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# "You can't curse". Topicalizing and sanctioning swearing in everyday interactions in Italian

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L'articolo esplora pratiche di sanzione/giustificazione di turni in cui emergono parolacce o tabù ("sanzionabili") in interazioni spontanee. In italiano, i parlanti utilizzano specifiche risorse lessicali (e.g., verbi deontici e iussivi) e morfosintattiche (e.g., pronomi di 1° e 2° persona; imperativi, ecc.), correlate a risorse multimodali (espressioni facciali, movimenti della testa, cambio della qualità della voce, risate, ecc.) per auto-/etero-sanzionare parolacce. Analizzando dati videoregistrati pluriadici, attraverso Analisi Conversazionale (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson 1974), Linguistica Interazionale (Couper-Kuhlen & Selting 2018), e abbracciando la recente svolta multimodale di questi approcci (Neville 2015), concettualizziamo i "sanzionabili" – e il loro trattamento – come elementi emergenti e situati nella conversazione, che rivelano l'"ordine dell'interazione" (Goffman 1983:2) sotteso. Le sequenze selezionate mostrano parolacce o tabù come una potenziale trasgressione dell'ordine sociale (Garfinkel 1967). Individuiamo allora un contrasto tra una dimensione sanzionatoria da un lato, e l'uso interattivo dei "sanzionabili" per costruire una dimensione scherzosa condivisa. La "soglia di accettabilità" emerge sanzionando apertamente *in loco*, o schernendo i co-partecipanti. L'"istituzionalità" del setting (inclusa la tematizzazione della telecamera come elemento "istituzionale") gioca un ruolo nel processo di negoziazione alla base dell'accettabilità dei "sanzionabili".

## **Parole chiave:**

parolacce, tabù, sanzionabili, auto-/etero-sanzione, analisi della conversazione, linguistica interazionale, multimodalità, italiano.

## **Keywords:**

swearwords, taboos, sanctionables, self/other-sanctioning, conversation analysis, interactional linguistics, multimodality, Italian.

## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The Cambridge Online Dictionary gives two definitions, among others, for the verb "to sanction": one as a synonym of "to allow", that is to formally give permission for something; the other as a synonym of "to punish", as in *to punish someone for something*, especially officially<sup>2</sup>. Sanction thus appears as an ambiguous word, very dependent on the context of production. In this article, by *sanctioning* we refer to the act of reprimanding somebody for a breach of normative expectations in interaction. In our corpus, apologizing and teasing are ways of locally expressing the breach of what is expected in that moment and in that place in interaction.

Sanctioning/noticing swearwords or taboo concepts (which we call "sanctionables" for the purposes of this study), or pre-emptively apologizing for swearing, are practices implemented by specific lexical resources and grammatical constructions, e.g., "sorry for X", "she said X", negative statements in 1<sup>st</sup> personal singular "no I don't X", negative impersonal imperatives lit. "it is not to be said" (with Italian impersonal pronoun *si*), and personal imperatives "no you can't say X". These verbal resources correlate with a package of multimodal resources such as facial expressions, head movements (e.g., head shaking), voice quality and laughter, as our analyses will show.

In this article, we explore the affordances of breaching a norm and try to answer the following research questions: How is the norm made relevant in the first place and how is it conceptualized as breachable? Who can sanction? How are participants' deontic rights and roles, and the 'institutionality' (Hester & Francis 2000) made relevant when orienting to swearwords?

Our goal is to investigate not only what cannot be done in interaction, as made relevant by the participants, but also to reveal their social expectations, what is expected. We aim at unveiling the social order behind the interaction, the *why that now* of the practice of sanctioning. Namely, when does a pre-emptive sanction appear and how does it foreshadow a curse word? Why is a curse word used as a second pair part instead of the expected conforming answer, when a sanctioning can be expected? In other words, how and when do participants orient to sanctioning in a particular moment in every-day social interaction?

After reporting on existing literature about sanctioning swearwords and taboo concepts which are "sanctionable" (section 2), we present the data and methods deployed to conduct this study (section 3). We analyze four excerpts in which the practices of self-sanctioning and other-sanctioning are implemented in order

<sup>1</sup> Both authors have contributed the same amount to the development of this paper. Specifically, section 2 has been written by Sciubba, section 3 by Calabria and sections 1-4-5 jointly. We would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments and suggestions, which helped us improve the manuscript.

<sup>2</sup> <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/sanction>

to accomplish an array of social actions that is wider than only projecting or reframing a turn as containing a "sanctionable" item (section 4); finally, we discuss the results and provide general conclusions on sanctioning in interaction (section 5).

## 2. Sanctioning swearwords<sup>3</sup>

Few previous CA studies have documented the use of swearing in ecological interactions, focussing on how the transgressive status of profanity to which speakers' orient by suppressing or obscuring swearing is made relevant (Schegloff 2003); the emotional dimension associated with normative constraints on swearing that are made relevant by participants (Butler and Fitzgerald 2011; Hoey et al. 2021); participants' treatment of swearing as speaking issues needing repair (Schegloff et al. 1977) and as breaching the normative constraints of an interaction (Garfinkel 1967; Goffman 1981). The picture made by previous studies revealed that in the course of ongoing talk someone may say something, locally and contingently, which breaches conventional standards of courtesy, propriety, tact, ethics, commonality etc. Speakers treat this breach of conventional norms on the fly, i.e., in the local emergence of a turn-at-talk, especially if it is potentially offensive to other parties in the interaction (Jefferson et al. 1987).

