOÈ (<i>ciòve</i>)
viii	<i>avete fatte tutto con la vostra idealità, di vostro sapere. Cioè, che avete fatto come cuando io non era al mondo</i>	Letter from Angelo F. to his friend (11.9.1919)	CIOÈ (<i>Cioè</i>)
ix	<i>questa lettera, che tu mi ai mantato, ora mi là dovevi mandare nel principio, da quando tù avevi questa idea, cioè questo penziero</i>	Letter from Angelo F. to his friend (11.9.1919)	CIOÈ (<i>ciòè</i>)
x	<i>caro sogero, io credo che sono stato ubidiente sempre apresso a voi e sempre spero esere, anzi meglio</i>	Postcard from Giovanni G. to his father-in-law (24.5.1917)	ANZI (<i>anzi</i>)
xi	<i>ne ho ricevute 4 che subito ti ho risposto, anzi senza riceverne io ti ho scritto</i>	Letter from Giorgio to his son Angelo (28.6.1915)	ANZI (<i>anzi</i>)
xii	<i>io subito ti scrivo perché mi o madato a prendere il tuo derizio, anze ti facio sapere che stanno tutti bene di saluti</i>	Postcard from Antonino to his brother Raimondo (12.5.1919)	ANZI (<i>anze</i>)
xiii	<i>dopo 40 mese di campagna mi fano cueso parllare, oldire che se uno che ave bona volondà di fare il sirivizio per cuesto campia peziero</i>	Postcard from Angelo to his father (21.8.1917)	VUOL DIRE (<i>oldire</i>)
xiv	<i>uno che ave bona volondà di fare il sirivizio per cuesto campia peziero, oldire a 60 mese che facio il soldato, l'ho fato e oro se non mi mandono [...]</i>	Postcard from Angelo to his father (21.8.1917)	VUOL DIRE (<i>oldire</i>)
xv	<i>Cara Maruza o capito che faceste 3 tomele di formende e non di potevito calare, ordire che mage asai e sei molto grosa</i>	Postcard from Orazio to his wife (8.7.1918)	VUOL DIRE (<i>ordire</i>)

Table 2 summarizes the three reformulation markers, offering a provisional overview. These three types are discussed in detail in the following subsections.

In general, the DRC displays a very small number of reformulators⁶. Many common forms in Italian (in the standard variety as well as in the colloquial), such as *diciamo*, *insomma*, *in altre parole*, *ciòè a dire*, or *nel senso che*, are not attested. It would be short-sighted to attribute this absence simply to the size of the dataset. In fact, this small inventory reflects a more complex historical sociolinguistic profile. Users of *italiano popolare* lack many linguistic resources, e.g., reformulators, because they are un- or low-educated, and they have limited access to the standard language, let alone formal registers. Conversely, they resort to structures and forms from their first language. Evidence of vernacular structures as crucial resources is VUOL DIRE—in its variants *oldire* and *ordire*—which are calqued on Sicilian *vordiri*. The uses of CIOÈ show instead the development of contemporary Italian

forms, that is, *italiano popolare* diverging from vernacular structures and aligning with the standard.

Table 2. Reformulation markers in the DRC.

Type	Equivalent Form in Standard Italian	Equivalent Form in Sicilian	Diachronic Source
CIOÈ (9 occurrences by 5 writers)	<i>cioè</i>	/	Italian: <i>ciò è</i> ('that is')
ANZI (3 occurrences by 3 writers)	<i>anzi</i>	<i>anzi</i>	Latin: <i>ante</i> ('in front of, before, in contrast to')
VUOL DIRE (3 occurrences by 2 writers)	/ (cf. <i>voglio dire</i> , lit. 'I want to say')	<i>voddiri</i>	Sicilian: <i>vo' diri</i> (lit. 'it wants to say')

This overall picture can be viewed not only synchronically (users lacking features of the standard and resorting to vernacular ones) but also diachronically (users starting to acquire features of the standard). The three reformulators from the DRC can be viewed on a continuum from alignment with the source language (the user's first language) to alignment to the target (standard Italian).

