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Closing formulae and transmission of cultural values in
Samuel Richardson's *Letters Written to and for Particular Friends*
(1741)

Abstract

Pragmatic functions and the meaning-making potential of formulaic epistolary elements such as salutations, address forms, opening and closing formulae in historical correspondence have attracted considerable scholarly attention in recent years. In the wake of these studies, the present paper will extract and examine the inventory of eighteenth-century closing formulae in Samuel Richardson's *Letters Written to and for Particular Friends* (1741). The aim of the investigation will be to show how these formulaic elements can assume multiple pragmatic functions, among which the transmission of cultural values and norms of conduct becomes especially prominent.

Keywords: epistolary discourse, closing formulae, Historical Pragmatics, Samuel Richardson, transmission of values and norms

1. *Introduction*¹

When a letter is delivered to the intended recipient and read, subscription is the last piece of information transmitted from the encoder of the letter to its addressee. In a way, subscription becomes the final piece the recipient is required to fit together with the other segments of the letter, in order to solve the jigsaw puzzle of the message it conveys. Subscription contains

¹ I would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers whose invaluable comments and suggestions have helped me to produce the present version of the paper. All the remaining infelicities are mine.

items of information already known to the recipient. The name of the encoder may be one of these, or it may indicate the relationship between the interactants. Moreover, in subscriptions, new information can be added to the message. If the contents of the letter are judged to be likely to cause distress to the recipient (a reproachful message, for instance), the choice of a particular subscription can either downplay or, on the contrary, reinforce the chastising.²

The definition of letter as “written communication typically addressed to one or more named recipients, [which] identifies the sender and conveys a message” proposed by Nevalainen (2004: 181) introduces the universal formal properties of the letter as a text type. Salutations and address forms on the one hand and subscription, or closing formula, on the other, identify the recipient(s) and the sender(s) respectively. Pragmatic functions and the meaning-making potential of these text-type defining elements have attracted considerable scholarly attention in recent years. For Early Modern English letters studies such as Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg’s (1995) sociolinguistic investigation of the conventions of address forms, Nevala’s (2004) systematic, comprehensive survey of the use of address as a social and pragmatic phenomenon, as well as Daybell’s (2006) extensive study of early English women’s letters and letter-writing practices have immensely enriched our knowledge and understanding of the pragmatics of formulaic elements in epistolary discourse. For the Late Modern English period, and especially the eighteenth-century, of the three major book-length studies of letter-writing (Fitzmaurice 2002, Bannet 2005 and Brant 2006), it is in Bannet’s investigation that formulae (i.e., superscriptions and subscriptions) are discussed. They are presented as elements that “registered hierarchies

² As Montini has convincingly shown in her case-study of Samuel Richardson’s correspondence with Sarah Westcomb, arriving at the conclusion that “closing salutations are used to add new issues to the quarrel offering an interesting interplay of mitigating and non-mitigating disagreement strategies” (2014: 186).

and acknowledged relations of power [that] can constitute the key to the interpretation of an eighteenth-century letter, and substantially change its *prima facie* reading” (2005: 65).³ As an inherent component of the set of conventions associated with epistolary practices, formulae employed in early English letters can be treated as routinised realisations of the linguistic and cultural scripts of deference (Daybell 2010, 2015).

What kind of conventions ruled the use of epistolary formulae in Late Modern English letters? Which particular formulae were in use and did these formulae continue to encapsulate the appropriate social codes of behaviour and moral norms in the eighteenth century, as they have been shown to do in the earlier periods? The present study will be limited to the investigation of subscriptions, or closing formulae, whose usage will be examined in Samuel Richardson's *Letters Written to and for Particular Friends* (1741 [2012], henceforth *Familiar Letters*). Section 2 will provide an overview of the theoretical framework which will guide the analysis of the pragmatic functions of the closing formulae in *Familiar Letters*. As Section 3 will show, this particular letter-miscellany⁴ represents a compelling case-study for several reasons. It can be said to occupy a singular position within the English tradi-

³ The linguistic study of Early and Late Modern English epistolary practices continues to be a burgeoning field of research. A helpful overview of bibliographical resources is provided in Palander-Collin (2010), as well as in Del Lungo Camiciotti and Pallotti (2014) and Del Lungo Camiciotti (2014). Other recent studies include Wood (2009) and Williams (2013) on early English letters; Harris (2009), Romaine (2010), Dierks (2009), Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2014), VanHaitsma (2014), Włodarczyk (2015) on Late Modern English letters, as well as the volume edited by Auer, Schreier and Watts (2015) which deals with epistolary practices across centuries.

⁴ A letter-miscellany is one of the terms used by Bannet to distinguish between different types of eighteenth-century letter manuals: “Letter-miscellanies [...] are simply collections of model letters without the compendium's outwork of supporting materials” (Bannet 2005: xiv-xv).

tion of epistolary guides or letter-writers. The discussion of this exceptional status of *Familiar Letters* in Section 3 will be followed by the presentation of the inventory of closing formulae in the miscellany and the analysis of their pragmatic functions in Section 4, while general conclusions will be drawn in Section 5.

2. Closing formulae in historical correspondence

The style and the rhythm of a letter, as Davis (1967) observes in his study of the earliest English letters, is largely determined by the ways in which formulaic, conventionalised elements of the letter interact with its non-formulaic components. The choices made by encoders as to which particular formulaic components to include can reveal unexpected influences that have shaped their linguistic habits as letter writers. This prompts Davis to criticise the lack of attention traditionally accorded to “the conventional and unspontaneous elements in the language of the letters” (1967: 15). Davis’s call to continue investigating formulaic epistolary elements has recently been answered by a number of studies which focused on subscriptions, or closing formulae, which until that moment had received less attention when compared to address terms and opening formulae. These studies will be presented in this section.

