ELEONORA SERRA

3 The use of discourse-ending formulae: Exploring intra-writer variation in Michelangelo Buonarroti's correspondence

ABSTRACT

The Florentine artist Michelangelo Buonarroti was a prolific letter writer: more than 400 autograph letters – most of which are private and everyday letters – have survived that address a range of individuals from different backgrounds and span 68 years (1496–1563). This chapter investigates intra-writer variation in Michelangelo's use of a set of discourse-ending formulae, charting their usage in relation to time and to the relationship with the addressee. This focus on intra-writer variation allows one to investigate the relative roles of writing experience and group practices in Michelangelo's language, suggesting that, for him, this set of formulae functioned primarily as social conventions.

1 Introduction

In light of the growing interest in letters as sources for studying variation and change in the past, the use of epistolary formulae has recently attracted considerable attention cross-linguistically. Studies on Germanic languages (Austin 2004; Elspaß 2005; Rutten & van der Wal 2012, 2014) and French (Große et al. 2016) have uncovered a correlation between a high use of epistolary formulae and low levels of writing experience, and have thus suggested that formulae functioned primarily as aids that helped less skilled writers to compose a text. However, other scholars have underlined that epistolary formulae could also function as markers of social identity, and could be used to signal in-group membership (Laitinen & Nordlund 2012; Conde-Silvestre 2016; Evans 2020). The interplay between the role of writing experience and group practices in

the use of epistolary formulae remains unclear to date (Rutten & van der Wal 2012: 195).

In this chapter, I ask whether patterns of intra-writer variation within the language of a single individual may shed some light on the role that epistolary formulae performed in private and everyday letters from Renaissance Italy. Although the letter-writing manuals, epistolaries and letter anthologies that were flooding the printing market in sixteenth-century Italy have been the object of a number of in-depth studies (see, for instance, Quondam 1981; Matt 2005; Braida 2009), the use of epistolary formulae itself has remained largely unexplored in the Italian context. When it has been investigated, it has usually been situated within a broader research encompassing lexis, style, topoi and discourse strategies, either with a focus on mostly literary letters (as in Barucci 2009) or on diplomatic correspondence (as in Felici 2018), whereas less attention has been paid to everyday, private letters. Even in this tradition, however, some studies have suggested a relative familiarity of little educated writers with letter-writing conventions (e.g. Palermo 1994; Telve 2019). This chapter aims to address this gap in the Italian context, in particular by investigating the correlation between the use of a set of epistolary formulae and the extra-linguistic factors of time and relationship to the addressee, and by evaluating whether patterns of intra-writer variation favour an interpretation of formulae as aids for formulation or as primarily social conventions.

The formulae investigated here are discourse-ending formulae: not to be confused with closing formulae, these optional formulae, as explained in detail in Section 5, signal the transition from the context-dependent information to the closing formula or from one piece of information to another.

The correspondence I analyse was written by Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475–1564), who, throughout his remarkably long life, was an incredibly prolific letter writer, mostly producing letters for practical purposes addressed to a wide and diverse range of people. He was an upwardly mobile individual whose writing experience increased considerably, and whose social networks drastically changed, thus enabling an assessment both of the role of writing experience and of social practices in his use of formulae. Further, the fact that many letters by his correspondents and family

members have come down to us makes it possible to situate his usage within his broader network.

2　Michelangelo and his practice of letter-writing

This section gives a research overview on the Buonarroti letters, sketches a biographical and linguistic profile of Michelangelo, and provides some basic information on his correspondence and on the possible routes for his acquisition of letter-writing conventions.

2.1　*The Buonarroti letters*

Michelangelo's letters and those of his correspondents were published between 1965 and 1983 (Barocchi & Ristori 1965–83), soon followed by the edition of other letters from the Buonarroti family archive (Barocchi et al. 1988–95).

　　　Aside from being studied for their historical value, Michelangelo's letters have drawn the attention of linguists since at least the 1960s and, also thanks to the efforts of the Memofonte foundation, which has digitized this corpus and made it available online,[1] the last few years have witnessed a flourishing of linguistic studies on this corpus. A number of studies have shed light on the linguistic features used by Michelangelo (Nencioni 1965; D'Onghia 2014; Valenti 2020), the evolution of his orthography over time (Bardeschi Ciulich 1989), the lexicon employed by Florentine artists and craftsmen (Barocchi & Maffei 1994), and the linguistic usage of Michelangelo's numerous correspondents (Serra 2020).

1　Cf. <https://www.memofonte.it/> accessed 1 March 2022.

2.2 Michelangelo: A linguistic and letter-writing profile

Before discussing my research hypotheses, it is worth surveying what we know, or might hypothesize, about the way Michelangelo learned to write letters, an issue which is tied to what we know about his life, education and writing training.

Michelangelo Buonarroti was born in 1475 to an impoverished Florentine family that belonged to the minor aristocracy. He grew up in the family villa in Settignano, a small village in the Florentine hills which primarily based its economy on stone carving, where he first approached sculpture (Wallace 2010: 51). However, since an artistic career was considered a step-down for a boy of his rank, he was initially sent to the grammar school of Francesco d'Urbino in Florence, but he never learnt much Latin here (Wallace 2010: 40). While passionate about drawing, he did not show interest for humanistic learning and his father reluctantly agreed to take him out of school and have him trained as an artist. There is general agreement that the formal education received by Michelangelo was modest (Hatfield 2002: 230; D'Onghia 2014: 93), since at the age of twelve he was already running errands for the workshop of the painter Domenico Ghirlandaio. Lacking in the kind of education that boys from the aristocracy usually received, he apparently suffered for this later in life (Hatfield 2002: 230), as he would eventually climb his way into patrician circles where knowledge of the classical languages was the norm.