On similar lines, Allan & Burridge (2006: 2) support the view that *strong language*, "the tabooed, the offensive, the dysphemistic and the impolite [...] identifies the marked behaviour", and as such it is perceived as taboo conduct that needs to be censored in everyday life: "Taboos arise out of social constraints on the individual's behaviour where it can cause discomfort" to others (Allan & Burridge 2006: 1).

However, as shown elsewhere, swearwords can contribute to building a mechanism of "social swearing" (Montagu 1967; Beers Fägersten & Stapleton 2017) that creates humour, express solidarity, and emotions, as opposed to "annoyance swearing" cathartically releasing them (Calabria & Sciubba 2022). Jefferson et al. (1987: 160) acknowledge the relevance of context for the production and treatment of "frankness, rudeness, crudeness, profanity, obscenity, etc., [which] are indices of relaxed, unguarded, spontaneous, i.e., intimate interaction". However, as they are used and made relevant in the unfolding of turns, swearwords acquire a public dimension and contribute to the achievement of specific social actions and thus to the building of intersubjectivity, a shared understanding of the situation (Sidnell 2014; Sorjonen et al. 2021). Therefore, the degree of intimacy, and/or "sanctionability" of

<sup>3</sup> For a more in-depth linguistic and grammatical analysis of swearing in Italian (and worldwide) please refer to Calabria & Sciubba (2022).



swearwords is locally negotiated by the participants in the interaction through their stance-taking (Ochs 1996; Stivers 2008; Turowetz & Maynard 2010).

### 3. Data and methods

The two corpora employed for this study show multiperson (3-5 participants) interactions in present-day Italian, recorded in different Italophone areas (Roma, Milano, and Tortona), and covering different settings (from mundane activities to institutional settings). From the ALIAS corpus (Archivio di LinguA Spontanea, collected within an educational project funded by KU Leuven, OWP2012/08), subsection "conversations around a table" (Calabria 2022), we selected 1 dinner, 1 aperitif and 2 business meetings, for a total of 12 hours. From the "Corpus di Italiano legale parlato" (Sciubba 2009) we took 1 hour of interaction between a lawyer and his clients. All of the interactions chosen for this study are multi-party and present the same participatory configuration: all participants converse sitting around a table, orienting to each other in comparable ways. This is particularly useful for a multimodal analysis, but also, in the case of institutional settings, as the position around a table is also made relevant as part of the participants' role (e.g., the boss of the business company sits at the head of the table, the lawyer sits behind a desk). Moreover, the multiperson configuration of these specific interactions allows us to analyse and show more complex participation frameworks, reinforcing the idea of sanctioning as a collectively-oriented practice.

All participants gave their informed consent to the recording and publication of the data in which they are visible. All proper names and sensitive information were pseudonymized. We transcribed the data following Jefferson's (2004) CA conventions for talk and Meredith and Stokoe's (2014) screen captures for embodiment. The original Italian transcripts were translated into English.

Thanks to the epistemological tools offered by Conversation Analysis (Sack, Schegloff & Jefferson 1974) and Interactional Linguistics (Mondada 2006; Couper-Kuhlen & Selting 2018), and being inspired by the recent embodied, or multimodal approach (Meredith and Stokoe 2014; Neville 2015; Mondada 2018), we present a set of bodily- and vocally-achieved practices that involve swearing. Through sanctioning, swearing emerges as a breach of the social order (Garfinkel 1967), on the one hand; on the other hand, however, swearing is also a resource for building and maintaining a jocular shared dimension. Our analysis is, therefore, also informed by an ethnomethodological attention to how people carry out a "practice" in social interaction (Garfinkel 1967). We conducted a sequential analysis of turns-at-talk, conceptualizing conversation as an interactive and multimodal event in which participants use bodily and grammatical resources to achieve and interpret specific, context-bounded, recipient-driven and -designed, situated and contingent social actions.

We focus on the visible dimension of what is treated as "sanctionable", on the one hand, or "laughable"<sup>4</sup>, on the other. We consider specific lexical and morpho-syntactic resources in Italian (e.g., "sorry for the term", "s/he said [swearword]"), negative imperatives (e.g., "no, you can't say [swearword]"), and negative statements in 1st and 2nd personal singular pronoun (e.g., "no, I don't swear/curse"). These resources are used in combination with an array of multimodal resources, specifically with facial expressions, head movements (e.g., head shaking), voice quality and (choral) laughter.

