

## FROM REQUESTING TO ALMS-SEEKING The politeness formula *fare la carità di* in nineteenth-century Italy

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**Abstract** – This contribution focuses on one particular politeness formula for requests, *fare la carità di* ‘be so good as to (give)’. The aim of the paper was to reconstruct the meanings and contexts for the usage of *fare la carità di* in nineteenth-century Italy. The following sources were used: conduct books, dictionaries, novels and diachronic corpora. The essay first looked at politeness metadiscourse and examined the available language advice for requests in CGIO, a corpus of 51 nineteenth-century Italian conduct books. However, as there is none available for *fare la carità di*, three nineteenth-century dictionaries were consulted. These findings from the metadiscourse were then read against those from a qualitative analysis covering all the examples found in two of the most influential novels of that period, Alessandro Manzoni’s *I promessi sposi*, ‘The Betrothed’, 1840, and Carlo Collodi’s *Pinocchio*, 1883. Finally, quantitative data from the historical corpora DiaCORIS and MIDIA were provided. This combined analysis (using metadiscourse alongside qualitative discourse analysis and quantitative data) produced the following results: the formula is used in two contexts, to make a (sometimes forceful) request and to beg for a handout. Both appear in roughly equal proportions until the end of World War II. After that, *fare la carità di* disappears from DiaCORIS. The paper tentatively concludes that the absence of the formula from the advice on requests in conduct books may be partly explained by its use as a specialised marker for alms-seeking, given that conduct books fiercely criticise almsgiving to the undeserving poor.

**Keywords:** CGIO; DiaCORIS; MIDIA; *I promessi sposi*; *Pinocchio*; request; alms-seeking; conduct books; Italy; nineteenth century.

### 1. Introduction

This contribution focuses on one particular politeness formula for requests, *fare la carità di* ‘be so good as to (give)’, examining its meanings and contexts of use in nineteenth-century Italy. The study takes its cue from the apparent mismatch between the formulaic character of the request – that is, the “conventionalised linguistic expression” (Culpeper 2011, p. 120) *fare la carità di* – and (as far as I know) its absence from contemporary conduct books. The study aims to explain this discrepancy.

That *fare la carità di* is absent from politeness advice in contemporary conduct books — notwithstanding its inclusion in dictionaries, its usage in novels and its presence in historical corpora — has consequences for the use of conduct books as sources to study the conventionalisation processes of linguistic politeness expressions. Culpeper (2017) and Paternoster and Saltamacchia (2017), for example, provide inventories of politeness rules in Italian conduct books, respectively, for the sixteenth and the nineteenth century. Paternoster and Saltamacchia (2017) found a wide range of rules and formulae, going from excuses to requests, the expression of agreement and disagreement, pre-emptive offers of assistance, the use of address pronouns, titles, etc. However, conduct books appear to be selective: conventionalised expressions may be missing from the metadiscourse. Therefore, it is useful to supplement the analysis of conduct books with other metasources, such as dictionaries, and frequencies of micro-usages in literary sources, reference corpora, etc. In fact, this is the method recommended within so-called third-wave politeness approaches: the two ways that are seen to be “methodologically sound” to study linguistic politeness conventions are, precisely, frequency counts and metadiscourse (Terkourafi, Kádár 2017, p. 190). The current study attempts to combine both, frequency counts and metadiscourse (on conduct books as sources within historical pragmatics, see also Paternoster, Fitzmaurice 2019, pp. 21-23).

Sections 2, 3 and 4 analyse *fare la carità di* in conduct books and dictionary entries, which constitute politeness metadiscourse. Politeness metadiscourse contains “reflexive *social discourses* on politeness”, which determine “*a persistent frame of interpretation and evaluation*” (Kádár, Haugh 2013, p. 187, original emphasis). Section 2 examines the language advice for requests in the *Corpus dei galatei italiani ottocenteschi*, or CGIO, the ‘Corpus of Nineteenth-Century Italian Conduct Books’, which comprises 51 texts. After a short digression in Section 3, which explores the available metadiscourse for a similar expression *per carità* ‘for the love of God’, in Section 4 three nineteenth-century dictionaries are consulted in order to look for evidence of the conventionalised status of *fare la carità di*. In Sections 5 and 6, the prescriptive findings are contrasted with actual language usage within a qualitative approach applied to two influential novels, *I promessi sposi* ‘*The Betrothed*’, 1840, and *Pinocchio*, 1883, both key texts in the nation-building effort. These particular novels were chosen for their didactic message, which was delivered with conspicuous editorial success: because of their influence they are assumed to have contributed to conventionalisation processes regarding this particular formula. Finally, Sections 7 and 8 provide a small quantitative setup to study uses of *fare la carità di* in the historical corpora DiaCORIS (1861-2001) and MIDIA (1692-1947). Not only does this enable the search to be extended to other genres; it also allows one to look at

occurrences in the twentieth century. Section 9 looks for reasons that may justify the absence of *fare la carità di* from conduct books. Finally, in Section 10, some concluding remarks are offered.

## 2. Requests in Italian nineteenth-century conduct books

In the nineteenth century, Italy was inundated with conduct manuals and etiquette books. Between 1800 and 1920, Tasca (2004) counts 186 original titles, resulting in at least 450 different editions. This boom can probably be explained by the fact that the emerging bourgeoisie was looking to replace the aristocratic ceremonial with a new, more rational and utilitarian code of conduct. CGIO comprises the 51 most representative sources (i.e. the ones having most reprints) of the long nineteenth century (i.e. from 1800 to 1920).<sup>1</sup> CGIO contains just over 2,300,000 words (tokens).

The rules and formulae for requests in CGIO offer a mixed picture, since Paternoster and Saltamacchia (2017) found deferential formulae, reminiscent of an *ancien-régime* type of politeness, next to more strategic ones. In Table 1, the conditional mood in *pregherei* ‘I would pray’, *bramerei* ‘I would desire’ and *avrei piacere* ‘I would have the pleasure’ expresses optionality and announces the present-day politeness model. However, most features in Table 1 still emphasise hierarchical differences by means of speaker denigration and addressee elevation. The sources divide requests into two classes: requests between equals use the address pronoun *voi* ‘you’, which is less formal than *lei* ‘you’ or *vostra signoria* or *V. S.* ‘your lordship’, used with a superior recipient. Molinelli explains how *voi* expresses “affective distance”, i.e. respect, in “symmetrical and reciprocal relationships”, whilst the third person expresses “social distance”, that is, deference, in the case of an “asymmetrical, non-reciprocal relationship” (2018, p. 52). For both groups, the bare imperative, even when using respectful 2<sup>nd</sup> person plural and deferential 3<sup>rd</sup> person verb forms, is considered *impolite* (the case of requests towards inferiors is not considered). What makes the request polite, then, is the use – according to Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) – of two categories: hedged performatives (‘I beg’) and want-statements (‘I would wish’), as shown in Table 1.

<sup>1</sup> CGIO was compiled by A. Paternoster and F. Saltamacchia within the research project *The Reasons for Politeness. The Birth of Contemporary Politeness in the Behavioural Treatises of Nineteenth-Century Italy*, financed by the Swiss National Science Foundation, Project no. 100012\_153031, September 2014-January 2019.

	Soave 1809 [1788]	Gattini 1870 [1869]	Cortinovis 1889
With superiors (with the deferential 3 <sup>rd</sup> person pronoun <i>Lei</i> )	La prego (I pray you)	Pregherei la S. V. (I would pray your lordship)	Pregherei V. S.
	La supplico (I beg you)	-	-
	Mi faccia il favore o la grazia (do me the favour or the grace)	Mi faccia il favore o la grazia	Mi faccia la grazia od il favore di
	Abbia la bontà (have the goodness)	Abbia la bontà	Abbia la bontà
	Si degni (deign)	-	-
	Si compiaccia (deign)	Si compiaccia	Si compiaccia
With equals (with the respectful 2 <sup>nd</sup> person pronoun <i>Voi</i> )	Vi prego (I pray you)	Vi prego	Vi prego
	Bramerei (I would desire)	Bramerei	Bramerei
	Avrei piacere (I would have the pleasure)	Mi farete piacere (you will do me the pleasure)	-
	-	-	Fate grazia (do the grace)
	-	Siate compiacente di (be obliging)	-

Table 1

Formulae to make polite requests in CGIO. Reproduced, with minor changes, from Paternoster and Saltamacchia 2017, p. 281.