In terms of the letter-writing training he might have received in his childhood, anecdotal evidence scattered across family books indicates that, in Renaissance Florence, a portion of elementary instruction might have been dedicated to the study of vernacular letter-writing (Witt 1995). Although his schooling was limited, Michelangelo would have doubtless received elementary instruction and it is therefore possible that he would have undergone some formal training in letter-writing. As noted by D'Onghia (2014: 93), however, he would not have had the kind of letter-writing training received by other boys from the Florentine aristocracy, who would usually undergo such training at an age when Michelangelo had already left school.

There were vernacular letter-writing manuals that circulated in Florence, such as Bartolomeo Miniatore's *Formulario*, first printed in Bologna in 1485 and reprinted several times in Florence since 1488. Hence, although we do not know that the Buonarroti family owned a copy, the use of manuals cannot be ruled out. On the other hand, it was extremely common in Florentine merchant families – and the Buonarroti were no exception – to keep a family archive where personal correspondence was preserved (Focarile 2022), so letters received by the household might have served as models for learning letter writing.

It has been hypothesized, however, that Michelangelo's first real 'exercise' in writing was indeed represented by his increasingly intense correspondence not only with colleagues and workers, but also with a range of high-ranking individuals (D'Onghia 2014: 93f.). The practical need to correspond – which increased as Michelangelo became an established artist receiving commissions from patricians and even popes – would have progressively familiarized Michelangelo with letter-writing conventions. A more secure writing style and mastery of certain stylistic structures in letters from the early sixteenth century, compared to Michelangelo's earliest letters from the 1490s, has been recognized (D'Onghia 2014).

In addition to this 'hands-on' training, Michelangelo also later made up for his lack of formal education by developing an interest for Tuscan vernacular literature and poetry. He had enjoyed writing verses as an amateur poet since the early 1500s, but his poetic endeavours became more serious from the 1530s, years that represent a sort of watershed in his life. During this time, he permanently settled in Rome and became friends with individuals from the aristocratic elites, with whom he would exchange sonnets and madrigals. This shift in his social circle has been interpreted as part of a wider effort on Michelangelo's part to raise his family's position, as he became more and more obsessed with status (Wallace 2010: 235).

The early 1540s had a significant effect also on Michelangelo's writing practices, which became less anchored to orality. For example, he abandoned the graphic rendering of the raddoppiamento fonosintattico, probably as a result of his contacts with two friends and literary 'advisors', Donato Giannotti and Luigi Del Riccio (Bardeschi Ciulich 1989: 14). Although a wealth of non-standard features are maintained even in his latest letters

(D'Onghia 2014: 98), in my PhD thesis I showed that, after his relocation to Rome, at least some salient features, such as the masculine determiner, were subject to lifespan change in the direction of the archaizing, literary variety that was being promoted throughout Italy in those years, largely through the products of the printing press and, after 1516, also through the production of grammars (Serra 2020).[2] Similar conclusions are reached by Valenti (2020), who shows the increase of several archaizing features in Michelangelo's language over time. Although a possible reading of Pietro Bembo's grammar *Le prose della volgar lingua*, first published in 1525, has been hypothesized (Valenti 2020), Michelangelo's re-orientation to standard features may simply be accounted for by his change in social networks and growing interest in literature. Such factors might also have triggered a change in his use of letter-writing conventions. This is an issue that the present chapter aims to explore.

In summary, a few points are worth underlining: first, after receiving little education in the early years of his life, Michelangelo's writing experience grew with time, also thanks to his prolific letter-writing. Second, the 1530s were years in which Michelangelo's social and linguistic practices significantly changed. Third, Michelangelo was an upwardly mobile individual, that is, somebody who could be termed a 'social aspirer'. These individuals are known to be particularly sensitive to prestige and stigma, and to show signs of linguistic insecurity (Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg 2016: 133f.). Hints of the latter emerge in Michelangelo's correspondence and, whereas some of his anxieties specifically concern the drafting of formal business letters (e.g. n. 129),[3] other times they express general feelings of inadequacy in addressing learned or powerful people (e.g. n. 273; 1225).

---

2   For an account on language codification in Renaissance Italy see, for instance, Trabalza (1908), Patota (1993) and Vallance (2019).

3   Here and elsewhere, I cite the Buonarroti letters by their identification number as it appears in the printed editions by Barocchi & Ristori (1965–83) and Barocchi et al. (1988–95).

3 Research hypotheses

As explained in the introduction, this chapter asks whether patterns of intra-writer variation in the language of Michelangelo may shed some light on the functions of epistolary formulae. Do these patterns favour a view of formulae as aids to compose a text, or do they favour an interpretation of formulae as social conventions, related to group practices?

I tackle this question by exploring two types of intra-writer variation: lifespan change (by charting Michelangelo's use of formulae across adjacent, subsequent time periods) and register variation (by charting Michelangelo's use of formulae on the basis of his relationship with the addressee).

Concerning lifespan change, an interpretation of formulae as a safe option for less experienced writers would lead us to expect a gradual decrease in Michelangelo's use of epistolary formulae, since his writing experience is known to have increased throughout his life. On the other hand, if formulae functioned as social conventions, signalling in-group membership, we would not necessarily expect a decrease in their use throughout his life. However, we might expect Michelangelo's use of formulae to change after the 1530s, in keeping with his relocation to Rome and change in social network.

Concerning register variation, if formulae served Michelangelo as a safe option to compose a text, they could be either expected to be used equally when writing to different addressees or, as was found by Große et al.'s (2016) study on correspondence by the semiliterate, the use of formulae could be expected to decrease with emotional proximity. An increase in the use of formulae with emotional proximity, instead, would not be compatible with this hypothesis, and would favour a view of formulae as conventions related to group practices.

4 The corpus used for analysis

In 2016, the Memofonte foundation kindly provided me with digital files of the Buonarroti corpus. After removing letters of non-autograph or uncertain status, I uploaded this corpus on the analysis tool Sketch Engine,[4] tagging it with a range of metadata on the identities of each writer along with the name of the addressee.