Table 3 sketches a continuum, whereby forms of *italiano popolare* align with the source language (Sicilian) or with the target (Standard Italian). The first type, VUOL DIRE, represents a lexical feature that is borrowed from the source language, with less (*ordire*) to more (*oldire*) phono-morphological adaptations. The second type, ANZI, displays an in-between case, because the word is identical in Sicilian and Italian, and it appears either in hypercorrected (*anze*) or standard form (*anzi*). The third type, CIOÈ, diverges completely from the source language, in which it has no corresponding form, and thus exemplifies alignment with the target language, from hypercorrected and simplified variants (*giove*, *ciove*) to the proper standard orthography (*cioè*). This continuum may hint at the diachronic evolution of *italiano popolare*, both at the speaker and at the variety level, in terms of divergence from the source language and convergence to target.

Table 3. Reformulation markers in the DRC between Sicilian and Standard Italian.

Reformulation Markers		
Sicilian [source]	<i>italiano popolare</i>	Standard Italian [target]
[<i>vordiri</i> , <i>anzi</i> , etc.]		[<i>cioè</i> , <i>anzi</i> , etc.]

In the DRC, divergence from Sicilian and thus convergence to Standard Italian have been affected by scribal mediation. Of course, it is often impossible to know whether authors wrote completely on their own or relied on scribes (fellow soldiers if at war, relatives or friends if at home). Nonetheless, some texts show a clear-cut difference, also in the case of the reformulation markers under investigation. Among the three tokens of VUOL DIRE, two (*xiii*, *xiv*) occur in the same text, a postcard dashed off by Angelo in a

state of anger and frustration, because he has long been denied leave. The text is poorly structured, full of disfluencies (cancellations, repetitions), and the handwriting is hasty. In such a situational context, it is not surprising that the autonomous author-writer employs VUOL DIRE, the reformulator that is closer to Sicilian, resorting to his source language. On the other hand, consider the first three tokens of CIOÈ (*i, ii, iii*), which occur in two texts signed by the father of the family. The man was born in the 1860s, when schools hardly existed outside of major cities and wealthier regions, and surely did not reach the class of peasants. We may just infer that the father, Giorgio, was illiterate, and he engaged scribes. In addition, his early texts (1915, i.e., when Italy joined the war) display a variety of Italian that remarkably conforms to the standard, with little interference from Sicilian, and an elegant and confident handwriting. Unsurprisingly, in a text written by a scribe—apparently a professional one, too—the type of reformulator emerges, CIOÈ, that belongs to Italian and diverges from Sicilian. In sum, although it is often hard to point out, scribal mediation surely played a role in driving *italiano popolare* away from its source languages and aligning it to the national standard.

5.1. CIOÈ

In Italian today, *cioè* is one of the most frequent words, whose main function is precisely that of nonparaphrastic reformulation (Mereu & Dal Negro, 2025, pp. 3, 10). Diachronically, it has been used as paraphrase or correction marker since the 13th century (Dal Negro & Fiorentini, 2014, p. 96), and it has undergone a long process of semantic bleaching so as to acquire several discourse-pragmatic functions (cf. Flores Acuña, 2009; Ghezzi, 2022). It stems from the lexicalization of the deictic pronoun *ciò* ('that') and the copula *è* ('to be.PRS.3SG'), parallel to Eng. *that is* or Lat. *id est*.

Given the centrality of *cioè* in the entire history of Italian and especially in the 20th century, it is interesting that the DRC shows how the Sicilian peasants readily acquire this important word in their letter writing. This is in fact the most frequent reformulation marker in the collection, with 9 occurrences. From the formal side, the word is acquired and used with some degree of formal uncertainty, in three realizations: *cioè*, *ciove*, and *giove*. First, the diacritical accent is often missing (see cases *iv*, *v*, and *vii* in Table 1). Second, phono-graphic confusion affects the realization of <c> and <g> (*iv*) as graphemes representing unvoiced and voiced affricates [tʃ] and [dʒ] (difficulty distinguishing between voiced and unvoiced consonants is a common feature in the Sicilian variety of *italiano popolare*). Third, simplification occurs, involving the syllabic structure of the wordform. The original structure CVV is simplified into a CVCV one. This is performed by insertion of <v>: *giove* (*iv*) and *ciove* (*v*). From the functional side, CIOÈ performs nonparaphrastic reformulation:

- (1) *vi fo sapere che parlo peri la mia sfortuna, ciove dela mia leceza*
 'I'll let you know that I'm talking about my bad luck, **that is**, about my leave'

In this postcard, the soldier Angelo is writing to his family at home. The topic is his military leave: although he requested it, he is not managing to obtain it. The young man writes this postcard to express his frustration. So, he introduces the topic calling it *my bad luck*, and rephrases it straight away with the exact referent, *my leave*. The two segments are not semantically equivalent: the first is a generic term that serves to connotate the writer's stance, and it is strategically specified, precisely through reformulation, into the neutral term that denotes the topic.