Culpeper and Archer treat “verbs such as *beg*, *plead*, *crave* and *beseech*” as performative verbs. These verbs “semantically” modify the “requestive force” (2008, p. 72) because they are used to realise a directive and name it at the same time. In fact, according to Fraser, these verbs “share the inherent property that the speaker is ‘requesting’ from a position of powerlessness, relative to the hearer” (1975, p. 197). These are impositives, direct, explicit formulations of requests: “The politeness formulae are elevating the benevolent, gracious, obliging hearer, who is deigning to stoop low to the level of an undeserving servant [...]” (Paternoster, Saltamacchia 2017, p. 281).<sup>2</sup> Requests could be a more conservative area, which is resistant to

<sup>2</sup> Paternoster and Saltamacchia (2017) compare their results with Gudrun Held’s study of official petitions in fourteenth-century Northern Italy. Frequent verbs are “supplicare” and “domandare

change. These results are in line with those found by Fedriani and Ghezzi (2018). Studying two theatre plays of the sixteenth, the eighteenth and the twentieth century respectively, they find that, in the sixteenth century, performative verbs are by far the most frequent way to make requests. In the eighteenth century this category still dominates, although other categories (such as modal verbs, impersonal verbs, diluted ‘we’) are now gaining ground. The eighteenth century already shows a mixed picture, whilst in the twentieth century all the categories shrink to the advantage of the politeness markers *per favore* and *per piacere*, ‘please’.

Table 1 does not include *fare la carità*. Neither does Demartino (1897 [1888]), a precious source, since it includes an ‘Appendix of most frequent ways to express oneself in civil life’, *Appendice che contiene i più frequenti modi di esprimersi nella vita civile*, a list of politeness formulae divided into six sections. Section 2 is called *Del pregare*, ‘on requesting’. The appendix contains 22 paradigms. Four of them express mitigation by means of the conditional (Paternoster, Saltamacchia 2017, p. 282), the others mainly use performative verbal locutions of the type listed in Table 1, but no mention is made of *fare la carità di*. In fact, no other conduct book in CGIO (other than the 30 ones used at the time for Paternoster, Saltamacchia 2017) treats it as a politeness formula.

Held (2005, pp. 298-299) mentions *carità* ‘charity’<sup>3</sup> as a noun often found in eighteenth-century politeness formulae, alongside *grazia* ‘grace’, *piacere* ‘pleasure’, *favore* ‘favour’ and *cortesia* ‘courtesy’.<sup>4</sup> Fedriani (2019, p. 236) finds that, in her corpus of eighteenth-century drama, *per carità* ‘for the love of God’ is actually the most frequently used prepositional phrase to make a request, far ahead of *in/per cortesia* ‘out of courtesy’ and *per favore* ‘as a favour’ (*per piacere* ‘as a pleasure’ returns zero results). Not unsurprisingly, in CGIO, *carità* ‘charity’ represents an important aspect of the conceptualisation of politeness. As discussed by Paternoster and Saltamacchia (2017, pp. 269-272), *cortesia* ‘politeness’ is mainly defined as

*gracia*” introducing the subordinate clauses “*piaccia a X/a X debba piacere, X si degna*” ‘supplicate’ and ‘demand special grace’ that it might ‘please’ X/that X ‘deigns’ to (Held 2010, pp. 209-210). This is exactly the semantic field at work in the nineteenth century.

<sup>3</sup> I purposely use the English term ‘charity’ here in the archaic and religious meaning of ‘love of mankind’, which is the prevailing meaning in the nineteenth-century data. Correct translations represent a major challenge (in any academic paper written in English on non-English data, and especially so for historical documents). I considered it good practice to consult the three historical dictionaries quoted in Section 4, alongside careful weighing of the co- and context of the examples.

<sup>4</sup> Arguably, all these terms have particularly rich meanings, the exploration of which falls outside the scope of this study. I refer to Held 2005 for a comprehensive overview. Although a one-to-one association between the Italian and English lexemes is, admittedly, reductive here, for each term I try to show the most literal translation.

love of one's 'neighbour,' since Catholic ethics inform most of the sources. The call for politeness as fraternal love is often backed by the second of the Gospel's Great Commandments, "love thy neighbour as thyself" (the first one being "love the Lord", Matthew 22:35-40 and Mark 12:28-34): 'do to others as you would have them do to you and do not do to others as you would not have them do to you' is a quote that returns time after time. First and foremost, *carità* 'charity' represents the love of God and the love of others, anchored in the love of God. As such it acts as a synonym for *cortesia* 'politeness'. Chiavarino, a priest, often uses *carità* next to good manners: "la buona creanza e la vera carità"; "colla carità fraterna, colla onestà Cristiana"; "un'oncia di dolcezza e di carità" (1897, p. 19, p. 57, p. 61).<sup>5</sup> Conduct books sometimes dedicate entire chapters to charity, like chapter II, *Carità*, in Rossi, 1921 [1878], where it is treated as the third of the theological virtues, besides faith and hope. Other chapters, Bruni 1870, Ch. VII, *Carità beneficenza gratitudine*,<sup>6</sup> and Cajmi 1869 [1865-7], Vol. II, Ch. X, *La carità*, discuss the concept as love for people who suffer, with the narrower meaning of compassion and, secondly, of almsgiving. The fact that *carità* is a central concept for the values and rules informing nineteenth-century Italian politeness metadiscourse is demonstrated with a frequency count (using AntConc 3.4.3m). In the 51 sources in CGIO, the search string *carit\** – which captures terms like *caritatevole*, *caritatevolmente*, *caritativo*, 'caring', 'caringly', 'charitable', old Italian *caritate* and *caritade*, and Latin *caritas* – returns 424 hits. The verbal locution *fare la carità* is used eight times (search term *fa\* la carità*), mainly in discussions on material assistance to the poor:

Le buone madri di famiglia possono in questa bisogna farvi da maestre; esse hanno nel **fare la carità** un tatto finissimo; [...]. (Gallenga 1871, p. 411)<sup>7</sup>

And elsewhere in the same book:

Volete esser certi che la vostra carità vada a sollievo della vera miseria? procurate per quanto ve lo permettano le vostre occupazioni di **fare la carità personalmente**. (Gallenga 1871, p.419, original emphasis)<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> 'Good manners and true charity; with fraternal charity, with Christian honesty; an ounce of kindness and charity.' (Here and elsewhere, translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.)

<sup>6</sup> 'Charity, alms-giving and gratitude.'

<sup>7</sup> 'To learn this task you can take example from dedicated mothers; they have a very fine tact **in giving donations**; [...].'

<sup>8</sup> 'Do you want to be sure that your charity will relieve genuine misery? Make sure, as far as your occupations allow, **to donate in person**.'

Only once does it occur in a request towards the readers:

Dunque, o lettori, cominciate voi a non adoperarlo [= “quel modo di invitare”] più, e **fate la carità di spiegare e difundere** queste mie ragioni fra tutti gli ignoranti che non leggono nessun libro. (Rajberti, vol. 1, 1850, p. 9)<sup>9</sup>

This 1850 example shows that the formula *fate la carità di* ‘be so good as to’ acts as a request modifier. The context is the request of the author to ban the formulaic expression *fare penitenza*, ‘do penitence’ used to invite people over for dinner, as in ‘come and do penitence with us’, a usage which Rajberti criticises as being affectatious and hypocritical.

### 3. *Per carità* ‘for the love of God’

Whilst *fare la carità* occurs only sporadically in CGIO, the expression *per carità* ‘for the love of God’, often accompanied by a comma or an exclamation mark, occurs 51 times. 15 of its occurrences are in Rajberti 1850, who uses it predominantly with imperatives. In the following example, the expression is a prepositional phrase used with scope over the verb. *Per* means ‘out of’, ‘in terms of’:

Giovani, che vi date a tentare la carriera delle lettere, **per carità di voi stessi** non salite sui trampoli dell’idealismo e delle fantasticherie [...]. (Rajberti 1850, vol. 1, p. 52)<sup>10</sup>

Here the expression has parenthetical status (that is, if left out of the sentence, the syntax would remain unchanged):

**Per carità**, guardatevi dal gettarle [= “signore eleganti”] in mezzo a un branco di vecchi funzionarii [...]. (Rajberti 1850, vol. 1, p. 33)<sup>11</sup>

The prepositional phrase precedes full pragmaticalisation. When fully pragmaticalised, the expression becomes parenthetical: it can move freely in the sentence and has scope over the entire directive act, and not just over the verb (see Fedriani 2019, p. 237 on the similar life cycle of *per favore*

<sup>9</sup> ‘Therefore, dear readers, be yourselves the first to stop using it [= that way to invite people] and **be so good as to explain and divulge** my arguments amongst all the ignorant people who never read books.’