In order to analyse Michelangelo's use of formulae, I have selected his autograph letters, excluding all unfinished letters, and letters that exhibited extensive damage. Because the formulaic frame was frequently added only on the final draft that was actually sent (e.g. cf. n. 1074 and n. 1075), I also excluded all of Michelangelo's own drafts and copies, unless they were ended by a conclusion, signature, or date.[5] This yielded a total of 442 letters.

To allow for analysis of lifespan change, letters were then categorized on the basis of the time period in which they had been written. I selected four timespans of equal length (i.e. 17 years) from the date of Michelangelo's first autograph letter (1496) to the date of his last (1563).

Considering tenor – that is, the social relation between writer and addressee – as the primary factor behind register variation, as did Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg (2016: 189f.) for the CEEC corpus, I classified letters on the basis of Michelangelo's relationship with the addressee, determined on the basis of secondary literature, and further confirmed by

---

4   Cf. <https://www.sketchengine.eu//> accessed 1 March 2022.

5   At times, a change in the use of discourse-ending formulae in different drafts of the same letter suggests that for Michelangelo, formulae were not interchangeable: a case in point is a very well-crafted letter addressed by Michelangelo in 1533 to his aristocratic friend (and possibly lover) Tommaso de' Cavalieri, to whom the artist also dedicated several sonnets. The first draft contains the only occurrence in this corpus of the formula *non altro che dirmi* [nothing else to say], which is changed to *non dirò altro* [I will not say anything else] in the second draft, and re-elaborated into a more complex and creative formulation, *per non vi tediare non scriverrò altro* [in order not to bore you I will not write anything else] in the third draft (see letters n. 893, 895, 896 respectively).

Michelangelo's use of forms of address, which tended to differ across the identified categories. I distinguished between:

(a) letters addressed to close family members (by far the most numerous group);[6]
(b) letters addressed to individuals from a lower rank, that is, labourers, assistants, artisans or fellow artists not belonging to wealthy families;[7]
(c) letters addressed to high-ranking individuals who were friends of Michelangelo;
(d) letters addressed to patrons/individuals of extremely high rank;
(e) letters addressed to distant business partners, most of which were written in a formal style.

The relevant divisions, and the number of letters that fall under each category, are shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1. Michelangelo's letters

	Letters to family	Letters to lower ranks	Letters to high-status friends	Letters to patrons	Letters to distant business partners	*Total*
1496–12	78	1	0	1	1	*81*
1513–29	48	15	14	1	6	*84*
1530–46	37	1	35	5	3	*81*
1547–63	172	2	15	6	1	*196*
Total	*335*	*19*	*64*	*13*	*11*	*442*

---

6   As Michelangelo outlived all of his brothers, the addressees in the family change over time: whereas in the first part of the *Carteggio* most of Michelangelo's family letters are sent to his brother Buonarroto and to his father Lodovico, most of the late letters are sent to his nephew and heir (Buonarroto's son), Leonardo.

7   For further details on social categorization, see Section 6.2.

5   Object of analysis: Discourse-ending formulae

Michelangelo's letters present formulae of different types, which seem to
fit quite well the pragmatic categorization proposed by Rutten & van der
Wal (2012), which distinguishes between text-type, text-structural, inter-
subjective and Christian-ritual formulae. I focus on a set of formulae that
were used to end discourse, which can be categorized as a subtype of text-
structural formulae, that is, formulae that 'mark the text structure by real-
izing the transition from one part of the discourse to another' (Rutten &
Van der Wal 2014: 108) – in this case, they signal the end of the context-
dependent information conveyed by the letter, realizing the transition
from the body of the text to the closing formula, or (less frequently) from
one topic to another. These formulae have not been systematically inves-
tigated in the Italian tradition to date, although they are identified as a
specific type of epistolary formulae in Fabio Magro's analysis of the text
typology of private letters (Magro 2014: 126, n. 50).[8]

　　These formulae are particularly frequent in Michelangelo's letters,
and in the Buonarroti corpus in general. Unlike text-type formulae (i.e.
formulae that mark the text as a letter, such as the address form, the signa-
ture, the date), discourse-ending formulae are optional. At the same time,
if writers decide to use them, they have a range of options to choose from.
This allows me to investigate two questions, that is, what factors influenced
the choice to use or not to use a discourse-ending formula and, in case for-
mulae were used, what factors influenced the choice of a particular type
of discourse-ending formula.

　　The analysis yielded a total of 231 discourse-ending formulae in
Michelangelo's letters. Allowing for some micro-variation in the order of

---

8　　Magro lists *basta* [enough], *non ò da dirti altro intorno a questo* [I have nothing
　　else to tell you about this] and *né altro per questa* [and nothing else through this]
　　as examples of formulae used to signal closure of discourse in early modern letters
　　(Magro 2014: 126). *Basta* is also discussed by D'Onghia (2014: 97) as a discourse
　　marker in private letters that appears to be derived from speech.

constituents within a single type, the types of formulae used by Michelangelo may be identified as the following:[9]

- *(Non) altro* [(Nothing) else]
- *(Non) altro per questa* [(Nothing) else through this]
- *E basta* [And enough]
- *Non ho altro da/che dirti/scriverti* [I have nothing else to tell/ write you]
- *Non dico/scrivo/dirò/scriverò altro* [I do/will not say/write anything else]
- *Altro (non) (mi) accade/scade* [(Nothing) else happens (to me)]

It is possible that these formulae might have functioned as aids to reduce the writing effort since they could be retrieved as a whole from memory and could therefore have helped to speed up the writing process (see Rutten & van der Wal 2012). This pre-fabricated nature of formulae is suggested by their occasional occurrence in rapid succession, almost as if they were inserted absent-mindedly, perhaps triggered by adjacent formulaic expressions, as in the following by Michelangelo: *Altro non m'achade. Seguita e avisami. Altro non m'achade* [Nothing else happens. Follow up and answer me. Nothing else happens] (n. 1199). Moreover, some of these formulae are semantically non-transparent, a characteristic that is typical of holistic units (Wray 2002: 33f.): in particular, the formulae *non altro* [nothing else] or *altro non accade* [nothing else happens] are frequently reduced to *altro* and *altro accade* (which, literally, would translate into *something else* or *something else happens*!).