Reformulation is clearly nonparaphrastic also in cases (*iv*), (*vi*), in which it serves for specification of the informative content. In *Carissimo padre vi scrivo giove rispondo ala vostra cartolina* 'My dearest father, I'm writing, that is, I'm replying to your postcard' (*iv*), Angelo rephrases 'write' and specifies it, 'reply' (note that the second term implies the polite act

of responding rather than mere writing). In *da molto tempo che non ricevo notizie vostre, cioè dal giorno 15 corrente mese* ‘a long time since I received news from you, that is, since the 15th of the current month’, Antonino reformulates a generic time reference into a better defined one.

Nonparaphrastic reformulation has different pragmatic reasons in cases (vii) and (viii). In *apena arivo vicino dove eroava ciove dove mi trovava io* ‘as soon as I arrive close to where I was, that is, where I found myself’ (vii), Raimondo appears to be unsatisfied with the wordform he has just written, probably due to uncertainty about its formal realization (*erovava*, actually very divergent from the standard *ero*), and replaces it with a simpler one (*trovava*, in fact closer to standard *trovavo*). In *avete fatte tutto con la vostra idealità, di vostro sapere. Cioè che avete fatto come quando io non era al mondo* lit. ‘you have done everything with your ideality, with your own knowledge. That is, you have done as when I was not in the world’ (viii), Angelo F. uses reformulation to achieve greater expressive effectiveness. By means of *cioè*, he sets a partial equivalence in a rhetoric sense: doing things ‘with your ideality, with your own knowledge’ is intended to correspond to ‘as when I was not in the world [as if I did not exist]’.

In a number of instances (*i, ii, iii, ix*), the distinction between reformulation and paraphrase becomes blurred. An interesting case concerns the first pair of examples (*i* and *ii*), drawn from texts written a few days apart. We report the first in (2).

- (2) *il grano ancora non l’ho trebiato cioè non l’ho ancora pisato*
 ‘I haven’t threshed the wheat yet, **that is**, I haven’t trodden it’

In this letter, the father Giorgio writes to his son Angelo. The young man has just left for the war, first of the family, and his father updates him about the family business. In June, the main business concerns grain processing: the crops have been harvested and now need to be threshed. The father gives precisely this information: ‘I haven’t threshed the wheat yet’. He uses the Italian verb *trebbiare* ‘thresh’, but it rephrases into a hybrid Italian-Sicilian wordform, *pisare*⁷ ‘tread’, ‘thresh’. The terms are semantically equivalent, if we limit our understanding to their reference (the activity of threshing). In this sense, *cioè* marks a paraphrase rather than reformulation. Nonetheless, two aspects must be taken into account. The Italian word is a technical term, semantically opaque, and probably unknown to the addressee as well as to the author (the text comes in fact from a letter handwritten by an expert scribe). On the contrary, the hybridized form is of course well known by both author and addressee because it is based on a Sicilian root, and it is semantically transparent. Before agricultural mechanization, threshing was performed by treading on the grain spikes, and Sicilian *pisari* means precisely both ‘to tread’ in general and ‘to thresh’ in particular. First, from the perspective of *Wörter und Sachen* of classic European dialectology, the two words are not mere synonyms. Second, we should note that the father and his scribe decide to use the Italian word despite assuming that Angelo would not understand it. But rather than avoiding it, they use it and rephrase it. Moreover, this choice seen in (*i*) is performed once again, in a postcard written one week after (*ii*). This reiterated choice shows not only the effort of a man, a semi-literate peasant, to learn Italian for letter writing, and perhaps to teach it to his son⁸.