<sup>10</sup> ‘Young people wishing to attempt a career in literature, **have pity on yourselves**, do not mount the stilts of idealism and dream worlds [...].’

<sup>11</sup> ‘**For the love of God**, take care not to throw them [= elegant ladies] amongst a pack of old civil servants [...].’

‘please’). In the second example above the meaning seems boosting, as it conveys urgency.

Ideally, *fare la carità di* should be studied in parallel with *per carità*, especially since Fedriani (2019) demonstrates how a similar politeness marker, *per favore* ‘please’, acquires parenthetical status as late as the 1890s. However, for reasons of space, I shall concentrate on the former, and only briefly discuss *per carità*. Beside the Rajberti example of 1850, CGIO contains an even earlier example of parenthetical *per carità* found in Melchiorre Gioja: “**Per carità**, non dimenticate questo precetto quando scrivete a dei grandi imbecilli che misurano il rispetto col compasso” (1820, vol. I, p. 190 in footnote).<sup>12</sup> Interestingly enough, Fedriani studies *per favore* ‘please’ from the point of view of pragmatic reversal, i.e. the process by which a routine politeness marker becomes impolite, as “insistent reinforcement of impolite acts such as urgent pleas, rude requests, rebuttals, and even insults” (2019, p. 233). In English, for example, ‘please’ can express impatience as in ‘Oh Please! Give me a break!’<sup>13</sup> Fedriani 2019 analyses impolite *per favore* in a twenty-first-century corpus of web texts. However, already at the beginning of the twentieth century, Fiorentina certainly uses *per carità* with very urgent bans. Here she writes about napkins:

[...] non appenderlo al collo come i bamberotti e, **per carità**, guardati dall’atto istintivo di fregare con esso il piatto, scambiando la nitida domestica mensa per quella d’un albergo: che mortificazione sarebbe per la padrona di casa! (Fiorentina 1918 [1915], p. 103)<sup>14</sup>

The term *mortificazione* indicates that this counts as a serious offence against good table manners and Fornari is impatient with offenders. That this polite marker is already conventionalised as impolite – i.e. it is not an occasional ironic use as mock politeness, where inferencing is needed to work out the meaning – is further confirmed by a historical dictionary.

The *Dizionario della lingua italiana* by Niccolò Tommaseo and Bernardo Bellini (1861-1879) is an authoritative dictionary based on literary examples. It discusses *per carità* in §13 of the lemma *carità* ‘charity’ (vol. 1, 1861, *ad vocem*). For *per carità*, Tommaseo and Bellini list examples, often without comma, where it has scope over the verb as a prepositional phrase:

<sup>12</sup> ‘**For the love of God**, do not forget this norm when you write to big imbeciles who measure respect with a compass.’

<sup>13</sup> See Ghezzi and Molinelli 2019 on a similar topic, i.e. the use of Italian *scusa* ‘excuse me’ in mixed messages, to express mock politeness and downright impoliteness.

<sup>14</sup> ‘[...] do not tie it round your neck like little children, and, **for the love of God**, make sure you do not instinctively rub your plate with it, mistaking the clean household table for a hotel one. What a mortification this would be for the mistress of the house!’



“Quando ha forma di preghiera e di chiesta, o sia relig. il senso o meram. umano, è sempre buono, o sia supplichevole o riverente o affettuoso; se non porti iron.” (vol. 1, 1861, *ad vocem*).<sup>15</sup> Tommaseo and Bellini allow here for ironic usages as mock politeness. *Per carità!* with exclamation mark “invoca la carità altrui a giovare col danaro o coll'opera; o almeno a non nuocere” (vol. 1, 1861, *ad vocem*).<sup>16</sup> However, in § 17 it has a distinct impolite meaning: “Così *Per carità!* è esclamazione d'impazienza e di sdegno.” (Tommaseo, Bellini, vol. 1, 1861, *ad vocem*).<sup>17</sup> This is the meaning seen above in Fiorentina (1918 [1915]).

Culpeper (2011, p. 174-178) discusses impolite uses of politeness markers, citing examples such as ‘with respect’, ‘no offence’, ‘I hate to be rude but’. These originally express conventional politeness, but Culpeper sees them as routinely conveying a “conventionalised impolite mixed message”, i.e. they have become conventionalised for impoliteness. He adds that this is “likely true” for “certain familiar forms of sarcasm and banter” (Culpeper, 2011, p. 178; see also Fedriani 2019; Ghezzi and Molinelli 2019). *Per carità* is likely to be a similar case, especially because the impolite use is already registered in a dictionary. The pattern followed by *per carità* confirms the analysis in Fedriani 2019, where it is deftly argued that *per favore* is routinised from a prepositional phrase into a parenthetical politeness marker in the 1890s, with examples of pragmatic reversal taken from the twenty-first century. *Per carità* follows a similar pattern, only it happens much earlier, with pragmaticalisation attested since 1820 (at least, in GCIO)<sup>18</sup> and an impolite meaning attested in a dictionary from the 1860s. However, this example taken from Manzoni’s *Promessi sposi*, ‘The Betrothed’, 1840, is also impolite. In ch. XV the innkeeper denouncing Renzo is offended that the police dare suspect him too and he makes a firm rebuttal: “Io? **per carità!** io non credo nulla: abbado a far l'oste.” (Manzoni 2002, p. 297).<sup>19</sup> In ch. XVIII the narrator specifies that Agnese uses *per carità!* with a mix of gratitude and impatience: “Oh **per carità!**” esclamò Agnese, con quel misto di gratitudine e d'impazienza, che si prova a un'esibizione in cui si trovi più la buona

<sup>15</sup> ‘When it has the form of a prayer or a request, it is always good, both with a religious or simply humane meaning, and with a supplicating, a respectful or an affectionate meaning, provided it is not ironic.’

<sup>16</sup> ‘Invokes someone else’s charity to assist with money or actions, or, at least, non to harm.’

<sup>17</sup> In this sense *Per carità!* is an exclamation of impatience and of disdain.

<sup>18</sup> A cursory glance at Carlo Goldoni’s eighteenth-century comedies shows a mixture of *per carità* used with or without a comma. See <http://www.intratext.com/ixt/ITA1289/DF.HTM>.

<sup>19</sup> “I! **For Heaven’s sake**; I think nothing: I only attend to my business.” Manzoni 1909-1914, retrieved from <https://www.bartleby.com/21/1.html>.

volontà altrui, che la propria convenienza: [...]?” (Manzoni 2002, p. 353).<sup>20</sup> These 1840 examples express the ‘impatience and disdain’ highlighted by Tommaseo and Bellini. Incidentally, present-day dictionaries, such as the Treccani, also list an impolite use for *per carità!*<sup>21</sup>

#### 4. Historical dictionaries

The Italian nineteenth century has been called the century of lexicography as this is a period when numerous dictionaries are published. Two dictionaries are based on literary examples: the *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca* (1863-1923), then in its 5<sup>th</sup> edition, and the Tommaseo and Bellini (1861-1879) as seen above. A third dictionary by Giuseppe Rigutini and Pietro Fanfani, 1875 (I use an 1893 edition) is based on spoken language. The *Vocabolario della Crusca* includes all the meanings of the noun *carità* ‘charity’ discussed in Section 2. As one of the theological virtues, it also acquires the more specific meaning of compassion – “Affettuosa compassione, Commiserazione, Pietà; e talvolta anche Misericordia” – which then leads to the meaning of “Qualunque atto caritativo” and “in senso particolare, Elemosina; per lo più adoperato col verbo Fare” (*Vocabolario*, vol. 2, 1866, *ad vocem*).<sup>22</sup> §VIII considers requests: the term is used for “Piacere o Favore che altri ci faccia di cosa sommamente desiderata; Grazia”,<sup>23</sup> with the following example: “Voi ch’avete paterna autorità Sopra il vostro figliuol grasso e paffuto, .... **Fateci a tutti un po’ di carità**; Fategli una solenne riprensione ec.”<sup>24</sup> (*Vocabolario*, vol. 2, 1866, *ad vocem*). The performative verbal locution is here used as a pre-request. Note that the request expresses urgency, it is ‘highly desired’. On the other hand, the example is slightly ironic.