Most frequently, as mentioned earlier, discourse-ending formulae are used to signal the end of the context-dependent information conveyed in the letter and are followed by a closing formula, but they can occasionally be used to signal the end of one specific piece of information. However,

9   The instances of these formulae present considerable spelling variation as was typical of sixteenth-century private writings. When discussing a formula type, among the alternative spellings I use the one that conforms to the orthography of modern standard Italian (but that was in any case used by some writers in the corpus). Conversely, when quoting individual occurrences, I reproduce the original spelling.

just as was the case for the formulae studied by Rutten and van der Wal (2014: 112), it is not always the case that these formulae in fact close the discourse (e.g. n. 62, 67). This may be accounted for by a scant level of textual planning (Magro 2014: 133).

6 Analysis and discussion

My analysis consisted of two parts: first, I analysed Michelangelo's choice of whether to use a discourse-ending formula or not; second, I focused on the discourse-ending formulae he did use to examine the variation in his choice of different types.

6.1 Use of discourse-ending formulae

As in Bijkerk (2004), in order to count formulae, I calculated the number of letters with at least one formula over the total of letters in each subgroup. This method was chosen over a normalized frequency count because it was only in very few cases (11 out of 442) that letters by Michelangelo contained more than one formula.[10] The results of this analysis are shown in Table 3.2.

Within the subgroups that allowed for a quantitative exploration of lifespan change, that is, the group of letters sent to family members and the group of letters sent to high-status friends, the use of discourse-ending formulae remains relatively stable over time. Hence, in Michelangelo's usage, the quantity of formulae does not seem to decrease with an increase in writing experience, being highest in the latest letters sent to his family. Michelangelo's letters to patrons, on the other hand, may tell a different story: out of the thirteen letters, only the earliest (1), written at 21 years of

---

10   Of these, nine contained two discourse-ending formulae (n. 2, 27, 62, 67, 130, 138, 981, 1196, 1199) and two (n. 20, 1136) contained three.

Table 3.2. Number of letters containing at least one discourse-ending formula/total number of letters in each category

	Letters to family	Letters to lower-ranks	Letters to high-status friends	Letters to patrons	Letters to distant business partners
1496−12	41/78 (53 %)	1/1	0/0	1/1	0/1
1513−29	29/48 (60 %)	5/15 (33 %)	4/14 (29 %)	0/1	0/6
1530−46	17/37 (46 %)	1/1	4/35 (11 %)	0/5	0/3
1547−63	109/172 (63 %)	0/2	4/15 (27 %)	0/6	0/1
Total	*196/335 (59 %)*	*7/19 (37 %)*	*13/64 (20 %)*	*1/13 (8 %)*	*0/11 (0 %)*

age, contains a discourse-ending formula. Numbers are low in this group and discussion must necessarily remain speculative, but it is possible that in letters sent to patrons and superiors, Michelangelo's increase in writing experience progressively translated into an effort to be more creative and to distance himself from routine formulae. This is suggested by the existence of letters to superiors where the ending of the discourse is signalled by creative formulations: an example is Michelangelo's self-deprecating comment in a letter sent in 1547 to the humanist Benedetto Varchi, where the artist explains that being almost in the grave on account of his old age he does not have the time to write further (n. 1077).

On the other hand, the results provide evidence of register variation. The highest number of discourse-ending formulae appears in letters sent to family members: in this category, more than half of the letters contain at least one formula. In addition, the eleven letters that contain more than one formula were all sent to family members.

The number of formulae decreases in letters sent outside of the family circle. Concerning letters sent to low-status writers, quantitative

considerations may be drawn only for the period 1513–29. A third of the letters contains discourse-ending formulae, compared to 60 % of letters sent to family members in the same time period. As for letters addressed to high-ranking friends, quantitative considerations may be made from the second time period onwards (i.e. from 1513). The percentage of formulae in these letters oscillates between 11 % and 29 % in the course of Michelangelo's life.

There is only one instance of discourse-ending formulae in letters to patrons, as previously mentioned, and no discourse-ending formulae are found in any of the eleven letters sent to distant business partners.[11]

The high frequency of formulae used in letters for family members, their moderate use in letters to low-status correspondents and close friends, and their virtual absence in letters to patrons and distant business partners that required a formalized correspondence suggest that these formulae were characteristic of an informal register.[12] This finding does not support the idea that formulae, for this particular writer, served as a safe option for text composition, because we would otherwise expect the quantity of formulae to remain stable across letters to different addressees or to increase as the distance to the addressee increases.

The concept of enregisterment – recently adopted in the field of historical sociolinguistics to explore the process by which linguistic features

---

11   The letter sent by Michelangelo in April 1549 to the papal bankers Benvenuto Olivieri & compagni contains an instance of 'altro non achade' which, however, does not function like an epistolary formula. It is integrated in a longer sentence and does not serve to close the discourse: 'così piaccia a Vostra S(ignio)ria di seguire fin che altro non achade' [May it please your Lordship to continue [to pay Bartolomeo Bettini & compagni twenty-two golden scudi each month] until something else happens (i.e. until you hear something else from me)].