Epistolary closing formulae, together with salutations, address terms and opening formulae, are typically realised linguistically as prefabricated chunks, that is to say complex multi-word strings or formulaic sequences. In a recent study Buerki defines formulaic sequences (FSs) as “phrases that are conventional pairings of form and unit of meaning in a speech community” (Buerki 2016: 18). The typology devised by Buerki groups epistolary closing formulae together with various other discursive elements, non-specific to epistolary writing. These heterogeneous items constitute an individual sub-type of FSs, namely “FSs that perform functions, including dis-

course functions, e.g. *I'm sorry* (apologising); *yours faithfully* (ending a letter); *in summary* (introducing a concluding section)” (Buerki 2016: 25).⁵

A more fine-grained typology of formulaic sequences specific to epistolary discourse has been put forward by Rutten and Van der Wal (2012, 2013, 2014). Rutten and Van der Wal have carried out extensive research with the aim to explore the ways in which epistolary formulae were employed in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century correspondence in Dutch. More specifically, Rutten and Van der Wal (2014) investigate the wide variety of formulae attested in authentic private letters written by Dutch men and women who represent various ranks of society. Their study is focused on the pragmatic functions and the rhetorical meanings of the formulae, while the interpretation of the results rests on the assumption that “the pragmatic situation in which the epistolary formulae acquire meaning consists of the texts (the letters) and the two participant roles of the writer and the addressee” (Rutten and Van der Wal 2014: 81). An overview of Rutten and Van der Wal’s taxonomy of the pragmatic functions of epistolary formulae is presented in the table below.

Table 1: Functions of epistolary formulae (adapted from Rutten and Van der Wal 2012: 177-182, 2014: 81-85)

Type 1: Text-constitutive function (with two sub-types, 1.1 and 1.2)	Formal elements that identify the letter as a text type. These elements are highly specific to the letter text type.
1.1 Text-type function	Surrounding elements, e.g., address formulae, date formulae, salutation and opening formulae, closing formulae and signatures, whose presence immediately reveals the text type.

⁵ The remaining sub-types of FSs are: collocations, multi-word terms, idioms, proverbs, and usual sequences (Buerki 2016: 25).

1.2 Text-structural function	Internal elements that mark the text structure by realising the transition between parts of the discourse. These organisational elements have specific text-structural functions, e.g., marking of the transition between the opening of the letter to the next part of the discourse.
Type 2: Intersubjective function	Elements that foreground the interactional aspect of the pragmatic situation by focusing on the relationship between the writer and the addressee. Three domains are covered by intersubjective formulae: health, greetings (introduced within the text body) and contact (i.e., formulae expressing the wish to maintain or renew epistolary contact).
Type 3: Christian-ritual function	Elements that foreground the relationship between the writer and the divine world, or between the writer, the addressee and the divine world, e.g. the commendation formula (i.e., a formulaic string with which the writer commends the addressee into the hands of God)

This is not to say that three distinct groups of epistolary formulae can be identified according to the pragmatic functions that a particular formula performs. Indeed Rutten and Van der Wal emphasise the fact that formulae can be multifunctional, with individual formulae assuming more than one function. Closing formulae, for instance, can fulfill text-structural and intersubjective functions simultaneously.

Closing formulae in eighteenth-century letters, when employed to signal the relationship between the letter's encoder and its addressee (thus assuming the intersubjective function, as identified by Rutten and Van der Wal),⁶ have been analysed in the light of theories of linguistic politeness (Brown

⁶ Cf. Nevala's (2003) study where subscription formulae are presented as those that "reflect more the image the writer has of him/herself in the relationship with the recipient" (2003: 147).

and Levinson 1987).⁷ Bijkerk's study (2004) , for instance, investigates the origins of the formulae *yours sincerely* and *yours affectionately* by analysing the frequencies of the two subscriptions and their variants in historical English corpora.⁸ Biijkerk's investigation builds up on earlier research by Tieken-Boon van Ostade (1999), who analysed writer and poet John Gay's (1685 – 1732) use of salutations and conclusions. Tieken-Boon van Ostade proposed to distinguish between four basic types of closing formulae in Gay's correspondence:

1. your most humble servant J(ohn) G(ay)
2. yours most sincerely
3. J Gay
4. no conclusion

(Tieken-Boon van Ostade 1999: 104)

As can be seen, Type 1 formulae are represented by the shorter and longer versions of standardised FSs of the type *your most humble servant/ your most obedient and obliged servant*. Type 2 groups together different forms of *yours (most) sincerely / yours (most) affectionately* subscriptions. Type 3 refers to cases when a formula is replaced by the encoder's name, while Type 4 indicates an absence of any kind of conclusions. In Gay's correspondence prefer-

⁷ A similar theoretical approach in the study of early English letters has been adopted by Nevala (2003, 2004) who looked at how politeness can be shown in a range of address and subscription formulae and Oinonen (2012) who examined a specific subscription formula ("yours to command").

⁸ The corpora used in Bijkerk's study include Chadwyck-Healey database, the Corpus of the Early English Correspondence (CEEC), the CEEC Extension, the Correspondence of Jonathan Swift and Letters of Alexander Pope.

ences accorded to a particular type of conclusions to depend on which politeness strategy (negative vs. positive) the writer chooses to implement: “the longer version of Type 1 formulas show a higher degree of negative politeness [...], while Type 2 formulas show a higher degree of positive politeness” (Bijkerk 2004: 298).⁹ In other words, according to Tieken-Boon van Ostade, the encoder employs the appropriate formula, as dictated by the current social protocol, to manifest deference and, at the same time, to signal her concern to safeguard the addressee’s negative face (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 1999: 110-111). This strategy of negative politeness, which aims at minimising the risk of offending the addressee, is replaced by a positive politeness move when Type 2 formulae are employed. It would seem that expressions of feelings of friendship and “warmth towards the addressee” (Holmes 1995: 5) required a creative deviation from the standard eighteenth-century Type 1 formulae. Increasing usage of *yours (most) sincerely* / *yours (most) affectionately* subscriptions by members of the social network to which John Gay belonged possibly triggered a change in epistolary conventions, helping to consolidate a creative linguistic routine as an established practice.