#### 4. Analysis

For the analysis, we select four excerpts in which a potential "sanctionable" emerges in the shape of a swearword or a taboo concept (Allan & Burridge 2006) and is treated either as a sanctionable, or as a laughable, i.e., resource to build a shared jocular dimension (Calabria & Sciubba 2022). Moreover, sanctioning is a practice that can be accomplished by a participant toward her/himself (self-initiated sanctioning) or by co-participants (other-initiated sanctioning), who treated the prior turn as a potential "sanctionable" or as a laughable. Self-initiated sanctioning of the type *Scusate per X*/"sorry for x" can occur both before swearing, projecting the potential problematic dimension of the unfolding turn, or after swearing, retrospectively framing what has been said as problematic. Other-initiated sanctioning, of the type *Non si può/puoi dire X*/"you can't say x", occurs in second position, as a reaction to a turn containing a sanctionable element; the latter can also be used to frame the prior turn as a "laughable", changing the footing of the interaction toward a jocular dimension (Calabria & Sciubba 2022). We, therefore, show (a) sanctioning in two mundane settings to express a disaligned stance, to tease and, eventually to set a co-constructed jocular tone (ex. 4.1), to frame a swearword as a "laughable" in a past episode (ex. 4.3); and (b) sanctioning in two institutional contexts to hold oneself accountable for a breach in the norm (ex. 4.2) and to excuse oneself for expressing a stance of disagreement by swearing (ex. 4.4). The "institutionality" of the setting plays a role in the treatment of turns in which a "sanctionable" emerges. However, "institutionality" is not a static, categorial concept. Participants negotiate it through their practices beyond the specific type of setting in which they interact. Namely, during the dinner, the camera is topicalized as an institutional element, hence as an element that impacts the reaction to a "sanctionable". Conversely, during the business meeting, colloquial lexicon and structures are used in moments in which participants negotiate and reach intersubjectivity, beyond the professional environment and the roles that they assume in it. In the multiperson composition of the data, the choral (Lerner 2002) element of co-construction of the tones of the interaction emerges.

<sup>4</sup> The term "laughable" covers any referent that draws laughter or which is designed to draw laughter (Glenn 2003).

### 4.1 Excerpt 1

The first excerpt shows a case where the sanctionable element is explicitly topicalized in the interaction. Although the participants address swearwords as a breach in the norm, sanctioning actually emerges as a practice to build and maintain a jocular dimension.

MICEFULL, 00.25:32-00:25:52

01 GIU oh allora: non si può dire parolacce:,  
so it is not allowed to swear

02 PIE [SE:RI: #o?]  
seriously?

03 RIN [ah ci son delle rego#le?  
ah there are rules?  
fig #fig.1



Fig. 1: Piera and Rino express surprise

04 GIU dobbiamo parlare solo: in^con^con I congiutivi perfe#tti  
we have to speak only with perfect subjunctives  
fig #fig.2

05 PIE vabbè il congiun[tivo, lo sappiamo. ]  
well we know the subjunctive

06 RIN [che regole ci sono? ]  
what rules are there?

07 GIU [no#: non è vero. ]  
no it's not true  
fig #fig.3



Fig. 2: Giulio gestures "perfetti" with 1x hand and assumes a sly expression

Three of the four friends invited at dinner by Giulio (GIU, the host), Piera (PIE), Rino (RIN) and Giorgio (GIO), have arrived. Giulio has just asked them to sign the consent forms for data protection. At line 1 he starts explaining what (not) to say in front of the camera.



Fig 3.: Giulio says "no" with a laughing face and retracts 1x hand

08 PIE [aspetta.] ((to RIN)  
hold on

09 GIU [dobbiamo] essere ipe:r natura:: [li::  
we have to be hypernatural

10 PIE [(>oh^giust-^dice<)  
oh right s/he says

11 ma porca: - p-/t-]  
holy f-

12 (0.3)

13 GIU ah ((laughter))

14 RIN [>ipernaturali? ]  
hypernatural?

15 GIU [puoi anche dire,]  
you can also say

16 (0.3)

17 GIU porco #dico. (.) [for#se.  
goddamit maybe

fig #fig.4 #fig.5



Fig. 4: Giulio slightly smiles on the word "god"



Fig. 5: Giorgio is looking at the plate in front of him

18 GIO [#NO #:: >le be#stemmie non si fa<  
no cursewords you cannot do that  
fig #fig.6 #fig.7



Fig. 6: Giorgio looks up at Giulio, who smiles

Fig.7: Rino looks at Giorgio smiling

19 RIN [((laughs)) # ] [((laughs)) ]  
20 PIE [eh: #:: b-i:: ] [p: ]  
Fig ((mimicking beeping))  
#fig.8



Fig. 8: Giorgio tilts head on word "bestemmia", Rino and Giulio laughs, Piera laughs while uttering "eh"

21 GIO [<mi offe:ndo.>#  
it offends me  
fig #fig.9



Fig. 9: Giorgio raises highbrows and turns rx to stare at the camera

22 RIN [((laughs)) ]  
23 GIO [io non #beste#mmio #raga.]  
I don't curse guys  
fig #fig.10#fig.11 #fig.12





Fig.10: Giorgio smiles while talking to the camera



Fig.11: Giorgio starts a gesture with his rx hand's finger up



Fig. 12: Giorgio's gesture emerges as a negation gesture (swings upward finger 1x rx)

24 RIN [#((laughs))  
fig #fig.13



Fig.13: All the participants smile

25 (0.6)  
26 PIE IO #(.) non #bestem#mio. #og #gi  
I don't curse today  
fig #fig.14 #fig.15 #fig.16 #fig.17 #fig.18



Fig.14: Piera brings up her finger pointed upwards in what emerges as a baton movement



Fig.15: Piera with an abrupt stroke, lowers her arm with finger still pointing



Fig.16: Piera points in front of her



Fig.17: Piera raises her finger to the sky at the onset of "oggi"



Fig.18: Piera lowers her arm again ending in a pointing-out gesture (cf. geste puntualizzatore in Italian)