The meanings of *carità* as a noun are similar in Tommaseo and Bellini (vol. 1, 1861), who also confirm its usage in a verbal locution to make a request. In §12, this example is negatively evaluated as verging on a ceremonious and mocking interpretation: “**Fate la carità d'insegnarmi**” is

<sup>20</sup> “**Oh holy patience!**” exclaimed Agnese, with that mixture of gratitude and impatience that one feels at an offer in which there is more good nature than suitability: [...]?” Manzoni 1909-1914, retrieved from <https://www.bartleby.com/21/1.html>.

<sup>21</sup> Consulted at <http://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/carita>.

<sup>22</sup> ‘Affectionate compassion, commiseration, pity; and at times also mercy. – Whichever charitable act. – In particular, alms-giving, mostly used with the verb *fare* ‘to do’.’

<sup>23</sup> ‘The pleasure or favour, we ask someone to grant us, of something that is highly desired; grace.’

<sup>24</sup> ‘You who have paternal authority Over your chubby and puffy son, ... **Do us all a bit of a favour**; Give him a mighty reprimand etc.’

“Modo fam. che tiene della cerimonia e dello scherzo”<sup>25</sup> (Tommaseo, Bellini, vol. 1, 1861, *ad vocem*). In §14, dedicated to *carità* as “elemosina” ‘handout’, the expression is treated as a formula for begging, but it also has the meaning of a more generic request: “T. Col Di. *Fate la carità d'un quattrino, d'un seccherello di pane*. – Col Di, in altri sensi eziandio: *La carità d'un consiglio, d'un saluto*.” (Tommaseo, Bellini, vol. 1, 1861, *ad vocem*).<sup>26</sup> However, § 17 discusses ironic, that is, mock polite, usages for *fare la carità*:

T. Anche iron. *Fatemi la carità*: ... tacete... andate via.

In senso sim. T. *Fatemi la santa carità*...

Col Di e l'Inf., e serio e iron. T. *Fatemi la carità di non parlare di me*. *Quest'è la miglior lode ch'io invochi*. (Tommaseo, Bellini, vol. 1, 1861, *ad vocem*)<sup>27</sup>

However, for Tommaseo, “può essere profanazione lo sprecare che in certi istituti pii si fa questa preghiera per mera cerimonia. T. *Fate la carità di darmi quel gomitolo, di porgermi quella pezzuola* (Tommaseo, Bellini, vol. 1, 1861, *ad vocem*).<sup>28</sup> In these examples, there is a strong contradiction between very ordinary objects and the religious connotation of the request modifier. The dictionary user seemingly needs to infer that this request formula should be reserved to ask for help in extraordinary circumstances, with an appeal to religious virtues as fraternal love. Overall, although the dictionary lists request and alms-seeking as a meaning for *fare la carità*, exaggerated (overpolite) and ironic (impolite) uses dominate.

Rigutini and Fanfani propose the shortest lemma. They discuss *fare la carità* as a polite request in the meaning of “Favore, Piacere efficace”,<sup>29</sup> with the following example of a pre-request: “fammi una carità e portami questa lettera al ministro” (Rigutini, Fanfani, 1893 [1875], *ad vocem*).<sup>30</sup>

In sum, whereas conduct books do not discuss the formula *fare la carità* to make requests, the three dictionaries do list it as a request modifier, demonstrating its conventionalised nature as a politeness formula; for the *Vocabolario della Crusca*, the request has urgency. Two dictionaries list *fare la carità* in the context of alms-seeking, but for Tommaseo and Bellini the

<sup>25</sup> ‘Be so good as to teach me – An informal saying that is partly ceremonious and joking in nature.’

<sup>26</sup> ‘With *di* ‘to’, be so good as to give a penny, or a breadcrust. – With *di* ‘to’, also in other meanings: [be so good as to] give a piece of advice, to say hello (The T. stands for Tommaseo as the author of the lemma).’

<sup>27</sup> ‘Also ironically, Do me a favour: ... be quiet... go away. In a similar meaning. Do me a blooming [lit. saintly] favour... With *di* ‘to’ and the infinitive, serious as well as ironic. Be so good as to not talk of me. That is the best praise I invoke.’

<sup>28</sup> ‘It can be a desecration to waste this request as a mere ceremony, as they do in certain religious institutes. Be so kind as to hand me that boll of string, to pass me that handkerchief.’

<sup>29</sup> ‘Efficient favour, pleasure.’

<sup>30</sup> ‘Do me a favour and take this letter to the secretary.’

lemma contains quite a few examples of mocking uses, which appear also in the example of the request provided by the *Vocabolario della Crusca*. There is a difference with *per carità*, however. *Per carità* was, as seen in Section 3, already conventionalised as impolite, whereas *fare la carità* is interpreted as mock politeness, that is, the recipient will still need to infer the antiphrastic meaning. In other words, it is not yet fully conventionalised. In fact, the sources only provide one example of ironic *fare la carità* (in Pirandello, see Section 7). In the next two sections, I examine how *fare la carità* is used in two nineteenth-century novels.

## 5. *I promessi sposi* ‘The Betrothed’

*I promessi sposi* ‘The Betrothed’ is allegedly the most important novel in nineteenth-century Italian literature (and is probably one of the greatest novels of the nineteenth century *tout court*). The first edition, of 1827, “immediately wins popular acclaim in Italy of the Risorgimento”; the second version, of 1840, written in a “Florentine dialect as it was spoken by the educated classes”, helps to build the Italian identity “by helping to forge its language” (Bermann 2006, p. 1133). In fact, language, communication and dialogue are important topics in the novel: whilst communication among aristocrats is fake and hypocritical, communication among the humble protagonists is a model to be followed, as they are genuinely caring for their fellow men. This didactic aspect regarding communication is important, as it will contribute to the conventionalisation of politeness formulae used by the characters occupying the positive moral pole of the novel.

In this novel, profoundly inspired by Catholic faith, the term *carità* appears no less than 80 times. The expression *fare la carità (di)* appears nine times. Table 2 lists the quotes, with minimal indications about their function as a request or alms-seeking. The concordances were established with <http://www.intratext.com/ixt/ITA0008/>. All quotes were checked against the anastatic edition, Manzoni 2002.<sup>31</sup> For the translation I quote Manzoni 1909-1914.

Ch.	Example	Translation	Context
III	Ma Lucia, richiamatolo, disse: “vorrei un servizio da voi; vorrei che diceste al padre Cristoforo, che ho gran premura di parlargli, e	But Lucia, recalling him, said, “I want you to do me a kindness; I want you to tell Father Cristoforo that we earnestly wish to speak	The marriage of Renzo and Lucia is called off. Via an intermediary, Lucia asks fra Cristoforo to come as soon as possible as they badly

<sup>31</sup> Also retrievable from [https://it.wikisource.org/wiki/I\\_promessi\\_sposi\\_\(1840\)](https://it.wikisource.org/wiki/I_promessi_sposi_(1840)).

	che <b>mi faccia la carità di venir</b> da noi poverette, subito subito; perché non possiamo andar noi alla chiesa.”	to him, and ask him <b>to be as good as to come</b> to us poor people quickly – directly; for I cannot go to the church.”	need his help. Request.
IX	“E se lei <b>fa questa carità di metterci</b> al sicuro, giacché siamo ridotte a far questa faccia di chieder ricovero, e ad incomodare le persone dabbene; ma sia fatta la volontà di Dio; [...].”	“And if <b>you do us the kindness to put us</b> in safety, since we are reduced to the necessity of asking a place of refuge, and of inconveniencing worthy people, (but God’s will be done!) [...].”	Pursued by Don Rodrigo’s men, Lucia and her mother are forced to flee from the village. Lucia arrives with her mother in a convent and asks if they can take refuge. Request.
XXI	“Se lei <b>non mi fa questa carità</b> , me la farà il Signore: mi farà morire, e per me sarà finita; ma lei!....”	“If <b>you don’t grant me this mercy</b> , the Lord will do it for me. I shall die, and all will be over with me; but you ...”	Lucia has been kidnapped. She supplicates her captor, a robber baron, to let her go. Request.
XXVI	“Pensateci voi, <b>fatemi anche questa carità</b> ; ché voi ci potete pensare.”	“Will you see to this, and <b>do me also this kindness</b> ; for <i>you</i> can think about it.”	Lucia is freed and sees her mother again. In captivity she has made a vow to renounce Renzo if she was saved and asks her mother to inform her former fiancé. Request.
XXIX	[...] e vedendo passar qualcheduno, gridava con una voce mezza di pianto e mezza di rimprovero: “ <b>fate questa carità al vostro povero curato di cercargli</b> qualche cavallo, qualche mulo, qualche asino.”	[...] or, seeing some one passing, cried out in a half-crying and half-reproachful tone: “ <b>Do your poor Curate this kindness, to seek</b> some horse, some mule, some ass, <b>for him!</b> ”	Don Abbondio, terrified to be left behind in the village with a looting army approaching, is desperate to have a way out. Request.
XXXIV	Ci andò di corsa; e quando fu vicino, “o quel giovine,” disse quella donna: “per i vostri poveri morti, <b>fate la carità d'andare</b> a avvertire il commissario che siamo qui dimenticati.”	He ran towards her; and when he came near, “O young man,” said the woman, “in the name of the friends you’ve lost, <b>have the charity to go</b> and tell the commissary that we are here forgotten!”	Renzo is looking for Lucia in Milan and is hailed by a woman whose house is boarded up for fear of the plague. She urgently needs food as she and her children haven’t eaten for two days.