It can be argued that pragmatic use of closing formulae as politeness devices, identified by Tieken-Boon van Ostade and Bijkerk, can be accommodated within Rutten and Van der Wal’s taxonomy of the functions of epistolary formulae as a specific sub-type of the intersubjective function

⁹ Navest (2004) discusses the uses of ‘yours affectionately/yours sincerely’ in Sir Joshua Reynolds’ (1723-1792) correspondence as positive politeness devices, while Dossena (2004) in her study of nineteenth-century Scottish English letters observes that “[c]losing greetings may also vary and be more or less emphatic, depending on the degree of social or psychological distance that the encoders wish to signal [...] closeness and familiarity are signalled by formulas like “believe me to be ever most Affectionately Yours”, “believe me ever & ever Your Most Affectionate” or “I remain your most sincere Friend”” (2004: 207).

that I will provisionally name as 'didactic function'. Closing formulae that assume this function not only foreground the actual relationship between the encoder and the addressee, but they can be read as what Daybell has described as "textual performances" (2015: 504), that is to say expressions of specific rhetorical and cultural models of normative behaviour realised with the help of formulaic epistolary elements. We know that the formalities of letter-writing code taught by manuals, as Chartier et al. maintain, disseminated knowledge "about the ordering of the social world" (Chartier et al. 1997: 5) by emphasising hierarchical relationships between fictionalised senders and addressees of model letters. The didactic formulae can be conceived of as tools to transmit role models and to offer scripts of appropriate conduct. Presumably it is in model letters offered by letter manuals, rather than in authentic historical correspondence, that this function will become predominant. In order to further our understanding of the pragmatic functions of closing formulae in eighteenth-century correspondence, the analysis of their functions in authentic historical correspondence can be complemented by the present case-study of a very special letter-miscellany of the period, Samuel Richardson's *Familiar Letters*.

3. *Samuel Richardson's Familiar Letters*

At the end of the seventeenth century, the popularity of letter-writers of imported, mainly French tradition, which dominated the English book market since the 1640s,¹⁰ slowly declined, giving way to a different strand

¹⁰ Frequently referred to as 'academies of compliment' after the title of the most extraordinarily popular examples of this sub-genre of letter-writers, these collections were famous for the elegant and elaborated style of their model letters, which otherwise possessed little practical utility, usually dealing with the questions of the heart (cf. Hornbeak 1934: 50-76).

of epistolary guides. The first of these new letter-writers was John Hill's *Young Secretary's Guide, or Speedy Help to Learning* (1687), which started the trend of catering for the needs of "gentlemen, merchants, tradesmen, military officers and professionals as well as of mariners, maidservants, apprentices, schoolchildren, and women of all ages and ranks [by offering] models of letters appropriate to all the diverse needs of people of these different ranks, occupations, ages and genders" (Bannet 2007: 16). As a social climber, printer and businessman with an extensive knowledge of the book market, which was literally flooded with this type of self-help literature in the first half of the eighteenth century, Richardson seems to have been in an ideal position to produce his own letter-miscellany for "the lower class of people" (Pettit 2012: lxx).¹¹

The most appropriate generic denomination for *Familiar Letters* is in fact a letter-miscellany, i.e. a collection of published fictional letters that lacks the traditional apparatus of supporting materials (e.g., lists of terms of address or basic instruction on how to write letters) that a letter-writer would normally be expected to offer. Thus the only strategy to teach letter-writing in letter-miscellanies was that of providing sample model letters, which could be copied and adapted to the real-life situation of the reader. The "new populist incarnation" (Bannet 2007: 16), characteristic of late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century letter-writers and letter-miscellanies alike, in the case of *Familiar Letters* found its expression in Richardson's commitment to teach letter-writing to the lower classes of people aiming, at the same time, to impart the precepts of the author's "*bourgeois* morality" (Hornbeak 1934: 125).¹² Hornbeak is adamant about Richardson's ethical,

¹¹ Detailed information on the history of the writing and the publication of the book is provided by Pettit (2012: lxxviii-lxxx).

¹² Cf. Whyman, who immediately hints at the strong didactic and possibly moralistic goals pursued by the author: "He [Richardson] sensed that people were interested in letter-writing - a commonplace yet exciting activity for those newly literate. He also knew

rather than rhetorical, engagement with the letter-writer genre, stating that *Familiar Letters* “pretended to give a working philosophy of life” (Hornbeak 1934: 106). Pettit echoes Hornbeak’s views, likewise foregrounding Richardson’s “dignified and undramatic commitment to moral exemplarity, at the workplace and elsewhere” (Pettit 2012: xciii). To accomplish this goal of transmitting moral codes and values effectively, Richardson implements two main strategies. First of all, *Familiar Letters* contain several of the so called letters of advice, in which the letter format is manipulated to produce a (lengthy) set of moral guidelines. Letter VII (*Advice from a Father to a young Beginner, what Company to chuse, and how to behave in it*), written by a father to his son “now entering into the World” (FL, 342-344), is one of the examples of such letters. In choosing his friends, as Richardson’s father in Letter VII repeatedly stresses, it is the conduct and reputation of the son’s acquaintances that have to be considered before friendships can be formed. In addition to including dedicated letters of moral instruction, Richardson succeeds in creating a series of convincing, lifelike characters – his fictional letter writers. Richardson inevitably endows his characters with exemplary moral traits, presenting their conduct as irreproachable.¹³ Yet his multitude of protagonists are not stiff or dull. Among these we find, for instance, affectionate and loving parents, as well as uncles and aunts, who set the right example for the younger generations by showing indulgence when children

from his own experience that many middle-class readers needed to know how to write properly. His goal, however, would be broader than mere instruction: ‘Will it be any Harm,’ he asked his publishers, ‘in a Piece you want to be written so low, if we should instruct them how they should think and act in common cases, as well as indite?’ He was positioning himself as an author with an eye to the market – one who was intensely aware of moral debates about the dangers of non-elite reading” (2009: 164).