A very similar case is (*ix*), where Angelo F. has used the Italian noun *idea*, an abstract word that is not found in Sicilian lexicon, and thus may not be understood by the addressee (his friend Angelo Di Raimondo). So, the word is rephrased into a simpler one, *penziero* (It. *pensiero* ‘thought’) which is almost homophonous with Sicilian *pinzièru*. Similarly to *idea*, also *idealità* (lit. ‘ideality’) is used in the same postcard, as we saw earlier (viii). In fact, we may interpret the sequence *con la vostra idealità, di vostro sapere* ‘with your ideality, with your own knowledge’ as a case of paraphrase, a function that is typically performed without overt marking.

Reformulation blurs into paraphrase in *perché non scrivi con cartolina militare, cioè del Regio Esercito*, ‘why don’t you write through military postcards, that is, postcards of the Royal Army’ (iii). Father Giorgio refers to postcards given free to soldiers by the army. He calls them ‘military postcards’, and then rephrases it with a semantically equivalent expression, ‘[postcards] of the Royal Army’.

5.2. ANZI

The form *anzi* is homophonous in Italian and Sicilian, resulting from Latin *ante* with originally spatio-temporal meanings ‘before’, ‘in front of’. In Italian, a contrast-corrective function has been observed since the 13th century already by Bazzanella (2003)—who treats correction as a subtype of reformulation (Bazzanella, 1995). Visconti (2015, 2021) has shown how Italian *anzi* has developed a proper (nonparaphrastic) reformulation function. Its original meaning, which was the more frequent in Old Italian, involved the construction ‘non p, anzi q’, and reformulation develops in the construction ‘p, anzi q’, where *anzi* does not invalidate p. In reformulation contexts, a scalar component is observed, whereby q shows a higher degree or grade in a given quality with respect to p (Sainz, 2014; Visconti, 2015, 2021; Russo, 2024).

The presence of *anzi* in the DRC is facilitated by the exact convergence of Italian and Sicilian in the same wordform. It is realized in its graphic standard form, *anzi*, which also renders the actual pronunciation in Sicilian, but also in the hypercorrected form *anze*. In order to understand the form *anze*, we need to recall that the vowel system of Sicilian has only three phonemes in unstressed position, [a], [i], and [u], whereas mid vowels [ɛ] and [ɔ] are always stressed. As far as the mid vowels are quite rare in Sicilian and much more widespread in Italian, Sicilian semi-literates tend to perceive them as a typical standard feature. In the case of *anze*, final ⟨i⟩ is avoided and changed into ⟨e⟩ due to hypercorrection.

The first occurrence of *anzi* (x) is an instance of nonparaphrastic reformulation with a clear scalar component, reported in (3).

- (3) *caro sogero, io credo che sono stato ubidiente sempre apresso a voi e sempre spero esere, anzi meglio*
 ‘dear father-in-law, I believe I have always been obedient to you, and I hope I always will be so, **well**, [even] better’

In this postcard, Giovanni G. pays his respect to his father-in-law, Giorgio Di Raimondo. He writes that he feels to have always been obedient as a son-in-law and swears he will always be. He then decides to reformulate, by means of *anzi*, increasing the strength of his oath: he will not only be as obedient as always, but ‘even’ better, i.e., more (than) obedient. *Anzi* does not invalidate the first oath but rather rephrases it in order to augment and intensify it.

The other two occurrences show how reformulation relates to two other discourse relations. The instance (xi) is reported in (4).

- (4) *mi hai scritto 24 lettere, ed io invece ne ho ricevute 4 che subito ti ho risposto, anzi senza riceverne io ti ho scritto*
 ‘You wrote me 24 letters, and I received four instead, to which I replied straight away, **well**, without receiving any I wrote to you’

In (4) it is hard to tell whether *anzi* invalidates the first segment, functioning as a corrective marker. The fact of replying to the four postcards is not necessarily negated by the fact of writing without receiving any. Both actions may have been performed: the man may have written a text in response to the four postcards, but he may have already initiated some other letter. In fact, wartime letter writing never relied on a steady pace of writing and replying. Letters and postcards overlapped, due to complex writing practices

(e.g., many people took part in handwriting, which took large spans of time) and because of issues with an overloaded postal service (e.g., postcard from several weeks may be delivered at the same time): in fact, in (4) the father says precisely that although his son claims to have sent twenty-four letters, he received only four. What is surely negated in (4) is not the semantics of the first segment, but rather its pragmatic implicature. Writing in reply to four postcards implies that the father wrote out of duty. This is a face-threatening act, as far as the son may feel harm to his positive face. Thus, the father employs *anzi* to invalidate this implicature and avoid the face-threatening act, and so to state that he has written as personal will, as a sign of unconditional fatherly care.