12   An alternative explanation that could be proposed is that the lack of formulae in letters to business partners, for example, could be due to the letter topic, since these letters deal more with requesting, negotiating, or planning, rather than with reporting news, and as such would not necessitate discourse-ending formulae. However, many of Michelangelo's correspondents, especially from the lower ranks, use discourse-ending formulae even in letters that exclusively discuss business. For this reason, differences in the level of formality seem to explain this pattern of use better than differences in topic.

become historically associated with specific groups or practices (Beal 2019) – has already been used to shed light on the way epistolary formulae and other structures were attributed social meaning by letter writers (Pietsch 2015). In Michelangelo's language, discourse-ending formulae seem to have become linked with family practice, coming to constitute part of a register of informal letter-writing. Even assuming that these formulae had served the relatively unlearned, young Michelangelo as aids for formulation, they must have ceased to perform such function as his writing experience increased. The stable use of formulae within letters to his family even after the 1530s, and its higher rate compared to correspondence sent outside of the family, suggests that the originary link with writing experience, if present, had faded, with formulae assuming meaning as social conventions.[13] This is further supported by the observation that the number of discourse-ending formulae is extremely high also in the letters Michelangelo received from his family members. For this writer, discourse-ending formulae must have become associated with a stable family practice that had its own standards and conventions.

In the following section, I shall explore the question of whether register variation and lifespan change may be detected in Michelangelo's use of different types of discourse-ending formulae, and the light this might shed on the function of these items.

6.2   Choice of different types of discourse-ending formulae

Since I aimed to investigate a possible social meaning behind Michelangelo's choice of particular discourse-ending formulae, I first analysed the distribution of these types in Michelangelo's broader social network. In previous research, I had reconstructed the backgrounds of the different writers in the Buonarroti corpus and, largely based on individuals' professions, I had adopted a bipartite social classification assigning

---

13   See also Rutten and van der Wal's (2014: 185–87) discussion of the possible role of social conventions for a Dutch writer, Kathelijne Haexwant, who despite her upper-class upbringing uses a great amount of formulae.

each writer to a 'higher' or a 'lower' rank (see Serra 2020). This distinc-
tion to an extent follows (although it does not completely coincide with)
the distinction that existed in Florence between major and minor guilds.
Individuals were classed in the higher rank if they were themselves, or
were descended from a family of bankers, cloth merchants, notaries, law-
yers, along with priests, secretaries, humanists, and politicians. The lower
rank consisted instead of artisans, among whom artists were also included
(unless, like Michelangelo, they came from an 'upper-class' background),
stonemasons, assistants, along with a few other professional figures such
as quarrymen and boatmen.

Table 3.3 and Figures 3.1 and 3.2 show the relative distribution of the
different types of discourse-ending formulae in letters by other writers of
the Buonarroti corpus, across the two social ranks and across two time
periods of 34 years each (1496–1529; 1530–63). The years 1496 and 1563
were chosen so as to coincide with the first and last letter by Michelangelo.[14]
My analysis was restricted to the types of discourse-ending formulae that
were also used by Michelangelo, but I further considered the type *altro
(non) (mi) occorre* [(Nothing) else happens (to me)] because of its struc-
tural similarity and semantic equivalence with *altro (non) (mi) accade*, a
formula frequently used by Michelangelo.

A few clear differences emerge in the use of formulae by the two ranks:
- There are formulae especially associated with the usage of high-
  status writers: these are *non altro per questa* and *altro non occorre*.
- There are formulae preferred by the lower rank: the formula *non
  altro* is used far more by this group in the first time period (1496–
  1529), although it loses ground afterwards (1530–63). The formula
  non dico/dirò altro is also predominantly a low-status one, and this
  preference seems to become more marked with the passing of time.

14   A quota was set so that no single writer was allowed to contribute more than five
      formulae: on quotas as a way to deal with unbalanced samples, see Nevalainen and
      Raumolin-Brunberg (2016: 246–49). In case a single writer had produced more
      than five formulae, formulae were selected in a way that reflected the overall fre-
      quency of formulae in that writer's production.

Table 3.3. Distribution among Michelangelo's correspondents of the discourse-ending formulae used by Michelangelo

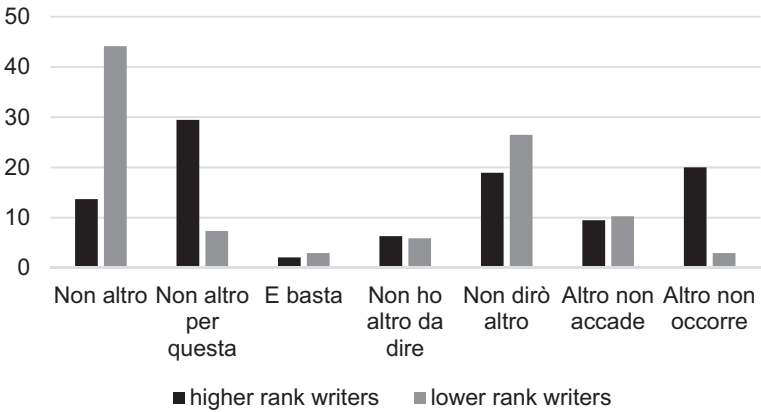|		*Non altro*	*Non altro per questa*	*E basta*	*Non ho altro da dire*	*Non dirò altro*	*Altro non accade*	*Altro non occorre*	N
1496–1529	high rank	13 (14 %)	28 (29 %)	2 (2 %)	6 (6 %)	18 (19 %)	9 (9 %)	19 (20 %)	95
	low rank	30 (44 %)	5 (7 %)	2 (3 %)	4 (6 %)	18 (26 %)	7 (10 %)	2 (3 %)	68
1530–1563	high rank	7 (14 %)	10 (20 %)	0 (0 %)	5 (10 %)	8 (16 %)	5 (10 %)	15 (30 %)	50
	low rank	4 (10 %)	3 (7 %)	3 (7 %)	1 (2 %)	17 (41 %)	4 (10 %)	9 (22 %)	41
Total		*54 (21 %)*	*46 (18 %)*	*7 (3 %)*	*16 (6 %)*	*61 (24 %)*	*25 (10 %)*	*45 (18 %)*	*254*