At line 1, Giulio gives a directive to the others about what not to say. The first item he topicalizes explicitly is *parolacce*/"swearwords", framing it already as a "sanctionable". Line 1 is uttered with projective prosody, and, in effect, it emerges retrospectively as the first part of an adjacency pair (Schegloff & Sacks 1973): it is a list of rules, *does* and *don'ts*, that projects an acceptance. However, Piera (line 2) and Rino (line 3) produce in overlap two dispreferred second pair parts expressing a stance of astonishment: on line 2 *serio?!* "are you serious" (see also in fig. 1 Piera turning her body to Giulio dramatically and adopting a surprised expression, while Rino raises his eyebrows in scepticism); on line 3 an overt question about the existence of etiquette rules for the dinner (note that Rino's turn at line 3 starts with *ah*, a change-of-state token, cf. Heritage 1984, which reinforces the reception of a piece of news). At line 4, Giulio continues the list, mentioning another element of the norm that the presence of the camera makes relevant: correct grammar. However, he adopts a *slay* expression (fig. 2) which already prepares the ground for the jocular dimension he is building. *Congiuntivi*/"subjunctive" constitutes a typical example, in the common ground knowledge of the participants, of an element that indexes (in)correct grammar. And at line 5, Piera confirms the shared knowledge dimension by saying "we know", while Rino asks again about the rules. The question at line 6 prompts Giulio to declare that his statement at line 1 was not true (line 7), while laughing (fig. 3). At line 9 Giulio contrasts his prior statements saying they have to be natural and using the intensifier *hyper* (an extreme formulation, Pomerantz 1986). This is more acceptable for Piera, who at line 10 says *giusto*/"right" and produces an actual example of "naturalness" for this group of friends, in contraposition to normative etiquette: cut-off blasphemy *ma porca*/"holy f-" (line 11). Giulio laughs at line 13, but Rino starts a repair sequence on line 14 repeating, as a question, Giulio's adjective *ipernaturale*/"hypernatural". Giulio explains at line 15 what one can say when behaving "naturally" projecting line 17 the curse against God, which comes after a short pause on line 16 and is hedged with *forse*/"maybe" that reframes the curse word as both one possibility in a list, but also showing his lack of certainty of what can be considered natural and acceptable in the video-recording. While saying this, Giulio can be seen smiling (fig. 4). At line 18, Giorgio, who was looking at the plate in front of him (fig. 5) disengaged from the current group activity and engaged in preparing dinner, self-selects and expresses his disagreement with a loud negation followed by the explicative negative statement: you cannot do *cursing*. By doing so, Giorgio takes his distance from his friend. But Giulio smiles and Rino laughs, treating Giorgio's statement as a non-serious statement. Moreover, Piera, at line 20 laughs while mimicking the non-lexical vocalization *beep* (used to cover a swearword in audio/video media): if she complies with Giorgio's statement about not saying curse words, she also exposes the laughable, jocular nature of this exchange they are having. At

line 21 Giorgio overtly expresses his personal affective stance: curse words *offend* him. *Offendersi* has a reflexive construction in Italian, therefore it emphasizes the personal stance taken by Giorgio against blasphemy. But this turn is proffered nonetheless with a smiling face. After Rino laughs again (line 22), Giorgio repeats his stance at line 23, *io non bestemmiio*/"I don't curse". He moves from a general statement using the impersonal verb construction with the pronoun *si*, to a statement in 1<sup>st</sup> pers. sing. (which in a pro-drop language like Italian is a marked choice that can index contrast, Duranti 1984). Giorgio states, looking straight at the camera (the "institution" in the room, see fig. 10), his intentions, and gestures a negation (figures 11-12). But again, despite Giorgio framing himself as a person that follows the rules established by the normative etiquette, his co-participants disalign and continue building the jocular tones of the interaction: Rino laughs at line 25. At line 26, Piera sets the record straight: she recycles part of Giorgio's preceding turn (line 23), uttering the pronoun *io*/"I" with contrastive prosody and high volume and adds the temporal deictic *oggi*/"today" that signals the extraordinary nature of the event. She points an index finger in front of her (fig. 14-16 and accompanies her turn (line 26) with baton gestures (fig. 17-18), rocking her body as well. Baton and pointing gestures can be used in relation to concepts that are more salient pragmatically (Wagner, Malisz & Kopp 2014): Piera's finger is pointed on *non*, the negation, and *oggi*, the deictic.

This first excerpt already shows the complexity and duality of the dimension of sanctionability: on the one side cursing and swearing are explicitly topicalized as negative elements that breach a norm established by the institution (the camera); on the other side, swearing is a laughable element and its topicalization allows co-participants to build the jocular tones of the episode. Giulio, the host, had been previously instructed by the researcher to behave as spontaneously as possible during the recording. Instead, he chooses, while signing the recording consents, to start a sequence in which he explicitly forbids the use of swearwords. This sequence will turn out to be a fun joke and will also be treated as such by the other participants who join in and incrementally co-construct a play on the taboo dimension of swearing in interactions. Although Giulio has epistemic rights on what can and cannot be done (as the contact point for the recording and host), he is still not 100% sure about what is acceptable or not. This shows that acceptability is a negotiable among the participants (for example, line 21 shows that blasphemy is treated as more offensive than swearwords), not a given, and it can be resisted or turned into laughter. In the meantime, although the propositional content of the turns might be taken at face value, as this excerpt shows an explicit list of *does* and *don'ts*, the jocular aspect is brought up by the embodied resources (mainly facial) mobilized by the participants, and by the laughter with which the whole section is interspersed. Finally, the setting

plays a role in showing the affordances of the norm: during an informal dinner between friends joking and laughing is the "norm". However, they are being recorded, and this episode happens during an institutional moment – while the participants are signing the informed consents – which makes relevant addressing the "institutional" norm to build in opposition a jocular norm.