¹³ Cf. Bannet’s (2005: 70-72) analysis of the letter of news derived from Letter XL (*From an Apprentice to his Friends, in Praise of his Master and Family*), which depicts, in an excessively idealistic way, a model family.

seek their guidance after confessing some serious missteps (e.g., Letter XXXVI. *A Father to a Son, to dissuade him from the Vice of Drinking to Excess*, or Letter CLXV. *From the Aunt, containing solid Advice and Caution on this Occasion*). These protagonists live and breathe in the letters, disseminating their moral teachings in eloquently written epistles.

This powerful authenticity of Richardson's fictional letter-miscellany sets *Familiar Letters* apart from any of its possible predecessors (and successors, for that matter) within the English letter manual tradition. So does Richardson's decision not to include any formal guidelines on the conventions of letter writing.¹⁴ The question of how much Richardson is indebted to earlier letter-writers published in England is a contested issue.¹⁵ Settling

¹⁴ As already mentioned, his method of teaching letter-writing consisted in producing the most heterogeneous variety of model letters to be adapted to the reader's needs. With so many different life situations discussed in *Familiar Letters*, the reader had an invaluable resource to go back to whenever she or he had to write a letter of their own.

¹⁵ For example, Hornbeak (1934: 101-103), Bannet (2005: 51), Mitchell (2007: 197) and Whyman (2009: 164) all claim that Richardson borrowed situations and even letters themselves from previous sources. Pettit (2012: lxxxii) instead argues that it was mainly ideas that had been borrowed. In terms of the miscellany's structure, for example, Pettit emphasises how divergent Richardson's decisions on the arrangement of the model letters are "from the tradition that Downs and Hornbeak cite" (2012: lxxxiii). Pettit contextualises *Familiar Letters* within a different European literary tradition: the feminocentric epistolary romance, as exemplified by works such as *Five Love-Letters from a Nun to a Cavalier* (1678), Ahpra Benn's *Amours of Philander and Sylvia* (1684-7), Marivaux's *La vie de Marianne, ou Les aventures de madame la comtesse de **** (1731-41). It is from this tradition, Pettit claims, that Richardson inherited an interest in "situational breadth and in the politics of courtship" (2012: lxxxiv), as well as "characterological continuity" (2012: lxxxvi). Pettit, moreover, indicates Eliza Haywood's *Love-Letters on All Occasions* (1730) as possibly "a more comprehensive antecedent to *Familiar Letters*" in the English letter-writer tradition (2012: lxxxvi). Bannet also, albeit implicitly, acknowledges this connection by placing *Familiar Letters* together with Haywood's second manual, *Epistles for the Ladies* (1749) in the distinct group of letter-miscellanies (Bannet 2005: xiv-xv).

this argument goes beyond the scope of this investigation. What is more relevant for the purpose of the present study is the evaluation of the impact of *Familiar Letters* on the English letter-writers published after 1741. All of the above-mentioned studies (Hornbeak 1934, Bannet 2005, 2007, Pettit 2012) agree that the legacy *Familiar Letters* left is outstanding and anomalous at the same time. Hornbeak, for instance, highlights the exceptional status of Richardson's letter-miscellany when she speaks of "a humble and anonymous sort of immortality" of *Familiar Letters* (1934: 117). In the absence of reliable statistical data on what kind of books people actually read in eighteenth-century England, the number of reprints of a work represents the most reliable indicator of its commercial success. Judging by the number of reprints in comparison to its predecessors (de la Serre, Hill), contemporaries (Hallifax, Haywood) and successors (Cooke, Crowder, Dilworth) alike, *Familiar Letters'* accomplishments were indeed very modest.¹⁶ This relative unpopularity of Richardson's letter-miscellany can be attributed to the lack of any kind of supporting materials with systematic instructions on letter-writing (not even a list of the appropriate forms of address and subscriptions was provided), lack of a clear subdivision into familiar and business letters, inclusion of letters that dealt with topics of little practical use,¹⁷ repetitiveness of some topics pursued in lengthy model letters.¹⁸

¹⁶ Reprints are discussed by Pettit (see n. 9) and by Hornbeak (1934: 117), who also details the history of the circulation of model letters extracted from Richardson (1934: 119-122).

¹⁷ For instance, eleven long letters (CXLIX – CLIX, *From a young Lady in Town to her Aunt in the Country*) containing detailed descriptions of London's landmarks and life in the city, a section in which "the boundaries of the letter-writer tradition dissolve, as Richardson declares himself a proud citizen of a wondrous city, interested [...] in the material record of the human experience as evident in London's buildings, monuments, and open spaces" (Pettit 2012: lxxxvii).

On the competitive book market of the English letter-writers these shortcomings of *Familiar Letters* may have made the miscellany less attractive in the prospective publishers' eyes. However, a selection of letters from Richardson's miscellany boast a remarkable longevity. These letters were pirated with astonishing consistency and continuity¹⁹ in a great number of the most popular later manuals, in Britain as well as abroad.²⁰ Some of these

¹⁸ These lengthy letters were in some case followed by another (lengthy) letter on the same topic. See the pairs of Letter CXL (*To a Gentleman of Fortune, who has Children, dissuading him from a Second Marriage with a Lady much younger than himself*) and Letter CXLI (*The same Subject pursued*), immediately followed by Letter CXLII (*Against a Second Marriage, where there are Children on both Sides*) and Letter CXLIII (*Against a second Marriage, where there are Children on one Side, and a Likelihood of more*).