			Request.
XXXIV	“Anche voi,” riprese Renzo, “credo che potrete farmi un piacere, <b>una vera carità</b> , senza vostro incomodo.”	“You, too, I think,” resumed Renzo, “can do me a service, <b>a real kindness</b> , without any trouble.”	Renzo is asking the same woman for directions to a house where he is hopeful to find Lucia. <i>Una vera carità</i> is apposition to <i>un piacere</i> . Request.
XXXIV	[...] e mentre quello si moveva per andarsene, “ <b>un'altra carità</b> ,” soggiunse; e gli disse della povera donna dimenticata. Il buon prete ringraziò lui d'avergli dato occasione di fare una carità così necessaria; [...].	[...] and as the priest prepared to go away, “ <b>Another favour</b> ,” added he; and he told him of the poor forgotten woman. The worthy priest thanked him for having given him this opportunity of conveying assistance where it was so much needed; [...].	After asking a priest for directions to Lucia's house, Renzo asks him for another favour: take food to the woman he has just met. <i>Un'altra carità</i> is used with ellipsis of the verb <i>fare</i> , which appears in the indirect discourse. Request.
XXXV	Dopo qualche momento, comparve un giovine cappuccino, al quale disse: “ <b>fatemi la carità</b> , padre Vittore, <b>di guardare</b> anche per me, a questi nostri poverini, intanto ch'io me ne sto ritirato; e se alcuno però mi volesse, chiamatemi.”	In a moment or two, a young Capuchin appeared, to whom Cristoforo said, “ <b>Do me the kindness</b> , Father Vittore, <b>to take</b> my share, too, of waiting upon patients, while I am absent for a little while; and if any one should ask for me, will you be good enough to call me.”	In the Lazzaretto, fra Cristoforo asks a young friar to look after the sick in his absence. Request.

Table 2

The verbal locution *fare la carità* in *I promessi sposi*, 1840.

There are nine cases, none of which refer to alms-seeking. In five cases, the expression is part of a pre- or post-supportive move. As a head act, *fare la carità* may or may not have an indirect object and *di* is followed by an infinitive: [mi faccia/fate/fatemi/fate al vostro povero curato] [la/questa] carità [di/d'] [venir/cercargli/andare/guardare]. Some of these are without doubt forceful requests, especially the ones in XXI, XXIX and the first one of XXXIV. They reflect the meaning found in the *Vocabolario della Crusca*, to request something ‘highly desired’. The request by Lucia in XXI has the hallmarks of a supplication, a specific type of directive. This is also recognised by the translator, who opts for the term ‘mercy’. Clark, working

on Homer, defines the speech act of supplication with the following four criteria: it is “a forceful directive” in which the speaker “has an essential and crucial interest in its success” and “the person supplicated has more power than the person performing the supplication”; he also points out the importance of gestures like kneeling (1998, pp. 9-11). In chapter XXI, the four conditions are met. Lucia makes a forceful request with highly emotive rhetoric, her captor has complete power over her, the outcome is a question of life and death and Lucia is on her knees, holding her hands out as in prayer, as shown in Figure 1:



Figure 1

The illustration by Francesco Gonin accompanying Lucia’s supplication (Manzoni 2002, p. 398).

Presumably, in this scene depicting feudal power relationships, Manzoni chooses the politeness modifier to underline Lucia’s religious fervour. Only in chapter XXXIV does the context involve begging for a material good. However, the Milanese woman is forced to beg for food because of highly unusual circumstances, that is, because of someone else’s negligence, and it does not fit the context of regular alms-seeking. Most examples are formulated by the humble protagonists of the novel, Lucia and Renzo, and their spiritual protector Fra Cristoforo. They form the positive moral and religious nucleus of the novel, and their language use is evaluated throughout as being warm, caring and, above all, genuine: a model to be copied (see also Paternoster 2010). There are no instances of an evaluation of overpolite or mock politeness. Overall, *fare la carità di* is used in requests, some of which are quite forceful.

## 6. *Pinocchio*

About 40 years after the *Promessi sposi*, *Pinocchio* was published in instalments in the children's magazine *Il giornale dei bambini* starting in 1881 and it was published in book format in 1883 (in 1890, the year in which Collodi passed away, the book was already in its fifth edition). A “classic novel of formation”, the stories “could help educate the children of the new Italy unified in 1870 after a long period of struggle” (Adami 2006, p. 486). In fact, after the unification of the country and the swift introduction of compulsory schooling, there was an urgent need for school manuals and reading materials. In *Pinocchio* the didactic message promoting politeness is very explicit. In fact, at the end of the novel, the puppet is transformed into “un ragazzino perbene” ‘a respectable little boy’ (Collodi 1995, p. 526). One of the main values that enable the transformation is the love of work. Two of the occurrences of *fare la carità di* take place on the Island of the Busy Bees (ch. XXIV), where Pinocchio decides to beg for food, dismissing what Geppetto has often told him about real charity:

I veri poveri, in questo mondo, meritevoli di assistenza e di compassione, non sono altro che quelli che, per ragione d'età o di malattia, si trovano condannati a non potersi più guadagnare il pane col lavoro delle proprie mani. Tutti gli altri hanno l'obbligo di lavorare: e se non lavorano e patiscono la fame, tanto peggio per loro (Collodi 1995, p. 449)<sup>32</sup>

This vision was reflected in “schoolbooks of the period” (Tosi and Hunt 2018, p. 46). The beggar Pinocchio, however fictional, “reflects the phenomenon of children begging in the Italian streets”; these children were not “picturesque”, instead, “they had become a serious political problem” (Tosi and Hunt 2018, p. 47; see also Prandi 2015). In Table 3 the concordances were established with <http://www.intratext.com/IXT/ITA1150/IDX001.HTM>, accessed 1.3.2019, and checked with the critical edition of Collodi 1995. I based the translation on Collodi 1925, occasionally making it more literal.

<sup>32</sup> ‘He had said that the real poor in this world, deserving of our pity and help, were only those who, either through age or sickness, had lost the means of earning their bread with their own hands. All others should work, and if they didn't, and went hungry, so much the worse for them.’ (Collodi, 1925, retrieved from <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/500/500-h/500-h.htm#link2HCH0024>)



Ch.	Example	Translation	Context
XXI	“O Lucciolina, <b>mi faresti la carità di liberarmi</b> da questo supplizio?...”	“Dear little Glowworm, <b>would you be so good as to free me</b> from this torture?”	Whilst trying to steal some grapes, Pinocchio is caught in a weaseltrap. He asks a glow-worm to release him. Request.
XXIV	“ <b>Mi fareste la carità di darmi</b> un soldo, perché mi sento morir dalla fame?”	“ <b>Would you be so good as to give me</b> a penny, for I am faint with hunger?”	Pinocchio is very hungry and decides to beg. Alms-seeking.
XXIV	“ <b>Fareste, galantuomo, la carità d'un soldo a un povero ragazzo, che sbadiglia dall'appetito?</b> ”	“Good man, <b>would you be so good as to give a penny to a poor boy who is yawning from hunger?</b> ”	After the first refusal Pinocchio makes another attempt. Alms-seeking.
XXXVI	“O Pinocchio” gridò la Volpe con voce di piagnisteo “ <b>fai un po' di carità a questi due poveri infermi.</b> ”	“Oh, Pinocchio,” he cried in a tearful voice. “ <b>Give some alms to us poor sick men.</b> ”	Cat and Fox reappear towards the end of the novel. Destitute, they resort to begging, but Pinocchio refuses to give, quoting several proverbs on the topic that ‘ill-gotten gains never benefit anyone’. Alms-seeking.

Table 3  
The verbal locution *fare la carità di* in *Pinocchio*, 1883.