## 4.2 Excerpt 2

The next excerpt shows a case where a participant apologizes for a swearword used in a prior turn, framing it as a "sanctionable" and holding himself accountable for it. However, his co-participants do not treat it as an element to sanction, nor as a laughable, and the sanctioning – in this excerpt – is self-initiated and not other-oriented.

Before the beginning of the excerpt, Paolo (PAO), the boss of the consultancy company Schema, is explaining to his colleagues Annina (ANN), Pamela (PAM), Ezio and Vanna how the management model has to change to become more transparent.

MiPROIFULL, 01:46:00-35:47:10

- 01 PAO ↑io come proprietà: e a questo a questo #non rinun#cio.  
 me as an owner and this this I won't give up  
 fig #fig.1 #fig.2



Fig.1: Paolo overlaps his hands while uttering the negation



Fig.2: Paolo opens his hands on the last syllable of the utterances

- 02 mi <↑r:iservo> di decidera la composizione del board.  
 I reserve the right to decide the composition of the board
- 03 [↑in funz]ione della- di ciò che io ritengo più opportuno,  
 according to what I consider most appropriate
- 04 ANN [#°certo.°]  
 of course  
 fig #fig.3



Fig.3: Annina lowers her head, closes her eyes while uttering "certo"

05 PAO e su questo non #può sindacare un #cazzo di #nessuno.  
 and on this fucking no one can comment  
 fig #fig.4 #fig.5 #fig.6



Fig.4: Paolo overlaps his hands on "può sindacare"



Fig.5: Paolo opens his hands on "cazzo"



Fig.6: Paolo opens wider his hands and brings them to sides on "nessuno"

06 ANN #ma certo. [ovvio. ]:  
 but of course obviously  
 fig #fig.7



Fig.7: Annina lowers her head, closes her eyes while uttering "ma certo"

07 PAO [[mi #sembra]<sub>1</sub> #no?]<sub>2</sub> scusate il termi#ne.=  
 it seems to me no? pardon me the word  
 #fig.8 #fig.9 #fig.10



Fig.8: Paolo lowers his head and closes his eyes while opening his arms



Fig.9: Paolo opens his hands with his arms



Fig.10: Paolo goes back to home position closing his hands on the table

08 PAM [(nods)]<sub>2</sub>

09 PAM =già.  
 indeed

At line 1 Paolo makes a clear statement (as shown by the co-occurring embodied conduct in figures 1-2, where Paolo gestures the negation he is uttering) about his position as the owner of the company. He utters explicitly the first personal pronoun (line 1) while pointing to himself. As the boss, he has



certain deontic rights in relation to the other co-participants who are his employees. But he also takes on the rights and responsibility of his statement: albeit the management changes he had mentioned before, he states now that he won't give up to certain rights (indexed by the cataphoric deictic *questo*/"this", uttered twice in line 1), spelling them at line 2-3, thereby also exercising his deontic rights, explicitly. His declaration proceeds incrementally. At line 3, he self-extends adding to his prior turn an upgrade from *mi riservo*/"I reserve the right" (line 2) to *ciò che io ritengo opportuno*/"what I consider most appropriate" (line 3). He utters this last turn explicitly using the first-person pronoun (see ex. 4.1). And he obtains an early verbal agreement in overlap by Annina (line 4) accompanied by an embodied display (fig. 3) of agreement, i.e., nodding in affiliation (cf. Stivers 2008). Line 5 emerges as the last unit of an incremental multi-unit turn (starting at line 1). Paolo adds it with the additive conjunction *e*/"and", and states explicitly his deontic rights to take decisions about the company without others interfering. He uses a multi-word expression *un cazzo di nessuno*/"a fucking nobody", containing a swearword which is used as an intensifier (Calabria & Sciubba 2022) and the indefinite pronoun *nessuno*/"no one", which makes clear how final this statement is. He accompanies this turn (line 5) with a gesture of his hands which overlap and then open again (figures 4-5-6), indexing negation. Annina expresses the obviousness of Paolo's words in the previous multi-unit turn, by means of lexical and embodied resources. At line 6 she utters the double confirmation *ma certo ovvio*/"but, of course, obviously", while simultaneously nodding and closing her eyes (fig. 7) in symmetry with line 3 (and fig. 3). Although Annina recognizes Paolo's turn as complete and agrees at line 7, Paolo self-selects again. Mirroring Annina's body conduct (line 4; 6), Paolo lowers his head and closes his eyes, while opening his arms (figures 7-8), thereby expressing a stance of "obviousness". This accompanies the rhetoric question *mi sembra no?*/"it seems to me no?" in line 7, used to fish for more affiliation. But the turn unfolds with a self-sanctioning, by which Paolo holds himself accountable and the "sanctionable" dimension of the swearword uttered at line 5 is made relevant.

However, it is not other-oriented as all the participants seem to orient to the progressivity of Paolo's talk. He then goes back to home position, with his hands spread on the table in front of him (fig. 10). And, indeed another participant, Pamela first nods at line 8 and then verbalizes her agreement in line 9 with *già*/"indeed". Now the explanation/activity has finally reached a conclusion.