¹⁹ Richardson "was apparently unmoved" (Bannet 2007: 25) by these acts of piracy. This could be explained by the fact that new compilations, produced by combining model letters from different sources (without acknowledging these sources) continued to be "viewed as a genuine form of 'authorial activity'", whereby by selecting and reordering existing materials new books with different significations were produced (Bannet 2007: 25).

²⁰ A case in point is Thomas Cooke's *Universal Letter-Writer; or New Art of Polite Correspondence* (1791), first published in London in the early 1770s, reprinted numerous times in the first half of the nineteenth century, one of the most frequently plagiarised letter manuals in Britain and abroad of the period (Bannet 2005: 194-222, Shvanyukova 2016). *The Universal Letter-Writer* contains numerous traces of Richardson's influence. We can compare, for example, Letters XXX (*From a young Woman, a Servant in London, to her Parents, desiring their Consent to marry*)-XXXI (*The Parent's (sic!) Answer*) in Cooke (39-40) with Letters XXVIII (*From a Maid-servant in Town, acquainting her Father and Mother in the Country, with a Proposal of Marriage, and asking their Consents*) – Letter XXIX (*From the Parents, in Answer to the preceding*) in *Familiar Letters*; a number of model letters in the business section of Cooke's manual, such as, for example, Letter XL *An urgent Demand of Payment*, 45, which is copied almost verbatim from Richardson's Letter XLIV. *A more pressing and angry Letter from a City Dealer on the same Account*. Most interestingly, Cooke makes some revisions to the answer, provided by Richardson (Letter XLV. In Answer to the preceding). In Cooke's version of the answer (Letter XLI, 46) the following lines have been

letters continued to be reprinted at the turn of the twentieth century. When in 1878 Theophilus C. Cann published his *Comprehensive Letter-Writer: A complete guide to English Correspondence [...] with explanatory notes for the use of Italians* in Florence, the English language teacher did not fail to include several letters modelled on the examples taken from *Familiar Letters*. Cann's *Advice on choosing a profession* (1878: 66-68), for instance, is a modernised version of Richardson's Letter I (*To a Father, against putting a Youth of but moderate Parts to a Profession that requires more extensive Abilities*). Cann's letter is addressed to the young man himself ("Dear William"), rather than William's father, the intended recipient of the original letter. On the level of contents the two epistles, with the second one published almost one and a half century after the first, show a striking resemblance. The same letter was even included in the fourth edition of Cann's *Comprehensive Letter-Writer*, which was reprinted for the last time in 1906 (Shvanyukova forthc.).

To summarise, if *Familiar Letters* were overshadowed, on the one hand, by Richardson's novels and, on the other hand, succumbed in the competition with more utilitarian letter manuals published by Dilworth, Cooke, Crowder, and the like, model letters extracted from the miscellany (without a trace of an acknowledgement) continued to circulate, disseminating the normative code of virtue and morality fostered by their author. This exceptional status of *Familiar Letters* within the tradition of the English letter-writer genre, as an insider and outsider (symbolically reflecting the in-between-ness of their author's position discussed above), Richardson's heightened awareness of his mission to teach both "the Requisite STYLE and FORMS To be Observed in WRITING Familiar Letters" and the ways

added: "I am determined, for the future, to make the rules laid down in your excellent letter, a guide, in my dealings with those people, whose dilatoriness in making good their payment to me, obliged me to disappoint you" (Cooke, 46). We can read the reference to "your excellent letter" here as Cooke's implicit acknowledgement of Richardson's epistolary mastery.

“How to THINK and ACT Justly and Prudently, IN THE COMMON CONCERNS OF HUMAN LIFE” (as stated on the title page) to those in need of such knowledge, call for an investigation of the formal elements of the modal letters. The next section will present the inventory of the closing formulae in *Familiar Letters* and discuss the functions that these routinised elements can assume.

4. Inventory and analysis of the closing formulae in Familiar Letters

To produce the inventory of the closing formulae in *Familiar Letters* the subscriptions were first collected manually and categorised according to the main patterns of their linguistic realisation. Eleven letters CXLIX – CLIX (*From a young Lady in Town to her Aunt in the Country*), given their special status in the collection, were excluded from the corpus,²¹ thus reducing the number of letters analysed from 173 to 162. The division of the 162 subscriptions into two main groups reflects their differences in length and type of linguistic structure employed. Subscriptions in the Group 1, categorised as standardised, are represented by longer conventionalised noun phrases, while compressed subscriptions in Group 2, which rely on structures such as *yours* + *adverb* or simply *yours*, tend to be much shorter. Both groups, as is shown in Table X below, were further divided into two subgroups each:

Table 2. Closing formulae in *Familiar Letters*: distribution and frequencies

Group	Example	Number of occurrences
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²¹ See n. 17.

Group 1: Standardised subscriptions		
1.1 Conventionalised noun phrase with a single head noun	<i>Your very humble Servant</i> (LETTER I. To a Father, against putting a Youth of but moderate Parts to a Profession that requires more extensive Abilities.)	114
1.2 Extended noun phrase with two nouns combined	<i>Your affectionate and faithful Friend and Servant</i> (LETTER LVIII. To a Friend, on Occasion of his not answering his Letters.)	31
Group 2: Compressed subscriptions		
2.1 Variations of the structure <i>yours affectionately</i>	<i>Yours most affectionately</i> (LETTER CLXIX. From one Brother to another, on the rash Marriage of A beloved Daughter of one of them, to a profligate young Fellow.)	8
2.2 Basic subscription	<i>Yours, &c.</i> (LETTER CXXIV. To one who, upon a very short Acquaintance, and Without any visible Merit but Assurance, wants to borrow a Sum of Money.)	9
Total		162