Only the first quote is not related to alms-seeking and is a request to obtain freedom from captivity, which is not granted.<sup>33</sup> The two quotes in XXIV show that begging is wrong behaviour: none of the inhabitants of the Island of the Busy Bees donate to Pinocchio. All suggest he do work for them, in order to earn some food. After 20 more refusals he finally accepts to carry someone’s water jug. The hyperbolic condemnation of begging is confirmed in XXXVI where Pinocchio, now close to deserving his transformation into a real boy, criticises other beggars. Out of the four uses, three are related to

<sup>33</sup> To be fair, the conversation is interrupted and the reader never knows if Glowworm would have tried to free the puppet. But given the way their conversation is going (Glowworm lectures Pinocchio on stealing and implies that being caught in a weaseltrap is a just punishment), it is rather unlikely.

begging, but all four attract refusals. Whilst in the head act of a request, *fare la carità di* is followed by an infinitive phrase, in the case of alms-seeking, *carità* can be used absolutely (*fai un po' di carità*), it can be determined by an infinitive (*di darmi*), or by a noun (*di un soldo*). Note the use of the third person as the indirect object in *a un povero ragazzo che sbadiglia d'appetito*, as a way of accumulating reasons to give. More examples of this 'accumulative' indirect object follow in 7.3. No usages are ironic. In fact, in all of these examples, through the co-text of the refusal, *fare la carità* is negatively evaluated. From the point of view of conventionalisation, it functions as a modifier to be avoided by readers aspiring to become 'respectable'.

In sum, in *Pinocchio*, *fare la carità* is mainly used for alms-seeking. The examples are not many, and therefore it is important to extend the search to a reference corpus.

## 7. DiaCORIS

DiaCORIS is a historical reference corpus elaborated for written Italian produced between 1861 and 2001. It provides a "representative and well balanced sample" (Onelli *et al.* 2006, p. 1212). Representativeness and balance are the two criteria ensuring that findings may be generalised to an entire language (McEnery, Xiao, Tono 2006, p. 124). It is divided into five different time slots (see below), each containing 5 million words. Texts are taken from the following genres: newspapers, prose fiction, essay writing, legal-administrative writing, and miscellanea. The miscellanea include popular novels, children's literature – including *Pinocchio* – serial novels, comic novels, translations, private and public writings like papal encyclicals (Onelli *et al.* 2006, p. 1214). The corpus includes 30% of fiction for 1861-1900; this goes slightly down to 25% in the subsequent slots. Miscellanea make up 15% of the corpus in 1861-1900 and 1901-1922, but this subsequently goes down to 10%. Together, fiction and miscellanea make up between 45% and 35% of the entire corpus, depending on the time slot. It can be assumed that requests or alms-seeking are less likely to appear in the other subcorpora (press, essayistic prose and legal-administrative prose). Also, the fiction section includes novels and short stories (Onelli *et al.* 2006, p. 1214), but, regrettably, no drama. In all, speech-like writing is underrepresented. This is understandable, since the aim of the corpus compilers was to include "written-written" texts (Onelli *et al.* 2006, p. 1213). I include data until 2001, because the data from the twentieth century confirm that the general trend is down.

### 7.1. 1861-1900

Overall, the search term *carità* appears 431 times. *Fare la carità* has seven occurrences: four in *Pinocchio* and three new ones.

Location	Example	Translation and Context
DiaCORIS, fiction, E. De Amicis, <i>Cuore</i> , 1886.	“[...] mi contento di campare di pan nero; ma che possa partir presto, che possa trovare una volta mia madre, <b>fatemi questa carità</b> , del lavoro, trovatemi voi del lavoro, per amor di Dio, che non ne posso più!”	“I am content to live on black bread; but only let it be so that I may set out quickly, that I may find my mother once more. <b>Do me this charity</b> , and find me work, find me work, for the love of God, for I can do no more!” (De Amicis 1895, p. 253) Request.
DiaCORIS, fiction, G. Verga, <i>Mastro Don Gesualdo</i> 1889.	“Senti, Nini!... <b>fammi la carità!</b> ...”	“[...] listen, Nini! – <b>Be so kind to me!</b> ” (Verga 1955, p. 57) Request.
DiaCORIS, fiction, E. De Marchi, <i>Demetrio Pianelli</i> , 1991 [1890].	“ <b>Mi fa una carità</b> . Tenga conto del movimento di cassa e basta”	“ <b>Do me a favour</b> . Just look after the cash register, nothing else” Request.

Table 4  
The verbal locution *fare la carità* in DiaCORIS, 1861-1900.

Table 4 contains three requests. All are forceful. In the first example, the speaker, a young boy, is alone in a foreign town without any resources. He actually considers begging, but only to dismiss it vigorously. The second example is a pleading request from a woman to the man she loves. In the third, a man has to rush home because his wife is dying and he asks a colleague to fill in for him. Importantly, this time slot includes the *Pinocchio* examples from Table 3, which were not repeated in Table 4. The results are evenly spread: three instances relate to alms-seeking, four to requests.

### 7.2. 1901-1922

Occurrences for the search term *carità* are almost halved, at 248. *Fare la carità* returns three results.

In the first example of Table 5 the inhabitant of a remote town is asking a man, who pretends to be a doctor, to attend to his suffering daughter. In the two examples by Grazia Deledda, a woman is asking to take her and her daughter for a ride in a postal coach. It is implied that they do not pay, so this is a form of alms-seeking. In the last example, the same woman is ill with

fever. The person looking after her has begged more than once she go to bed. Oli finally agrees on the condition her nurse does something for her. Like in the previous time slot, both functions of *fare la carità* are present, requests and alms-seeking.

Location	Example	Translation and Context
DiaCORIS, newspapers, “Il resto del carlino”, Renato Fucini, <i>Acqua Passata</i> , 1921.	“Dio vi benedica! Venite con me, mi raccomando. <b>Fatemi la carità...</b> No, non è lontano.”	“God bless you! Come with me, I beg you. <b>Do me this favour...</b> No, it is not far.” Request.
DiaCORIS, fiction, G. Deledda, <i>Cenere</i> , 1904.	“ <b>Vuoi farci la carità di prenderci</b> un po' in vettura?”, disse Oli, mangiando.	“ <b>How'd you like to take pity and let us ride</b> a while in the wagon?” said Oli, eating. (Deledda 2004, p. 44) Alms-seeking.
DiaCORIS, fiction, G. Deledda, <i>Cenere</i> , 1904.	“Andrò se <b>mi fate una carità</b> ”, disse finalmente Oli.	“I'll go if <b>you'll do me a favor</b> ,” Oli said finally. (Deledda, 2004, p. 198) Request.

Table 5  
The verbal locution *fare la carità* in DiaCORIS, 1901-1922.

### 7.3. 1923-1945

The occurrences of *carità* are relatively stable at 250. *Fare la carità* occurs five times.

Location	Example	Translation and Context
DiaCORIS, fiction, C. E. Gadda, <i>Racconto italiano d'ignoto del Novecento</i> (cahier d'études), 1925.	“Devo morire, se sei un vero Dio, <b>devi farmi questa carità</b> , devi concedermela.”	“I must die, if you truly are a God, <b>you must grant me this favour</b> , you must grant it to me.” Request.
DiaCORIS, fiction, L. Pirandello, <i>La Giara</i> , 1928.	“Professore, io la ringrazio,” dice, “ <b>ma mi faccia il favore, la carità</b> , di non incomodarsi più per me, ecco!”	“Professor, I thank you,” he says, “ <b>but do me the favour, the very great favour</b> , of no longer troubling yourself over me, won't you?” (Pirandello 1994, p. 137) Request.
DiaCORIS, fiction, L. Pirandello, <i>La Giara</i> , 1928.	Lì si mise a dir forte, mica a me, certe parole che io in prima non compresi: “ <b>Fate</b>	Then she started to say loudly, however not to me, certain words that I failed to

	<b>la carità a questo povero orfanello cieco, abbandonato, solo al mondo!”.</b>	understand at first: “ <b>Give some alms to this poor blind little orphan, abandoned, alone in the world!</b> ” Alms-seeking.
DiaCORIS, essay writing, B. Barilli, <i>Il paese del melodramma</i> , 1930.	Era sempre la stessa salmodia sonnolenta: <b>fate la carità al povero cieco.</b>	It was always the same monotonous psalmody: <b>give some alms to this poor blind man.</b> Alms-seeking.
DiaCORIS, newspapers, “Marc’aurelio”, Federico, <i>L’altro giorno</i> , 1939.	L’altro giorno ho visto un mendicante con un cartello appeso al collo. C’era scritto: “ <b>Fate la carità a un distinto signore che ha un sacco di quattrini e non è per niente ammalato</b> ”.	The other day I saw a beggar with a sign hung from his neck. It read: “ <b>Give some alms to a distinguished gentleman who is wealthy and not sick at all</b> ”. Alms-seeking.