Although Paolo's self-sanctioning makes explicit the sanctionable dimension of the swearword *cazzo*<sup>5</sup> uttered during an explanation, which is serious and occurs in an institutional setting (a business meeting), neither his apology for the swearword, nor the swearing itself are treated as problematic by the co-

<sup>5</sup> See Calabria & Sciubba (2022) for an overview of the many functions this swearword can have in Italian.

participants. Paolo's turn makes self-sanctioning relevant because of when and where it occurs, showing how "sanctionability" and the *external* norm become *internally* negotiated in the unfolding of a specific interaction.

### 4.3 Excerpt 3

In contrast, the next excerpt shows a case where a participant gives relevance to a swearword uttered by another co-participant during a past shocking event, which is now reframed as a laughable. While the swearword itself is not treated as problematic, the dimension of "sanctionability" is made relevant.

Serena (SER), Flavia (FLA) and Alice (ALI) are having an aperitif at Alice's home. They are collectively remembering a common friend who, first, invited them to an expensive restaurant to celebrate her birthday but then did not contribute to the bills, letting the guests paying entirely for themselves, despite having already given her an expensive present.

*TorAPEFULL, 25:01-25:11*

- 01 SER #*quella sera ho sentito flavia dire una <parola:ccia>*  
That night I heard Flavia saying a swearword
- 02 ALL [((laughs)) ]  
fig #fig.1



Fig.1: SER maintains her hand gesture throughout the whole turn

- 03 FLA [*°si ma dai.°*]  
yes but come on
- 04 cos'è che avevo de:tto? *°metti ti[po:°]*  
what is that I had said? say like
- 05 SER #*[ca:]zz(o.)* [((laughs))]  
fuck  
fig #fig.2



Fig.2: SER's tilted head while uttering "cazzo"

- 06 FLS [*°ah si.°*]  
ah yes
- 07 ALI [((laughs))]
- 08 SER [((laughs))]
- 09 ALI [ma [è:::  
but is it
- 10 FLA [costa ta:nto^eh. [perché- ]  
it costs a lot because





and displaying one's stance and emotions toward an event and for gaining affiliation from co-participants. This confirms findings in Calabria & Sciubba (2022), but it also highlights how other-sanctioning, or in this case other-noticing of a fact makes providing an account relevant. In the process of account-giving, the breach of the general norm emerges, but it is locally managed and negotiated, so that a contingent norm is interactionally restored.

#### 4.4 Excerpt 4

In the fourth excerpt, a speaker projects a "sanctionable" – here a swearword – cataphorically by self-sanctioning. In this way, the speaker excuses himself for expressing a disagreement via a swearword. However, while a co-participant (the lawyer, i.e., the person whose higher deontic/epistemic authority is made relevant) accepts the swearword, another co-participant disaffiliates from this acceptance by making relevant that, for a professional, accepting a "sanctionable" also constitutes a breach of the norm. In a divorce case, the lawyer (AVV) is talking to a client (CLI) and her brother (FRA), while examining the counterpart's letter. The lawyer is trying to make sense of the line of events regarding money, inheritances, and properties.

RmAvvCI, 00:01-02:59

01 CLI #ndz ndz #nc'entra proprio niente °questo°.   
 ndz ndz this is really not relevant   
 fig #fig.1 #fig.2



Fig.1: Layer (A) looks down at paper in front of him



Fig.2: F slide gazes at C

02 (4.6)

03 FRA insomma dice pura insomma #un po'::di::   
 in short he says also a bi::t o::f   
 fig #fig.3



Fig. 3: C gazes at F. F grabs a pen in front of him

04 AVV [#si- #no ma queste qua sono-]   
 yes=no but these here are-   
 fig #fig.4 #fig.5



Fig.4: F gazes at L



Fig.5: L gestures "away" shaking 2x hand

- 05 FRA [mi scusi il termine un po'di] #cazzate mi scuso  
 don't mind the term a bit of bullshit excuse me  
 fig #fig.6



Fig.6: F utters "cazzate" while gazing at L

- 06 [ >il termine ma-< ]  
 the term but-<  
 07 AVV [ <sisi> ] no ma il termine:: è:: #giusto.  
 yes yes no but the term is the right one  
 #fig.7

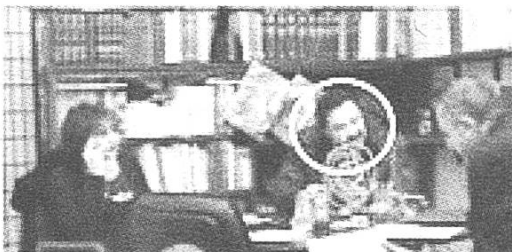


Fig.7: F smiles at "cazzate"

- 08 AVV [↑no?]  
 isn't it?  
 09 FRA [ahah]  
 10 CLI [°tseheheheheh=#avvocà°  
 tshaha "avvocà"  
 fig #fig.8



Fig.8: C laughs, lowers rx hand, leans forward

- 11 AVV ma [tan- queste qua sono tutte quanto cose-  
 but anywh- these here are all things-