A pragmatic nuance of politeness is involved also in the last instance (*xii*) reported in (5), which shows the semantic component of addition observed in Old Italian—already in the 13th century by [Molinelli \(2010, pp. 262–263\)](#), but also in texts from the 16th and 19th centuries by [Russo \(2024, pp. 217–219\)](#).

- (5) *io subito ti scrivo perché mi o madato a prendere il tuo derizio, anzi ti facio sapere che stanno tutti bene di saluti*
 ‘I’m writing as I’ve asked for your address, well, I’ll let you know that everyone is fine’

In (5), Antonino writes to his brother Raimondo. He first states ‘I’m writing as I’ve asked for your address’. Again, like in the previous example (4), this first formulation implies that the author is writing out of duty, i.e., as a mere consequence of obtaining his brother’s address, and this would be a face-threatening act. In (5), unlike in (4), the use of *anzi* shows a component of addition. The marker serves to elaborate on the topic of discussion and provide further informative content. This value of addition is not observed in contemporary Italian (cf. [Visconti, 2015, 2021](#)), but only in texts from past centuries ([Molinelli, 2010](#); [Russo, 2024](#)). Interestingly, the Sicilian equivalent *anzi* encompasses precisely the meaning ‘moreover, in addition’, as attested by the main lexicographic source for Sicilian ([VS = Piccitto, G. et al., 1977–2002](#): s.v. *anzi*).

5.3. Vuol Dire

The third marker is an innovation of *italiano popolare* in the DRC. It results from interference from the corresponding Sicilian construction *voddiri* or *vordiri* ([VS = Piccitto, G. et al., 1977–2002](#): s.v. *vordiri*), a lexical item meaning precisely ‘that is’. The Sicilian wordform is the lexicalization of the verb phrase *vo(li) diri*, lit. ‘it means to say’. The reformulation marker in the DRC is a phonemic adaptation of Sicilian, a calque in Italian. The writers reconstruct the type *vuol dire*—well-formed phrase for ‘it means to say’—but delete the initial consonant-semivowel cluster (<vuol dire> >). The marker recurs twice as *oldire* (*xiii, xiv*), and once with the original internal <r> from Sicilian, *ordire* (*xv*). The type VUOL DIRE displays a certain degree of grammaticalization or pragmaticalization: it does not function as a full verb phrase, since it does not require the use of the complementizer *che* (‘it means that’), as shown by (*xiv*), i.e., the second occurrence in (6).

The structure of VUOL DIRE suggests a comparison with a similar reformulation marker of present-day Italian, *voglio dire* ([Fiorentini & Sansò, 2017](#)), lit. ‘I want to say’. Interestingly, the two forms differ in terms of person marking. This morphological difference is significant from an enunciative perspective: while in present-day Italian *voglio dire* is based on ‘I’, the speaking subject who intends to reformulate, in the low variety of *italiano popolare*, *oldire* is centered on ‘it’, the textual element to be reformulated.

The function of (nonparaphrastic) reformulation of *oldire* appears in a pair of occurrences in (6), drawn from the postcard in which Angelo complains about not getting his military leave.

- (6) *Che io, adopo 18 mese che non vengo, a leceza mi apartene, e se non mi la tano mi fano cozimare a me, la vito ala lirbità. Perché dopo 40 mese di campagna mi fano cueso parllare, oldire che*

se uno che ave bona volondà di fare il sirivizio per cuesto campia peziro, oldire a 60 mese che facio il soldato, l'ho fato e oro se non mi mandono ce pezo io a fare cuello che faceno a me. Basta, termino [...]