The two groups of subscriptions identified in *Familiar Letters* to a certain extent correspond to Type 1 and Type 2 formulae as described by Tiekens-Boon van Ostade (1999) and subsequently discussed by Bijkerk (2004) (see Section 2). However, in Tiekens-Boon van Ostade's categorisation Type 1 formulae only include the longer and shorter versions of "the pragmatized standard epistolary formula *Your most obedient humble servant*" (Bijkerk 2004: 297). While in Tiekens-Boon van Ostade's data these were the only formulae linguistically realised as noun phrases, *Familiar Letters* contain examples of standardised subscriptions that mirror the linguistic pattern of *your most obedient humble servant*, by replacing the individual elements (the head noun and frequently also the pre-modifier) with new lexical items. Hence, in addi-

tion to the variations of the standard formula with *servant* as the head noun, Group 1 in the present study also includes closing formulae realised as noun phrases with other lexical items as head nouns. This group will be presented in sub-section 4.1. In Group 2, discussed in sub-section 4.2, subgroup 2.1 corresponds to Type 2 formulae as identified by Tieken-Boon van Ostade and Bijkerk, while basic subscriptions constitute a new subgroup (2.2).²²

The number of occurrences column in Table 2 shows that closing formulae in *Familiar Letters* are distributed in an uneven way. Group 1 accounts for the total of 145 occurrences, or almost 90% of all subscriptions, against only 17 occurrences, or 10%, of formulae categorised as Group 2. What the numbers of occurrences of formulae per group do not automatically reveal is the presence of numerous variations of the formulae in the collection. To explore the patterns of variation of the forms, an open-source corpus-analysis tool #LancsBox version 3.0 (Brezina, McEnery and Wattam 2015) was used to retrieve concordance lines containing key lexical items that emerged after the initial manual examination. These items included individual nouns (such as *servant*, *friend*, kinship terms), adjectives (e.g., *dutiful*, *obedient*), as well as wild-card searches (e.g., *your** and *affection**).²³ The results of the analysis will be discussed in the following subsections.

4.1. Group 1 formulae: standardised subscriptions

²² Tieken-Boon van Ostade's (1999: 104) Type 3 (use of the sender's name) and Type 4 (absence of the conclusion) formulae were not found in *Familiar Letters*.

²³ A plain-text version of *Familiar Letters* can be downloaded from ECCO-TCP online collection:

<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/ecco/004845953.0001.000?rgn=main;view=fulltext>.

Longer conventionalised noun phrases, a typical linguistic realisation of Group 1 formulae, rely on the basic structure introduced by *your* + (modifier) + head noun (sub-group 1.1) or an extended noun phrase with two heads conjoined (sub-group 1.2). Table 3 provides an overview of lexical items used as head nouns in the two sub-groups, with their respective frequencies.

Table 3. Group 1 formulae: distribution and frequencies of head nouns

Sub-group	Lexical item(s)	Example	Number of occurrences
1.1 Conventionalised noun phrase with a single head noun	Lexical item used as Head noun		
	Kinship terms: father (17), daughter (6), son (6), mother (4), aunt (4), brother (4), uncle (3), kinswoman (3), cousin (2), kinsman (2), sister (2), nephew (2), niece (1), wife (1), husband (1)	<i>Your ever loving Mother</i> (LETTER III. A Widow-Mother's Letter, in Answer to her Son's complaining of Hardships in his Apprenticeship.)	58
	Servant	<i>Your most obedient humble Servant</i> (LETTER XIII. A young Man in Business, to a Father, desiring Leave to address his Daughter.)	44
	Other items (friend, admirer, lover, well-wisher, tenant)	<i>Your sincere Friend</i> (LETTER LIII. To a young Lady, advising her not to change her Guardians, nor to encourage any clandestine Address.)	12

1.2 Extended noun phrase with two nouns com- bined	Combinations of two lexical items	<i>Your affectionate Uncle, and sincere Friend</i> (LETTER LXV. Against too great a Love of Singing and Musick.)	
	Friend and servant	<i>Your sincere Friend, and humble Servant</i> (LETTER CLXXII. To a Father on the Loss of a hopeful Son, who died at Man's Estate.)	18
	Other combinations (two nouns selected from the options available as head noun in sub-group 1.1)	<i>Your passionate Admirer, and devoted Servant</i> (LETTER LXXIV. From a respectful Lover to his Mistress.)	13
Total for Group 1			145

Closing formulae realised as noun phrases with a kinship term (KT) as head noun, or *your* + (modifier) + KT structure, represent the largest group of subscriptions in *Familiar Letters*. In this group, the top kinship terms refer to the four members of the nuclear family. To systematically analyse patterns of variations of the closing formulae in letters exchanged between family members in Richardson's miscellany, thirty-five letters signed by fathers, mothers, sons and daughters, were examined. Table 4 presents an inventory of *your* + (modifier) +KT used by the nuclear family members, with the letters arranged according to the encoder – recipient relationship:

Table 4: Variations of *your* + (modifier) + KT formula (nuclear family members)

Father to Son (8 letters)	Your affectionate Father (Letter VII) Your affectionate Father (Letter VIII) Your tenderly affectionate Father (Letter XI) Your most indulgent Father (Letter XXXVI) Your indulgent and most affectionate Father! (Letter XXXVII) Your loving Father (Letter XLVIII) Your indulgent and afflicted Father (LVI) Your careful and loving Father (Letter LX)
Father to Daughter (9 letters)	Your indulgent Father (Letter XVI) Your indulgent Father (Letter XVII) Your loving Father (Letter LXIII) Your loving Father (Letter LXVII) Your afflicted Father (Letter LXIX) Your affectionate Father (Letter LXX) Your most indulgent Father (Letter XCI) Your indulgent Father (Letter XCIII) Your grieved and indulgent Father (Letter CXXXVIII)
Mother to Son (1 letter)	Your ever loving Mother (Letter III)
Mother to Daughter (3 letters)	Your ever indulgent Mother (Letter LIV) Your ever affectionate Mother (Letter LV) Your ever affectionate Mother (Letter CXLVI)
Parents to Daughter (1 letter)	Your truly loving Father and Mother (Letter XXIX)
Son to Father (5 letters)	Your dutiful Son* (Letter XXV, *from son-in-law) Your ever dutiful Son (Letter XL) Your dutiful, tho' unhappy Son (Letter XLVII) Your truly penitent and dutiful Son (Letter LVII) His most dutiful Son (Letter LXI)
Daughter to Father (4 letters)	Your most dutiful Daughter (Letter XV) Your ever-dutiful Daughter (Letter LXVI) Your most dutiful Daughter (Letter XCII) Your dutiful Daughter (Letter CXXXIX)
Daughter to Mother (1 letter)	Your gratefully dutiful Daughter (Letter XXIV)
Son to Parents (1 letter)	Your dutiful Son (Letter XLI)
Daughter to Parents (1 letter)	Your dutiful Daughter (Letter XXVIII)
Son and Daughter to Parents (1 letter)	Your most dutiful Son* and Daughter (Letter XXX, *son-in-law)