12 FRA #embè nzomma viè da sé.  
*well you know, it goes without saying*

Throughout all the episode, AVV always looks at and/or manipulates the papers in front of him, either by writing on it or turning pages (fig. 1). While before the beginning of the interaction FRA was monitoring with his gaze the interaction of CLA and AVV, before line 3 – during the pause – he projects with his body a preparation to take the turn: first he gazes at CLI (fig. 2), then he leans forward. He self-selects at line 3, projecting an assessment about his stance toward what the counterpart claims. FRA's TCU is left incomplete as a word search, but in line 4 the lawyer treats it as a complete evaluation: "he says a little bit of [adjective]". In line 4, the lawyer starts an assessment too in alignment with FRA's projection (line 03), in the form agreement + disagreement ("no, yes") (Pomerantz 1986), projecting a disagreeing TCU that is left incomplete as it overlaps, at line 5, with FRA's continuation of line 3. The lawyer accompanies his turn with a left-handed gesture that indexes "away" (fig. 5). Although it is *prima facie* a disagreement in format, line 4 emerges as a reassurance to the client that what is happening is "normal". At line 5 FRA's stance, projected by the assessment started in line 3, is made explicitly through the swearword *cazzate*/"bullshit". But *cazzate* is a "sanctionable" and therefore is pre-emptively self-sanctioned through a cataphoric apology. The swearword is, however, also embedded between two apologies: the first one projects prospectively a "sanctionable" and the second one frames the swearword retrospectively as a "sanctionable", making relevant a breach in the norm. The swearword is also the expression of the stance toward the counterpart: by using *cazzate*, FRA assesses the type of morality concerning the counterpart's words. Line 7 the lawyer starts with a double agreement token "yes" (in a similar format as line 4) and follows it with a disagreement token "no", that does not index a disagreement but instead an acceptance and alignment with AVV's turn at line 5, the lexicalized assessment *cazzata*. O in line 7, *no ma* projects that a breach has been made in the "normative conduct within an institutional setting". The lawyer's (AVV) line 7 emerges then as a composite turn (Rossi 2018): he disagrees with the apologies about the breach of normative conduct, but he agrees with the assessment, aligning with another assessment about the "accuracy" of FRA's words. In other words, the lawyer both aligns in providing another assessment to an assessment, and affiliates with FRA's stance, by accepting FRA's stance as expressed with *cazzate*. Consequently, FRA smiles (fig. 7). In line 8, the lawyer continues and produces a tag question that opens up to confirmation to both the co-participants. In effect, at line 10 CLI reproaches AVV, by using the vocative *avvocà* (truncated version of the word *avvocato*, lawyer), with a distinctive prosody associated with rebuke. She also embodiedly indexes her embarrassment by producing embarrassed laughter that begins with an explosive element, while being whispered *tseheheheheh* (line 10) –



whereas her brother laughs heartily (line 9, fig. 8). CLI's laugh also reveals the unexpected and problematic nature of accepting a "sanctionable" from a person who has epistemic/deontic authority and embodies the institution (the lawyer). As also noted by Glenn & Holt (2013: 104), laughter does not just index embarrassment, but it can also mark: "an awareness of something problematic while fixing it". In this way, it is the client who is indirectly doing the sanctioning, not the lawyer who has accepted the sanctionable. The client reminds the lawyer of his role as "gatekeeper", as the epistemic and deontic owner of the interaction. Since the recipients of the assessments are placed in the position to dis/align with, dis/affiliate from or bypass the evaluative stance (Turowetz & Maynard 2010), and since the lawyer refuses to handle the assessment as expected, the client takes it onto herself to bring the interactional moral order on track and on the record.

Thus, a potential "sanctionable" that breaches the norm of an institutional encounter is projected and reframed by self-initiating sanctioning (in the form of an apology). The speaker whose deontic rights are recognized as higher (therefore, the potential sanctioner) legitimates the swearword. However, the co-participant, who recognizes the sanctioner and grants him these rights, holds the sanctioner accountable for not doing his duty. In other words, the person not sanctioning is contested, even though, or because, the "sanctionable" is accepted. Finally, this excerpt shows "sanctioning", as a moral right and responsibility (Stivers et al. 2011) that comes with a certain role.

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

The sequences selected for this paper show how the use of swearing is treated by participants in the interactions as a breach of the social order (Garfinkel 1967). However, the practice of sanctioning is multi-layered and can be implemented with different reconfigurations of the participation framework, depending on the context, the institutionality, the activity at hand, and the verbal and multimodal resources mobilized by the participants. These analyses complement studies in Calabria & Sciubba (2022) and Sciubba & Calabria (2022), where swearing is described as a practice to manage emotions in interaction, and, therefore, not as a "sanctionable", but instead as a constitutive resource for anger management. There is, in fact, a contrast between the normative dimension of swearwords, on the one hand, and their actual interactional usage, on the other (Calabria & Sciubba 2022): swearwords are resources that allow speakers to implement social actions, but whose deployment has to be negotiated bit by bit in the unfolding of turns.

Sanctioning is part of this negotiation as it sets the "threshold of acceptability", which emerges in different ways, i.e., by overtly sanctioning the user *in situ* (excerpts 4.3, 4.4), or by teasing one of the participants (ex. 4.1, lines 39-40). As said, the setting plays a role: its "institutionality" (e.g., ex. 4.2, business

meeting, and ex. 4.4, lawyer/client interaction) prevents the interpretation of swearing as a potential "laughable" (and even something embarrassing, ex. 4.4). Furthermore, topicalizing the camera as an "institutional" element in ordinary conversations influences the speakers' display of acceptability of swearing (cf. Sciubba & Calabria, in preparation). This is "contrasted" with moments when the camera is not topicalized, and a swearword is eventually treated as unproblematic (ex. 4.1). In fact, in the dinner setting, the sanctioning does not create a delicate situation in terms of face saving, but rather the teasing contributes to building a shared jocular dimension (Haugh 2017b).