Figure 3.1. Discourse-ending formulae across the two ranks from 1496 to 1529 (in per cent).
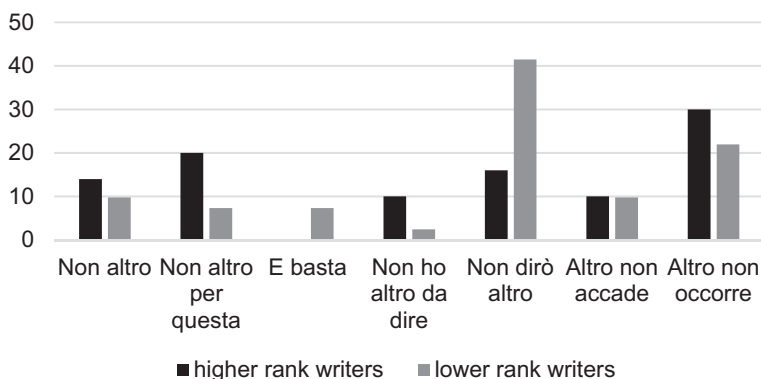
Figure 3.2. Discourse-ending formulae across the two ranks from 1530 to 1563 (in per cent).

    The formula *e basta* also appears as more associated with the lower rank, since it is maintained by them for longer.

- There is one formula, *altro non accade*, which does not show any clear sociolinguistic patterning as its frequency is roughly the same throughout the years and across the two ranks.

At this point, I was able to analyse Michelangelo's choices of discourse-ending formulae, situating them within his broader network. I analysed the distribution of the different types of formulae in his letters in relation to register and time. The results of this analysis are shown in Table 3.4.

    A quantitative analysis of lifespan change in Michelangelo's use of different types of formulae is possible if we zoom in on the letters addressed to his family, as visualized in Figure 3.3.

    In family letters, the formula *non altro* represents Michelangelo's favourite formula before 1530. Although further studies are required to assess whether this trend is true of the general Tuscan population, and not simply an idiosyncrasy of Michelangelo's correspondents, from the data shown above this formula appears to have been far more frequent in letters by lower-rank correspondents, and to have gradually decreased in usage in the course of the century. It seems significant, then, that after the 1530s Michelangelo virtually discontinues using it. This might be interpreted

Table 3.4. Distribution of types of discourse-ending formulae in Michelangelo's letters in relation to addressee and time

Addr.	Time	*Non altro*	*Non altro per questa*	*E basta*	*Non ho altro da dire*	*Non dirò altro*	*Altro non accade*	N
Family	1496–12	19 (40 %)	0 (0 %)	10 (21 %)	12 (25 %)	2 (4 %)	4 (9 %)	47
	1513–29	20 (64 %)	0 (0 %)	2 (6 %)	2 (6 %)	0 (0 %)	7 (23 %)	31
	1530–46	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)	5 (26 %)	0 (0 %)	13 (68 %)	18
	1547–63	2 (2 %)	0 (0 %)	2 (2 %)	16 (14 %)	3 (3 %)	92 (80 %)	115
	N	*41*	*0*	*14*	*35*	*5*	*116*	*211*
Lower rank	1496–12	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
	1513–29	2	0	0	0	0	3	5
	1530–46	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
	1547–63	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	N	*3*	*0*	*0*	*0*	*1*	*3*	*7*
High-status friends	1496–12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	1513–29	0	0	0	0	0	4	4
	1530–46	0	0	0	1	2	1	4
	1547–63	0	0	0	1	0	3	4
	N	*0*	*0*	*0*	*2*	*2*	*8*	*12*
Patrons	1496–12	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
	1513–29	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	1530–46	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	1547–63	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	N	*0*	*1*	*0*	*0*	*0*	*0*	*1*

(*Continued*)

Table 3.4.   Continued

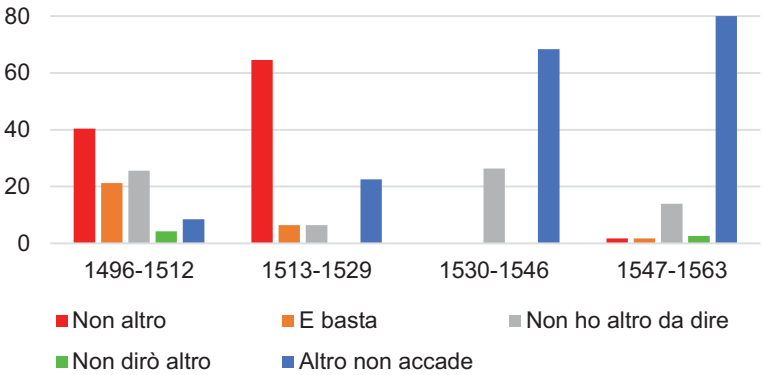| Addr.	Time	Non altro	Non altro per questa	E basta	Non ho altro da dire	Non dirò altro	Altro non accade	N
Distant partners	1496–12	o	o	o	o	o	o	o
	1513–29	o	o	o	o	o	o	o
	1530–46	o	o	o	o	o	o	o
	1547–63	o	o	o	o	o	o	o
	N	*0*	*0*	*0*	*0*	*0*	*0*	*0*

Figure 3.3. Types of discourse-ending formulae over time in Michelangelo's letters to family members (in per cent).

as either a lifespan change reflecting change in the community, or as a re-orientation towards linguistic forms that were less diastratically marked. In favour of the latter hypothesis, it should be noted that after the 1530s, Michelangelo also abandons *e basta*, suggesting that he was distancing himself from formulae that might have been considered popular and were associated with the lower rank.

On the other hand, the formula *altro non accade* – which, as previously observed, is used more or less equally, as a minority variant, by

correspondents from the higher and the lower rank – sees a sharp increase in Michelangelo's family letters after the 1530s, becoming the majority variant. As Michelangelo's network changes, Michelangelo might have opted for what would have appeared to him as a more neutral and less popular formula. This choice might even have been driven by the influence of the structurally similar formula *altro non occorre*, strongly associated with the higher rank.