Formulae used by one of the children, or both of them, addressing (one of) their parents manifest the strongest degree of formulaicity. In fact, *dutiful* is employed consistently as the pre-modifier to the kinship term. This usage occurs irregardless of the gender of both the letter's encoder (be it

daughter or son) and its intended recipient (be it mother or father). Likewise, the genders of the interactants seem not to have any impact on the choice of the closing formulae in the letters from (one of) the parents to (one of) the children: for instance, fathers writing to daughters and sons alike, select as one or two adjectives from a restricted pool of pre-modifiers: *affectionate, loving, careful, indulgent, afflicted* or *grieved*. However, if we examine the topics dealt with in the same sample of thirty-five letters, we immediately notice how highly gender-specific the contents of the letters are. In fact, with the exception of a single occasion,²⁴ epistolary exchanges taking place between daughters and (one of) the parents in *Familiar Letters* are dedicated exclusively to the matters of courtship, marriage and marital problems. The last paragraph from Letter LXIII in (3) can be given as an example of a letter addressed to a daughter:

(1) Be cautious of rushing yourself into Ruin, and as I am not able to maintain you and a young Family, do not throw yourself upon the uncertain Charity of well-disposed People; who are already vastly encumbered by the Miserable. I hope you will not thus rashly increase the unhappy Number of such; but will give due Attention to what I have said; for I can have no View, but that of discharging the Duty of

Your loving Father.

(Letter LXIII. To a Daughter in a Country Town, who encourages the Address of a Subaltern [A Case too frequent in Country Places])

When corresponding with sons, parents never address the same issues. Young men discuss matters of courtship with their prospective fathers-in-law (e.g., Letter XIII), with their brothers (Letter IX) or aunts (Letter LXXVII-LXXVIII). Instead in letters sent to or from their parents (and we may add their uncles to this list), the topics dealt with range from general advice on conduct (e.g., Letter VII. Advice from a Father to a young Be-

²⁴ Letter XXIV, From the Daughter to her Mother, in Excuse for her Neglect.

ginner, what Company to chuse, and how to behave in it or Letter VIII. General Rules for agreeable Conversation in a young Man. From a Father to a Son) to appeals to quit harmful habits (Letter XXXVI. A Father to a Son, to dissuade him from the Vice of Drinking to Excess) to letters composed to caution the young man against choosing the wrong profession (Letter XLVIII. The Father's Answer, setting forth the Inconveniencies and Disgrace attending the Profession of a Player). Example (2) comes from a father-to-son letter:

(2) Think seriously of these Things, and in time resolve on such a Course as may bring Credit to yourself, Justice to all you deal with, Peace and Pleasure to your own Mind, Comfort to your Family; and which will give at the same time the highest Satisfaction to

Your careful and loving Father.

(Letter LX. From a Father to a Son, on his Negligence in his Affairs)

The two examples of letters sent by two loving fathers, one writing to his daughter (1) and the other one to his son (2), deal with different topics (affairs of heart in (1) vs. business affairs in (2)). Yet it can be argued that the ways in which the two fathers give advice to their children on how to tackle important challenges in life are very similar. Children are asked to reflect on the terrible consequences of their misconduct, as well as on their fathers' anxiety and preoccupation about their future. Children are urged to rethink their behaviour by following simple and effective rules laid out by the fathers ("shake off the idle Habits you have contracted, quit unprofitable Company, and unseasonable Recreations, and apply to your Counting-house with Diligence", Letter LX). As such, these letters represent excellent examples of didactic literature whose goal is to transmit norms of proper social conduct, in this case, from parents to children. And, judging by the answer written by the negligent son to his loving and indulgent father, the teaching is quickly absorbed:

(3) Your letter came so seasonably upon this, that I hope it will not want the desired Effect; and as I thank God it is not yet too late, I am resolved to take another Course with myself and my Affairs, that I may avoid the ill Consequences you so judiciously forewarn me of, and give to my Family and Friends the Pleasure they so well deserve at my Hands; and particularly that Satisfaction to so good a Father, which is owing to him, by

His most dutiful Son.