'After 18 months of not coming [home], the leave belongs to me, and if they don't give it to me, they'll consume me, my life to freedom. Because after 40 months of campaigning they say such things, **I mean**, if one who has the good will to do [military] service then he changes his mind, **I mean**, I've been a soldier for 60 months, I did it, and now if they don't send me [on leave] I'll do to them what they are doing to me. Enough, I conclude'

In (6) a longer passage is reported, so to understand the two uses of the same reformulation marker. In fact, it is crucial to capture the context of writing: Angelo is frustrated and angry, and his composition results hasty and rambling. The text is not the usual balanced and accurate byproduct of epistolary practice, but rather an outburst of emotion. In this context, reformulation is used twice, in an effort to express the writer's stance in a rash unplanned text. In both cases, *oldire* has scope over an indefinite segment, which is generically the informative content that has just been expressed. The marker serves to reformulate the whole line of reasoning and try to better define it.

The last instance (7) occurs instead in a perfectly controlled text, a postcard from Orazio to his wife. The young woman is seven months pregnant, and Orazio finds a humorous way to express his indescribable joy.

(7) *Maruza o capito che faceste 3 tomele di formendi e non di potevito calare ordire che mage asai e sei molto grossa. Ma tu non puoi imaginarite cuale desiderio lo mio cuore e le mie ochie di vidirite, ma pacenza*

'Maruzza, I see that you made three *tomoli* [around 50 kg] of wheat and you couldn't bend over, **this means** that you eat a lot and you're very fat. But you can't imagine how much my heart and my eyes long to see you, but this can't be helped'

In (7), Orazio addresses her wife Maria (calling by her nickname, with an evaluative morpheme *-uzz-*) commenting on the usual topic of letter writing, i.e., updates on the family business and work. He pretends to think that she is not able to work, bending over to lift heavy loads of wheat, because she is too fat. Of course, he knows she's just in the final phase of her pregnancy, and this is why he yearns so much to see her. In this instance, *ordire* performs in fact a different textual relation. The marker introduces the motivation (Ferrari, 2014) for the preceding segment ('you couldn't bend over, *this means* that you eat a lot and you're very fat').

6. Discussion

In sum, the analysis first highlights the limited number of discourse structuring markers—only three types, CIOÈ, ANZI, and VUOL DIRE—compared to the rich repertoire of Italian. Reformulation markers in the DRC show features of the three basic forces of *italiano popolare*: hypercorrection (<i> > <e> in *anze*), interference (the very lexical item *voddiri* > *oldire*; the additional value in *anzi*), and simplification (syllabic structure CVV > CVCV in *ciove*). This outline of reformulation in *italiano popolare* raises two issues for discussion: the relation between reformulation and neighboring functions (Section 6.1) and the role of reformulation in the continuum from the spoken to the written mode of language (Section 6.2).

6.1. A Semantic-Pragmatic Map for Reformulation

Pons Bordería (2013) has pointed out a common mistake, in both theoretic and methodological terms, in the study of reformulation: subtypes of this function are listed, according

to the uses displayed by reformulation markers. Different uses of a marker should point to different functions altogether, rather than suggesting a subset of reformulation values. Following this argument, some instances of CIOÈ, ANZI, and VUOL DIRE in the DRC have been analyzed, showing how reformulation overlaps with distinct function.

Cioè performs paraphrase in (iii): *perché non scrivi con cartolina militare cioè del Regio Esercito* ('why don't you write through military postcards, that is, postcards of the Royal Army'). *Anzi* shows a textual function of correction in Italian, and in the DCR that of addition, as exemplified in (5): *io subito ti scrivo perché mi o madato a prendere il tuo derizio, anze ti facio sapere che stanno tutti bene di saluti* ('I'm writing as I've asked for your address, well, I'll let you know that everyone is fine'). An instance of *ordire* performs a textual function of motivation in the last example (7): *non di potevito calare, ordire che mage asai e sei molto grosa* (you couldn't bend over, *this means* that you eat a lot and you're very fat'). Figure 1 schematizes the relations between reformulation and these neighboring functions.

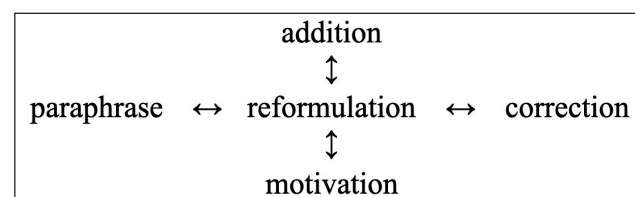


Figure 1. A semantic-pragmatic map for reformulation in the DRC.