Comparing letters to the family with letters to other types of addressee, it is possible to detect register variation on a qualitative level. Michelangelo's correspondence contains only one instance of *non altro per questa*, a formula that, as we have seen, was far more frequent in letters by the higher rank. This only instance also represents the only formula used in letters addressed to patrons, that is, Michelangelo's early letter to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici written in July 1496 (n. 1). In this case, Michelangelo might have been consciously selecting a formula perceived as more prestigious and more suitable for the addressee's rank.

Furthermore, register variation may help understand Michelangelo's acquisition of the formula *altro non accade*, the usage of which, as we have seen, rises sharply after the 1530s. In his early letters, Michelangelo had produced a few instances of this formula, in its variant *non mi accade altro*. The first instances with the fronted constituent *altro*, which moves on to become the most frequent variant in his later correspondence, appear in letters addressed to individuals outside of his family circle. In particular, in the timespan 1513–29, when this formula is still a minority variant in letters to family members, the four formulae registered in letters for high-ranking friends are all instances of *altro non (mi) accade*. This suggests that this formula, subsequently employed as the majority variant even within the family, was at first adopted by Michelangelo as a more elegant alternative when corresponding with high-ranking friends.

In summary, while the use of discourse-ending formulae seems to be, for Michelangelo, typical of an informal register, and mostly of the family register, and the artist by no means dispenses with formulae as his writing experience increases, the types of formulae themselves are not stable, but change in the course of his life. Formulae that might have been perceived as too 'popular' or low-status were abandoned even in the most informal

of registers in favour of a more neutral choice, originally adopted in letters exchanged outside of the family.

However, it should be noted that Michelangelo does not opt for formulae that exclusively characterize the highest echelons of society. The formula *non altro per questa* – mostly associated with the higher rank – occurs only once (cf. n. 1), and *altro non mi occorre*, so frequent in the letters of his high-ranking correspondents, is never used. Moreover, other high-ranking correspondents, in the latest time period, seem to develop a habit of inserting discourse-ending formulae within more complex syntactic structures, a practice that may have been influenced by the letter collections and anthologies that were progressively flooding the market. This is not the case for Michelangelo, who even in his latest letters keeps using these formulae as autonomous strings.

At any rate, Michelangelo's change in his use of formulae in the direction of less popular variants, along with his preference for less popular formulae in letters sent to high-ranking individuals, suggests that this writer used formulae, to an extent, to style his social identity. This is further supported by the observation that his usage changes most dramatically after the 1530s, coinciding with his relocation, change in social circle, and change in orthographic and linguistic practices. Returning to my earlier reflections on the way Michelangelo would have learnt to write letters, these findings also demonstrate that his early life was by no means the only time when the artist would have acquired his formulaic language.

7 Conclusions

This chapter analysed lifespan change and register variation in the use of discourse-ending formulae by focusing on the language of one single writer, whose usage was, however, situated in his broader social network. Future studies could explore whether similar patterns may be identified for other writers, or whether Michelangelo, as a social aspirer, was more sensitive to the social value of formulae than other individuals. Further, the analysis was based on a single set of text-structural formulae: it

remains to be seen whether this pattern would be replicated for other formulae, and for formulae with different pragmatic functions, such as intersubjective formulae. It should also be pointed out that register categories were not equally represented, with a far higher number of family letters than letters of other types. The scarcity of letters outside of the family circle for the first time period, when Michelangelo was still an inexperienced writer, is particularly regrettable, and makes it difficult to establish whether his early use of a formula when addressing a patron was the result of chance, or provides, instead, evidence that when corresponding with high-ranking individuals, his formulaic usage decreased with growing levels of writing experience.

These results, however, suggest that, in Michelangelo's private and everyday correspondence, discourse-ending formulae were, to a large extent, conventions related to group practices. At an early stage, these formulae, as strings that could be retrieved as a whole from memory, might have served the relatively unlearned artist as aids to reduce the writing effort. However, the maintenance of these formulae in letters to his family throughout his life, and their high frequency compared to their absence in letters sent to patrons or business partners, suggests that the function of formulae as text-composition aids was no longer prevalent as Michelangelo's writing experience grew. These formulae seem rather to have become enregistered within the practice of informal correspondence, especially within the family. At the same time, the analysis highlights a radical change in the types of discourse-ending formulae used after the 1530s, coinciding with a more general change in Michelangelo's social and linguistic practices: Michelangelo's abandonment of what were likely popular formulae in favour of less diastratically marked options further underlines the social meaning that formulae had, or had progressively acquired, for this writer.

References

Austin, Frances. 2004. 'Heaving This Importunity': The Surviving of Opening Formulas in Letters in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries. In: *Historical Sociolinguistics and Sociohistorical Linguistics* 4. <http://www.let.leidenuniv.nl/hsl_shl/heaving_this_importunity.htm> accessed 29 December 2021.

Bardeschi Ciulich, Lucilla. 1989. *Costanza ed evoluzione nella scrittura di Michelangelo*. Florence: Cantini.

Barocchi, Paola, Kathleen Loach Bramanti & Renzo Ristori (eds). 1988–95. *Il carteggio indiretto di Michelangelo. Vol. 2*. Florence: SPES.

Barocchi, Paola & Renzo Ristori (eds). 1965–83. *Il carteggio di Michelangelo, edizione postuma di G. Poggi. Vol. 5*. Florence: SPES.

Barocchi, Paola & Sonia Maffei. 1994. *Michelangelo: Lettere, concordanze e indice di frequenza*. Pisa: Scuola Normale Superiore.

Barucci, Guglielmo. 2009. *Le solite scuse: un genere epistolare del Cinquecento*. Milan: Franco Angeli.