Table 6

The verbal locution *fare la carità* in DiaCORIS, 1923-1945.

The first example of Table 6, taken from Carlo Emilio Gadda, is a request. The first Pirandello example comes from the short story *Pensaci, Giacomino!* ‘Think it over, Giacomino!’ (published in the collection *La Giara* ‘The Oil Jar’). It is interesting in that it appears to be ironic, i.e. an impolite meaning expressing the wish to be let alone in a context of controlled anger, which transpires from the previous sentence: “Giacomino si torce su la sedia, stringe le pugna fino ad affondarsi le unghie nel palmo delle mani”.<sup>34</sup> The three remaining examples refer to alms-seeking. The last one comes from a humorous newspaper and parodies the ‘accumulative’ indirect object. This would show that the 3rd-person indirect object with a relative clause to refer to oneself is quite conventionalised: the humour would fail if the reader did not recognise this as the ironic reversal of an expression typical of alms-seeking.

#### 7.4. 1946-1967

Overall occurrences of *carità* are slightly down to 207. There are no examples of *fare la carità*.

<sup>34</sup> “Giacomino Pugliese writhes on his chair and clenches his fists till he sinks his nails into the palms of his hands” (Pirandello 1994, p. 137).

## 7.5. 1968-2001

Overall occurrences of *carità* have a big drop from 207 to 84. There is one example of *fare la carità*.

Location	Example	Translation and Context
DiaCORIS, essay writing, I. Montanelli, <i>L'Italia del Risorgimento (1831-1861)</i> , 1972.	( <b>Mi faccia la carità di aiutarmi</b> ) io per parte mia ho sempre fatto quel che ho potuto.	( <b>Be so good as to help me</b> ) I, for my part, have always done what I could. Request.

Table 7

The verbal locution *fare la carità* in DiaCORIS, 1968-2001.

The request in Table 7 occurs in a history essay, however, it is part of a historical document, a letter dated 9<sup>th</sup> of February 1855, written by the future king of Italy, Victor Emmanuel II, to pope Pius IX (Pio IX, Vittorio Emanuele II 1980, pp. 155-157).

Overall, any result needs to be considered with caution, given that the examples returned by DiaCORIS are few and far between. Table 8 gives an overview of the functions of *fare la carità* in the 5 time slots:

	Request	Alms-seeking
1861-1900	4	3
1901-1922	2	1
1923-1945	2	3
1946-1967	0	0
1968-2001	(1)	0

Table 8

Occurrences of the two functions of *fare la carità* in the 5 time slots of DiaCORIS.

As long as the expression has currency, both functions stay evenly distributed, with eight requests and seven instances of alms-seeking. One request functions as mock politeness and the most recent one actually dates back to 1855 and is put between round brackets. There are no examples in DiaCORIS of *fare la carità* after World War II.

## 8. MIDIA

The corpus MIDIA, *Morfologia dell'italiano in diacronia* 'Morphology of Italian in diachrony' contains far fewer tokens than DiaCORIS, about 1 million and a half words per time slot. There are five time slots, starting from the beginning of the thirteenth century. The nineteenth century is present in

two time slots, respectively from 1692 to 1840, and from 1841 to 1947. A confrontation with the results from DiaCORIS is useful, because, unlike DiaCORIS, MIDIA does include theatre plays. Balance is achieved by using seven text genres: non-scientific essays (including newspapers), scientific essays, legal and administrative texts, personal writings (letters, diaries, etc.), poetry, literary prose and drama (see <http://www.corpusmidia.unito.it/documentation.php#corpus-organization>).

Every category contains about 14% of the corpus: literary prose, drama and personal writings, all genres where one would expect speech-like writing (and requests/alms-seeking), amount roughly to 45%. As a result, MIDIA contains more speech-like texts than DiaCORIS. Nevertheless, with the search term *carità*, the results for *fare la carità* are not very different.

Only two examples appear in the slot 1692-1840, shown in Table 9, whilst overall the occurrences of *carità* are 85.

Location	Example	Translation and Context
MIDIA, personal writings, V. da Filicaia, <i>Lettere inedite a Lorenzo Magalotti</i> , end 17 <sup>th</sup> century – beginning 18 <sup>th</sup> century	[...] mi par ora conveniente, anzi necessario, rispondere al secondo con quel che ora v'invio, perché <b>mi facciate la solita carità di</b> correggerlo e di raffazzonarlo.	[...] it appears now important to me, even necessary, to respond to his second [sonnet] with the one I am sending you now, so that <b>you will do me the usual favour of</b> correcting it and putting it in shape. Request.
MIDIA, drama, J. Ferretti, <i>La Cenerentola</i> , 1817.	<b>Un tantin di carità.</b> / Accattoni! Via di qua.	<b>A bit of alms.</b> / Beggars! go away. Alms-seeking.

Table 9  
The verbal locution *fare la carità* in MIDIA, 1692-1840.

For the second time slot, *carità* goes up to 169. This is in line with the high number found in DiaCORIS for 1861-1900. For *fare la carità* some usages have already been seen above: the quote from Rajberti seen in Section 2, alongside the quotes from De Marchi and Pirandello found in DiaCORIS, which were all requests. Table 10 lists the four new quotes.

D'Annunzio's example is ironic: the poet-friar is asking a girl for her love, but he uses the formula used by mendicant religious orders. Including the three requests that were already present in DiaCORIS, the outcome from 1692 to 1947 is four requests and three instances of alms-seeking.

Location	Example	Translation and Context
MIDIA, drama, P. Ferrari, <i>Baltromèò calzolaro</i> , 1847.	“Piuttosto <b>ch' i me facce una carità</b> . La me moghja e la me figghjola ho una gran paura ch'al sciene all'ultimo della miseria; poere creature!...”	“Rather, <b>give me an alm</b> . My wife and my daughter, I am really afraid, are at an extreme level of misery; poor creatures!...” Alms-seeking.
MIDIA, drama, A. Torelli, <i>I mariti</i> , 1867.	“ <b>Fatemi una carità</b> , dottore, osservatemi gli occhi.”	“ <b>Do me a favour</b> , doctor, have a look at my eyes.” Request.
MIDIA, drama, F. M. Piave, <i>La forza del destino</i> , 1869.	Coro dei mendicanti: “ <b>Fate la carità</b> , Andarcene dobbiam, andarcene dobbiamo, Andarcene dobbiam, la carità, la carità!”	Choir of beggars: “ <b>Give us some alms</b> , we have to go, we have to go, we have to go, alms, alms!” Alms-seeking.
MIDIA, poetry, G. D'Annunzio, <i>Primo vere</i> , 1880.	Ecco un frate poeta e peccatore / che va pe 'l mondo a la cerca d'amore: / <b>fate la carità!...</b>	I am a poet-friar and a sinner, / who goes around the world looking for love: / <b>be merciful!...</b> Alms-seeking.

Table 10

The verbal locution *fare la carità* in MIDIA, 1841-1947.

The main point to take away from a comparison with DiaCORIS is that in DiaCORIS, from 1861 to 1945, there were 8 requests and 7 instances of alms-seeking and in MIDIA, from 1692 to 1947 are 5 request and 4 instances of alms-seeking. Note that there are fewer results for a far longer time slot (but this might be due to the fact that MIDIA is a lot smaller than DiaCORIS); however, the proportion between the two functions stays the same: requests and alms-seeking are fairly evenly spread.

