

Eleonora Serra
University of Cambridge

*Looking for norms for informal writings:
An examination of sixteenth-century Italian metalinguistic texts*

It is well known that sixteenth-century grammars of Italian postulated the existence of two types of literary norms, one for poetry, and the other for prose. The existence of norms explicitly formulated for informal and private writings, however, has rarely been the object of investigation to date. This paper examines a range of sixteenth-century grammars and letter-writing manuals in order to assess whether, and to what extent, norms were identified for informal written language. I show that several Florentine grammars (Paolo del Rosso's *Regole*, Lionardo Salviati's *Avvertimenti*, Giovan Battista Strozzi's *Osservazioni*) explicitly drew a distinction between variants to be used in literary and in private writings. In Del Rosso's *Regole* (1545), in particular, such distinction is not merely postulated but clearly justified with reference to the existence of opposing values: the value of certain linguistic forms as markers of in-group membership within a well-defined, local community, and the value of other forms as prestigious supralocal variants that were promoted in the literary standard. To the author, assigning the local forms and the supra-locally prestigious forms to informal and formal writings respectively seems a good solution in order to accommodate these opposing values.

At the same time, the linguistic norms prescribed in sixteenth-century letter-writing manuals (some of which, like Giovanni Antonio Tagliente's *Componimento di parlamenti* and Orazio Toscanella's *Concetti*, were targeted at broad audiences) could be independent of the literary model, and even go against it. The norms proposed in these texts, rather than conforming to the fourteenth-century Tuscan variety that was being promoted as the literary norm, seem to have been more in line with a model of an eclectic language (*lingua cortigiana*), a variety that was described as simple, unaffected and easily understood; that avoided archaic fourteenth-century Tuscan words, typical of the literary variety; and that was suitable for speech as well as writing. In summary, this paper discusses the relevance of metalinguistic texts in showing awareness of different norms for the written language.