If we think of this network of functions as a semantic-pragmatic map, we can see how different markers cover different areas of the map. The type CIOÈ extends in the left (reformulation + paraphrase), ANZI in the right and at the top (reformulation + correction + addition), and VUOL DIRE at the bottom (reformulation + motivation). Of course, each marker may have other functions, which would expand this map in other directions. The example in Figure 1 tries to capture the neighboring functions that relate to reformulation, according to the uses of the three reformulation markers.

6.2. Reformulation in the Continuum from Orality to Writing

Reformulation occurs in both planned and unplanned language use (Blakemore, 1993, p. 101). On the one hand, it is a prominent example of disfluency: due to the lack or issues of planning speech in real time, speakers employ reformulation in order to redefine and refine the content as they express it (Voghera, 2017, p. 71). On the other hand, reformulation can be used as a rhetorical strategy in formal registers (Cuenca, 2003) and in writing in general (Ferrari, 2022, p. 72). Reformulation can thus be emblematic of both spoken mode, as a byproduct of unplanned and disfluent speech, and the written mode, as rhetorical strategy in writing⁹.

What do the fifteen occurrences in the DRC show, in terms of this opposition between spoken and written mode? Is the use of reformulation disfluent or strategic? If it is disfluent, the DRC would confirm the assumption that semi-literate letter writing lack scriptural complexity, and that this kind of texts transpose a spoken textuality onto the written page¹⁰. On the contrary, if reformulation is strategic, the textuality of semi-literate letter writing would prove its adherence to the written mode. Table 4 collects the fifteen occurrences and collocates them in the continuum between the pole of orality, corresponding to disfluent uses, and the pole of writing, corresponding to strategic uses; in-between uses are acknowledged as well, for cases where disfluency and rhetorical strategy overlap.

the same letter. Reformulation is performed to reinforce an oath in (x), and to gain clarity through specification in (xi). Specification is a highly rhetorical in (v), and highly rhetorical is also the use of reformulation for humoristic reasons in (xv).

7. Conclusions

In sum, this article has dealt with a particular textual relation, reformulation, in a peripheral type of language use, the low social variety of Italian known as *italiano popolare*. The data are drawn from the Di Raimondo Correspondence, a collection of 204 handwritten letters and postcards by 15 Sicilian semi-literate peasants written during World War I (1915–1919). The analysis has shown how writers perform reformulation by means of a limited inventory of markers—CIOÈ, ANZI, and VUOL DIRE—that are affected by hypercorrection, interference, and structural simplification (typical processes of *italiano popolare*, but also typical of second or foreign language users more in general). The main issues that result from this investigation concern the functions that relate to reformulation and the continuum between the spoken and written modes of language use. Reformulation appears to relate to paraphrase and correction, as widely recognized by relevant literature, but also to addition and motivation. As to the spoken/written continuum, reformulation is performed much more as a rhetorical strategy that is typical of planned written texts, rather than as a feature of disfluency that characterizes unplanned speech.

In conclusion, this study has tried to contribute to the pragmatic–diachronic study of the 20th century. The beginning of the century was a crucial phase in Italian linguistic history, offering the first instances of mass use of the national language. Widespread use of Italian among the entire population provides unprecedented evidence of sociolinguistic variation. Addressing this sociolinguistic complexity allows us to better trace the evolution of language structures and language use. Reformulation is just a case in point.

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Notes

- ¹ In the Italian context, the notion of *dialect* refers to Italo-Romance varieties, that is, languages that evolved from Latin in the Italian peninsula. Since the early standardization of Tuscan in the 16th century (then acknowledged as ‘Italian’), Italo-Romance languages like Sicilian have been non-standard or vernacular varieties, as far as they have been roofed by Italian as the Standard variety in a diglossic repertoire.
- ² All editorial interventions are needed to ensure readability (while the fully faithful transcription—the diplomatic edition—is available in Scivoletto, 2024, pp. 363–431): (1) capitalization has been adjusted in accordance with orthographic conventions, including the so-called reverential uses (where the capital letter is intended to show respect to the very concept the word refers to), as well as more or less arbitrary ones. (2) punctuation—where present in the original text—has been preserved. Additional commas and periods have been added or adjusted, to clarify the structure of the text. (3) word boundaries are restored, when writers misspell them. In some cases, integrations and adjustments are necessary (e.g., ifamiglia > *in* famiglia; avvoi > *a* voi); (4) in the edited collection (Scivoletto, 2024), additions and adjustments are signaled in italics. In fact, in a few cases words or fragments have been added to help readers recognize a word, and sometimes to reconstruct passages (thanks to contextual or