## 9. Alms-giving in post-unification conduct books

Conduct books join the debate on alms-giving, and, to finish, I present a handful of extracts showing their involvement in the topic. In the years following the unification there is intense debate on public assistance as the care of the poor was mainly organised, not by the State, but by the Church and charitable organisations (Riall 2009, p. 96). This may well be the reason why *carità* scores higher frequencies in DiaCORIS for 1861-1900 and in MIDIA for 1841-1947. Given the Catholic ethics, conduct books strongly encourage alms-giving, but the key issue is to distinguish between those who are really worthy – the deserving poor – and those who are just lazy. For Bruni (1870), the best form of assistance is to provide work, “questo è uno dei mille mezzi che si possono adoperare e forse il più proficuo quasi



sempre” (Bruni 1870, p. 43).<sup>35</sup> His view is identical to the one found in *Pinocchio*: alms-giving should be limited to those who are not able to work: “Se si tratta poi di certi infelici impediti di guadagnarsi la sussistenza o per malattia o per insanabile infermità, oh verso di questi sì che la carità è un dovere strettissimo.” (Bruni 1870, p. 43).<sup>36</sup> Likewise, in his chapter on *Lavoro* ‘work’ he rules: “Chi può, deve lavorare” (Bruni 1870, p.49 ).<sup>37</sup> Tramping and begging are fiercely criticised:

Per questo molti si danno a vagabondare, e sudici e cenciosi, indifferentemente stendono la mano senza punta vergogna di rendersi avviliti presso la società! [...] E dire che col lavoro potrebbero essere stimati quanto gli altri! (Bruni 1870, p. 50)<sup>38</sup>

The longest discussion is found in Gallenga (1871), an influential conduct book, which won a competition launched in Turin by city councillor Baruffi. An award of 500 *lire* (in that year a primary school teacher’s average yearly salary is 433 *lire*, see Gallenga 1871, p. 229) was promised to whoever wrote a conduct book for the people. Gallenga won with *Codice delle persone oneste e civili, ossia Galateo morale per ogni classe di cittadini* ‘The rulebook of honest and civil people, or moral conduct book for every class of citizens’. This 506-page book includes chapters for all sectors of society, civil servants, doctors, solicitors, families, priests, journalists, etc., and the poor. As in Bruni, no alms whatsoever should go to able-bodied unemployed: “[...] vuolsi ad ogni modo schivare la carità inconsiderata che vale soltanto a promuovere l’infingardaggine, il vizio mascherato di una finta o colpevole miseria.” (Gallenga 1871, p. 413).<sup>39</sup> This is the start of a six-page rant against the undeserving poor. Of one hundred beggars, “novanta, se non più, sono fannulloni, scioperati, quando non furfanti, manutengoli”,<sup>40</sup> of one hundred disabled or sick people “novanta almeno sono ipocriti che si fingono poveri e sciancati per sottrarsi al lavoro”<sup>41</sup> (Gallenga, 1871, p. 414):

<sup>35</sup> “[...] this is one of the thousand solutions that can be used and perhaps almost always the most productive one.”

<sup>36</sup> “If we are dealing with certain unfortunate people, who are incapable of supporting themselves or because of illness or because of incurable disability, oh yes, towards these people alms-giving is the most rigorous of duties.”

<sup>37</sup> ‘He who can, must work.’

<sup>38</sup> ‘For this reason, many become vagrants, and filthy and in rags, they indifferently extend their hand without feeling any shame for becoming society’s dejected! [...] And to say that with work they could be esteemed just like any other!’

<sup>39</sup> “[...] one must at all means avoid an indiscriminate alms-giving, which is only destined to promote laziness, vice disguised as a fake or criminal misery.”

<sup>40</sup> “[...] ninety, if not more, are lazy, unemployed, if not villains or their accomplices.”

<sup>41</sup> “[...] at least ninety are hypocrites who fake being poor and cripple to avoid working.”

Ma quelle disgrazie sono simulate, quelle piaghe, quelle imperfezioni, quelle mutilazioni non sono ordinariamente che altrettanti mezzi per eccitare l'altrui sensibilità. Quei bambini che vedete nelle loro braccia agitarsi e contorcersi per la fame, per le percosse ricevute sono, il più delle volte, bambini d'affitto; quelle povere creature non sono che strumenti di una colpevole industria; e, cresciuti a quella scuola d'ipocrisia e di vizio, diventeranno più tardi complici di quella mendicizia scellerata. (Gallenga 1871, pp. 414-415)<sup>42</sup>

In one word, this is “frode”, ‘fraud’ (Gallenga 1871, p. 415).

Bruni and Gallenga address adult readers, but the discourse for school-going readers is not very different: alms-giving is an all-important sign of compassion, but not every beggar is deserving. Rodella, who wins the Baruffi competition *ex-aequo* with Gallenga, includes a tear-jerking scene in which the schoolboy Enrichetto, the main character of this conduct novel, protects a blind elderly beggar (Rodella 1871, p. 24). Nevertheless, children too need to be aware that not all beggars are deserving. Pellegrino writes for boys at boarding school:

Guardatevi però dal fare elemosina a quelle persone che proprio non vi pajono poverette, giacché correreste pericolo, sebbene in buona fede, di promuovere il vagabondaggio, l'intemperanza, il sudiciume. (Pellegrino, 1870 p. 12)<sup>43</sup>

Half a century later his advice is still valid: “Purtroppo c'è qualche mendicante il quale trova più comodo accattare che lavorare: fargli l'elemosina sarebbe favorire il vizio” (Fiorentina 1918 [1915]: p. 227).<sup>44</sup> Only Cajmi has a more generous view. His argument is that young people may lack the experience to distinguish correctly between fake and genuine sufferers. His motto is: if in doubt, give!

Dunque, direte voi, aiuteremo anche l'ozioso, l'accattone di mestiere? — Nel dubbio, fatelo pure: sarà sempre meno male che si trovi un accattone di più, a condizione che vi sia un egoista di meno. (Cajmi, 1869 [1865-7], vol. 2, p. 51)<sup>45</sup>

<sup>42</sup> ‘But those accidents are fake, those wounds, those imperfections, those mutilations are usually meant to be as many ways to excite other people’s sensitivity. Those children, whom you will see writhe and wriggle because of hunger, because of the beatings they have received, are, most of the time, children who have been hired; these poor creatures are nothing but the tools of a guilty trade; and, educated to the school of hypocrisy and vice, later they will become the accomplices in this wicked mendicancy.’

<sup>43</sup> ‘Take care not to give alms to those people who do not appear poor, as you would run the risk, albeit in good faith, of promoting tramping, intemperance, filth.’

<sup>44</sup> ‘Sadly, there are some beggars who find it easier to beg than to work. Donating to them would mean promoting vice.’

<sup>45</sup> ‘So, you will say, do we then also help the idle, he who begs for a living? - If in doubt, go ahead: it will always be preferable to have one more beggar, on the condition that there is one less selfish person.’

In sum, the extensive discourse on the intricacies of good and bad alms-giving in conduct books is a telling sign that the larger public debate on poverty is trickling down into instructional writing. Therefore, it is not a surprise that a politeness modifier conventionalised for alms-seeking was not going to be included in the paragraphs that conduct books dedicate to advice on linguistic politeness.

## 10. Concluding remarks

The aim of this paper was to examine the meanings and contexts of use of the request modifier *fare la carità di* in nineteenth-century Italy. My interest was elicited by its absence from advice on politeness formulae in contemporary conduct books, despite the fact that dictionaries list it as a request modifier, confirming its conventionalised status. Ideological reasons for this absence can be found in the conduct books themselves, although admittedly these only offer broad explanations. Poverty was mainly seen as the fault of the poor themselves, who were encouraged to work.

Despite this, all three of the consulted dictionaries confirmed that *fare la carità* is conventionalised as a request modifier, and two dictionaries included the meaning of begging for a handout. The analysis of two successful literary sources showed that in 1840 *fare la carità* is only used for making a request, in a co-text of positive evaluations, whilst in 1883 it covers one request and three cases of alms-seeking, all in a co-text of negative evaluations. The view on begging in *Pinocchio* is indeed close to the condemnation present in conduct books. The double usage, for request and alms-seeking, was further confirmed by both DiaCORIS and MIDIA, which included requests and alms-seeking in roughly equal proportions till the end of World War II. That the verbal locution has disappeared is in line with the fact that overall the frequency of the noun *carità* is fast diminishing in DiaCoris. Another resource to be exploited is Google Ngram viewer, where the frequency of *fatemi la carità di*, *mi faccia la carità di* (1700-2000) stays high during the nineteenth century, with a first drop in 1900-1920 and a final tapering off after 1920.<sup>46</sup> One obvious reason for the drop is the growing secularisation of society, where a request formula with a religious connotation becomes less popular than formulae conveying sensorial meanings, such as *per favore*, *per piacere* ‘please’ (whereas *grazie* ‘thank you’ has an aesthetic etymology of ‘grace’). The answer as to why the request modifier is not included in contemporary conduct books can in part be explained by its use as a specialised marker for alms-seeking. Also, as several

<sup>46</sup> <https://books.google.com/ngrams>.

examples show, it is quite a forceful request, and that, as well as its mock-polite use, well documented by the dictionaries, might have contributed to its exclusion from conduct books.

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