We started our investigation of sanctioning by understanding this process as a way of making relevant a breach in the social norm. However, in the excerpts that we analyzed, we discovered that participants achieve sanctioning not only by framing a turn as "sanctionable" but also by co-constructing a shared jocular dimension (Haugh 2017b) where teasing is involved and a problematic element – i.e., a swearword or a taboo word – becomes instead a "laughable". Categories such as "institutionality", "acceptability" and "sanctionability" are therefore not static, context-free concepts, but emerge through and in the interaction as context-bounded. Participants negotiate them visibly and chorally through their practices and the resources they used to implement them.

Along with the verbal resources, a co-participant's embodiment gives cues to all participants as to how a swearword should be framed. For example, in ex. 4.1, the turn that emerges as a sanction is accompanied by the participant's sly facial expression that shows his actual jocular stance. In the same excerpt, and in the same vein, another participant states that he doesn't swear, while smiling and looking at the camera. In ex. 4.3, the participant reporting the swearword smiles and immediately the other participants respond with laughter. These two excerpts (4.1 and 4.3) show that, when considering only verbal productions without taking into consideration facial expressions and other embodied actions, it would be impossible for the participants themselves to negotiate and share the tone of the sanctioning practice. The same applies to ex. 4.4, where, without considering how the laughter is vocalized, it wouldn't be possible to capture the embarrassed stance of one of the laughing participants.

In general, we notice that in excerpts 4.2 and 4.4, i.e. the institutional settings, the speakers orient to the progressivity of the unfolding activity and of the interaction rather than side-tracking it by topicalization the swearing. Moreover, self-sanctioning projects a swearword as more acceptable. In these two excerpts, the swearing speakers do not frame swearing as a laughing or laughable activity with their facial expressions, or smiling voice. They both use it in a context of explanation, in which the swearword accurately expresses the speaker's stance and is, in effect, accepted and not treated as problematic by others in the immediate next turn.



In all the excerpts presented, other- and self-sanctioning, both laughable or serious, are accompanied by hand gestures. However, these gestures reconfigure the tone of the different activities differently in the four excerpts selected, which demonstrates the salience of the embodied conduct associated with a verbal utterance. In ex. 4.1, at the end of the episode, two speakers (PIE & GIO) re-enact the words "I do not curse", contributing to the staging of the sanctioning (Sidnell 2006), namely Giorgio looks at the camera, the institutional element, smiles, gestures "no"; Piera rocks her body and makes baton gestures in correspondence of her statement in laughing voice. The sanctioning is not only uttered, it is embodied, and this staging is what contributes to making the episode jocular rather than serious. Conversely, in ex. 4.2, the self-sanctioning speaker (PAO) accompanies both his swearword and the sanction itself with an opening and closing hand gesture, punctuating each word of his explanation. As Streek (2009) noticed, hand gestures that accompany talk often happen in explanation sequences, as they attract the visual attention of co-participants as well as giving visual salience to what has been explained. Similarly, in ex. 4.3, the speakers other-sanctioning the swearword accompanies the report of the other speaker's swearing with an iconic gesture that attracts the coparticipants' visual attention. Finally, in ex. 4.4 the speaker accepting the swearword accompanies his acceptance with the iconic waving gesture that indexes shushing away. Alongside laughter, tone of voice, prosody and body and gaze orientation, hand gestures that accompany the sanctioning are also a resource for building the tone of this practice: in one direction, by other-sanctioning a speaker's words, a co-participant might have to provide an account and side-track the interaction, or by self-sanctioning a forthcoming swearword, a speaker might draw attention to the seriousness of the activity at hand. In another direction, we have showed that sanctioning can be made relevant as more than a practice of revealing a breaching of norms. It can create a jocular dimension, shared by all participants. Both settings and formats of sanctioning play a role in how the practice is constructed and treated. The multimodal conduct of participants is what makes visible for the participants themselves what the social meaning of the sanctioning actually is in a specific context and situation. In conclusion, this shows that the embodiment in the process of action ascription and sense making of addressing a swearword is fundamental for all participants to negotiate the threshold of acceptability of what has been said.

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## Appendix: Talk transcription conventions (Jefferson 2004)

(.)	short pause or gap (up to 0.2 seconds)
(2.4)	measured pause, gap, silence (in seconds)
[ ]	onset and end of overlap
(maybe)	dubious transcription
(he;it)	alternative transcription
( )	incomprehensible segment
((cry))	transcriber's comment
.	final intonation
,	continuative intonation
?	interrogative intonation
to↑morrow	the segment following ↑ is pronounced with a higher pitch
yester↓day	the segment following ↓ is pronounced with a lower pitch
OVER	loud
°nope°	soft
<u>sure</u>	emphasis; 'punched up' pronunciation
fa:r	lengthening
alwa-	cut-off
< >	slowed down, compared to the surrounding talk
> <	speeded up, compared to the surrounding talk
.h	inbreath
h	outbreath
cohhhst	pronounced with breathiness (laughter)
(h)	laughter token
fhellof	smiley voice or suppressed laughter
=	latching; no break or gap between end of one line and beginning of next line
&	turn continuation by the same speaker
his^son	liaison
ə	schwa