intertextual information that is not explicit in the very text) that otherwise would remain totally opaque; (5) repeated words or fragments have been eliminated, that are duplicated merely due to graphic disfluency; (6) graphic accents in polysyllabic words are restored, to clarify otherwise opaque oxytones (e.g., *lirbita* > *lirbità*, for It. *libertà* ‘freedom’); the case of *ciove* and *giove* (for *ciòè*) is excluded, as far as this is a central topic of the present study and thus analyzed in detail; (7) abbreviations are spelled out (e.g., *Rgg* > *reggimento* ‘regiment’); (8) missing parts of the text (eroded, torn, or faded) are indicated by three dots in square brackets. For a more detailed discussion and exemplification, cf. Scivoletto (2024, pp. 25–30).

³ The notion of *discourse structuring markers* refers to “connectors that allow the speaker/writer (SP/W) to signal what relationship they wish the addressee/reader (AD/R) to deduce from the linking of discourse segments in a non-subordinate way” (Traugott, 2022, p. 4).

⁴ A good example is Sicilian *bi*, a marker that is used exactly to invalidate a mistaken segment of talk and correct it: e.g., *a mmia u psicologu, bi u psicologu, u ddielologu mi rissi [...]* ‘my psychologist, oh, not my psychologist, my dietician told me [...]’ (Scivoletto, 2023, p. 196). Recently, Mereu and Dal Negro (2025, p. 7) have described the same corrective construction with *ciòè* in Italian.

⁵ The occurrences are found in the following texts from the collection (Scivoletto, 2024): T5 (*i*), T6 (*ii, iii*), T35 (*iv*), T111 (*v*), T124 (*vi*), T173 (*vii*), T201 (*viii, ix*), T102 (*x*), T3 (*xi*), T169 (*xii*), T111 (*xiii, xiv*), T150 (*xv*).

⁶ I wish to thank an insightful anonymous reviewer for suggesting me to elaborate on the limited inventory of reformulators, on its implications in a diachronic perspective, and on the influence of scribal mediation—as discussed in what follows.

⁷ The lexical form is termed hybrid (cf. Regis, 2016; Scivoletto, 2024, pp. 186–203) to the extent that the two codes (Italian and Sicilian) are mixed inside the wordform. In fact, the past participle *pisa-to* is made of the Sicilian root of the verb *pisari* (‘to thread’) and the Italian inflectional morpheme *-to* (Sicilian morpheme being *-tu*).

⁸ In using reformulation (and, above all, in reiterating this use), the pedagogic aim may be seen clearer if we understand wartime semi-literate letter writing as an instance of community of practice, based precisely on the shared effort to acquire both writing as a communicative tool and Italian as a linguistic code. This reflection, which falls outside the scope of this paper, is sketched in Scivoletto (2024, pp. 178–180, 321–325).

⁹ The distinction between orality and writing is intended here in the classical sense of Koch and Oesterreicher (1985), that is, in terms of *Medium* as well as *Konzeption*: the difference does not lie in the mere channel or mode of communication (phonic vs. graphic) but involves the distinction between the language of immediacy vs. distance (cf. also Briz, 2010 on the informal-conversational vs. formal distinction). The complex blend of oral and scriptural features in epistulary writing—in addition to this case of *italiano popolare* (already discussed in Scivoletto, 2023)—has been examined in letters from the Spanish Civil War by Pardo Librer (2025, and this issue).

¹⁰ This assumption is commonplace in the research that has focused on written texts of *italiano popolare* (cf. Berruto, 1987). A recent analysis that deconstructs this assumption is provided by Herbst (2022). A more detailed discussion on the topic is in Scivoletto (2024, pp. 325–330).

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