Beal, Joan C. 2019. Enregisterment and Historical Sociolinguistics. In: Sandra Jansen & Lucia Siebers (eds), *Processes of Change: Studies in Late Modern and Present-Day English*. Amsterdam: Benjamins. 7–24.

Bijkerk, Annemieke. 2004. *Yours Sincerely* and *Yours Affectionately*. On the Origin and Development of Two Positive Politeness Markers. In: Terttu Nevalainen & Sanna-Kaisa Tanskanen (eds), *Letter Writing*. Amsterdam: Benjamins. 115–29.

Braida, Lodovica. 2009. *Libri di lettere: le raccolte epistolari del Cinquecento tra inquietudine religiose e 'buon volgare'*. Rome: Laterza.

Conde-Silvestre, Juan C. 2016. A 'Third-Wave' Historical Sociolinguistic Approach to Late Middle English Correspondence: Evidence from the Stonor Letters. In: Cinzia Russi (ed.), *Current Trends in Historical Sociolinguistics*. Warsaw: De Gruyter Open Poland. 46–66.

D'Onghia, Luca. 2014. Michelangelo in prosa: sulla lingua del 'Carteggio' e dei 'Ricordi'. In: *Nuova Rivista di Letteratura Italiana* 8: 89–113.

Elspaß, Stephan. 2005. *Sprachgeschichte von unten. Untersuchungen zum geschriebenen Alltagsdeutsch im 19. Jahrhundert*. Tübingen: Niemeyer.

Evans, Mel. 2020. *Royal Voices: Language and Power in Tudor England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Felici, Andrea. 2018. *'Parole apte et convenienti'. La lingua della diplomazia fiorentina di metà Quattrocento*. Florence: Accademia della Crusca.

Focarile, Pasquale. *Family Archives in Tuscany*. Medici Archive Project (MAP) Winter Seminar in Palaeography and Archival Studies. Florence, 17–22 January 2022. Lecture.

Große, Sybille, Agnès Steuckardt, Lena Sowada & Beatrice dal Bo. 2016. Du rituel à l'individuel dans des correspondances peu lettrées de la Grande Guerre. *SHS Web of Conferences* 27: 06008.

Hatfield, Rab. 2002. *The Wealth of Michelangelo*. Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura.

Laitinen, Lea & Taru Nordlund. 2012. Performing Identities and Interaction through Epistolary Formulae. In: Marina Dossena & Gabriella Del Lungo Camiciotti (eds), *Letter Writing in Late Modern Europe*. Amsterdam: Benjamins. 65–88.

Magro, Fabio. 2014. Lettere familiari. In: Giuseppe Antonelli, Matteo Motolese & Lorenzo Tomasin (eds), *Storia dell'italiano scritto. Vol. 3: Italiano dell'uso*. Rome: Carocci. 101–57.

Matt, Luigi. 2005. *Teoria e prassi dell'epistolografia tra Cinquecento e primo Seicento. Ricerche linguistiche e retoriche (con particolare riferimento alle lettere di Giambattista Marino)*. Rome: Bonacci.

Nencioni, Giovanni. 1965. La lingua di Michelangelo. In: *Michelangelo artista, pensatore, scrittore*. Novara: De Agostini. 89–107.

Nevalainen, Terttu & Helena Raumolin-Brunberg. 2016 [2003]. *Historical Sociolinguistics: Language Change in Tudor and Stuart England*. London: Routledge.

Palermo, Massimo. 1994. *Il carteggio Vaianese (1537–39). Un contributo allo studio della lingua d'uso nel Cinquecento*. Florence: Accademia della Crusca.

Patota, Giuseppe. 1993. I percorsi grammaticali. In: Luca Serianni & Pietro Trifone (eds), *Storia della lingua italiana. Vol. 1: I luoghi della codificazione*. Turin: Einaudi. 93–137.

Pietsch, Lukas. 2015. Archaism and Dialect in Irish Emigrant Letters. In: Anita Auer, Daniel Schreier & Richard J. Watts (eds), *Letter Writing and Language Change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 223–39.

Quondam, Amedeo. 1981. Dal 'formulario' al 'formulario'. In: Amedeo Quondam (ed.), *Le 'carte messaggiere'*. Rome: Bulzoni. 13–157.

Rutten, Gijsbert & Marijke van der Wal. 2012. Functions of Epistolary Formulae in Dutch Letters from the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries. In: *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* 13(2): 173–201.

Rutten, Gijsbert & Marijke van der Wal. 2014. *Letters as Loot: A Sociolinguistic Approach to Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Dutch*. Amsterdam: Benjamins.

Serra, Eleonora. 2020. Linguistic Prestige and Early Modern Italy: A Contribution to Historical Sociolinguistics. PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, <https://doi.org/10.17863/CAM.51376>.

Telve, Stefano. 2019. Lingua e norme dell'italiano. Alcune considerazioni a partire dalle lettere fra Cinque e Settecento. In: Paolo Procaccioli (ed.), *L'epistolografia di antico regime*. Sarnico: Edizioni di Archilet. 243–59. <http://www.archilet. it/Pubblicazione.aspx?IdPubblicazione=10> accessed 29 December 2021.

Trabalza, Ciro. 1908. *Storia della grammatica italiana*. Milan: Hoepli.

Valenti, Gianluca. 2020. A Corpus-Based Approach to Michelangelo's Epistolary Language. In: *Digital Humanities Benelux Journal* 2: 1–17.

Vallance, Laurent. 2019. *Les grammairiens italiens face à leur langue (15E–16E s.)*. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Wallace, William E. 2010. *Michelangelo: The Artist, the Man, and His Times*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Witt, Ronald. 1995. What Did Giovannino Read and Write? Literacy in Early Renaissance Florence. In: *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance* 6: 83–114.

Wray, Alison. 2002. *Formulaic Language and the Lexicon*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.