(LETTER LXI. The Son's grateful Answer)

At this point I would like to argue that the exemplification of normative behaviour is not limited to the body of the letter, but continues in the subscriptions. As already observed, parents' closing formulae do not vary between mothers or fathers who write to either daughters or sons. Most importantly, what remains unchanged are the roles that the closing formulae force upon the senders: while children are expected to present themselves as obedient by using the deference formula *your (most/ever) dutiful Daughter/Son*, parents are called to express love and affection for their children. The role and the duties of a parent are explicitly acknowledged by Betsy's father in example (1) above: "for I can have no View, but that of discharging the Duty of / *Your loving Father*". In this example, as well as in examples (2) and (3) given above, Richardson opts for run-on conclusions, i.e. "subscriptions growing out of the letter's last sentence", that were fashionable in that period (Bannet 2005: 66). Transformed into a prepositional phrase and formally attached to the body of the letter, the meaning-making potential of the formula as an integral element of the message is further reinforced.²⁵ As a result, the the didactic message conveyed by the formulae is

²⁵ For reasons of space, the extent to which run-on subscriptions can contribute to the meaning-making process cannot be discussed here. One example will have to suffice: in LETTER CLXVI (From a Lady to her false Lover, who after having brav'd all his Friends Expostulations, at last is persuaded to abandon her for another of larger Fortune) the sender concludes her letter in the following way: "For I am not your Enemy,

made more transparent. Not only do subscriptions in *Familiar Letters* inculcate the duty of obedience and deference in the children, but they also aim to teach the older generation about the true virtues of a good parent: love and indulgence above all. What has to be stressed here is that the values of affectionate parenthood are promoted in *Familiar Letters* as a response to situations where children are guilty of violating norms of proper conduct (e.g., by choosing a wrong kind of suitor in example 1). The caring parent is not allowed to turn her or his back on the offender, which is exactly what an elder brother does in Letter X (An elder to an extravagant younger Brother).

By recurring to the same set of pre-modifiers, variations of *your* + (modifier) + *KT* encode cultural scripts of model behaviour for dutiful children and indulgent parents alike, to be disseminated among and imitated by the readers of *Familiar Letters*. Examples of subscriptions whose function is prescriptively didactic can also be found in letters where a variation of the standard formula *your* + (modifier) + *Servant* are used. There are forty-four occurrences of this standardised closing in *Familiar Letters* (with *Servant* as the single head noun, see Table 4), which include its fifteen different variations, as illustrated in Table 5:

Table 5: Variations of *your* + (modifier) + *Servant* formulae

Structure			Example
Your	humble	Servant	Letter XX. From the Father, in Answer to the young Gentleman.

tho' you deserve not that I should style myself / Your Friend." Here the closing formula maintains its text-constitutive function at the same time as it works as a building block of a powerful statement. I completely agree with one of the reviewers who pointed out how fascinating the mechanism of run-on subscriptions is.

Your	very humble	Servant	Letter I. To a Father, against putting a Youth of but moderate Parts to a Profession that requires more extensive Abilities.
Your	most humble	Servant	Letter XLII. To a Country Correspondent, modestly requesting a Balance of Accounts between them.
Your	obliged humble	Servant	Letter XXXV. Recommending a Nursery-maid.
Your	most obedient	Servant	Letter XXXI. Recommending a Superior Man-Servant.
Your	most obedient humble	Servant	Letter XXXIV. Recommending a Chamber-maid.
Your	most obliged humble	Servant	Letter CII. From a Town-Tenant to his Landlord, excusing Delay of Payment.
Your	most devoted humble	Servant	Letter XIV. To the Daughter (on the Father's Allowance) apprising her of his intended Visit.
Your	most obliged and obedient	Servant	Letter LXXI. A modest Lover desiring an Aunt's Favour to her Niece.
Your	faithful humble	Servant	Letter LI. On the same Occasion. (To a Friend on his Recovery from a dangerous Illness.)
Your	most faithful and obliged humble	Servant	Letter CX. The Friend's Answer, accepting the kind Offer.
Your	highly obliged and humble	Servant	Letter LIX. In Answer to the preceding. (Letter LVIII. To a Friend, on Occasion of his not answering his Letters)
Your	affectionate humble	Servant	Letter CXL. To a Gentleman of Fortune, who has Children, dissuading him from a Second Marriage with a Lady much younger than himself.
Your	for ever-obliged, and affectionate humble	Servant	Letter XXI. From the young Gentleman to his Mistress on her Arrival at her Father's.
Your	repentant and obliged	Servant	Letter XXXVIII. From an Apprentice to his Master, begging Forgiveness for a great Misdemeanor

This type of conventionalised noun phrase is common in specific categories of letters. The main category is represented by letters that stage business, as well as business-like interactions, conducted by interlocutors who are not related (or, in the case of letters of courtship, who are not related at

that point in time). Variations of *your* + (modifier) + *Servant* subscription are found, for instance, in letters of recommendation (also known as letters of character), addressed to the prospective employer (e.g., XXXV); letters exchanged between suitors and fathers of young ladies, negotiating matters of courtship and marriage (XX); letters expressing one's opinion and dispensing advice (CXL), as well as business letters proper (CII). Usage of these highly standardised, formulaic subscriptions (see Table 5 for examples) clearly conforms to epistolary conventions laid out by social protocols of deference. When it comes to the choice of pre-modifiers, also formulae with *Servant* as head noun make use of a limited number of routinised options (with *humble*, *obedient*, *obliged*, *faithful*, *affectionate* and *devoted* among the most frequent ones), a pattern that has already been observed in the case of *your* + (modifier) + KT structure.

In terms of their functions it can be assumed that these standardised subscriptions fulfil predominantly the text-constitutive function (see Section 2). However, the didactic function emerges, once again, in (4) below:

(4) What is past I cannot help; but for what is to come, I do promise, if God gives me Health and Power, that my Actions shall testify for me how much I am, good Sir,

Your repentant and obliged Servant.

(Letter XXXVIII. From an Apprentice to his Master, begging Forgiveness for a great Misdemeanor.)

The insertion of *repentant* as a pre-modifier to *Servant* is a move aiming to reinforce the message of penitence conveyed by the letter and to promote a particular model of behaviour – a penitent young man in this case. The variation of the closing formula transforms the subscription from a formulaic, conventional element into a powerful didactic tool for dissemination of cultural scripts.

4.2. Group 2 formulae: compressed subscriptions

Group 2 formulae, as already mentioned, are only found in 17 out of 162 letters in Richardson's miscellany. The inventory of subscriptions in 2.1 sub-group (variations of the structure *yours affectionately*, a sub-group that corresponds to Type 2 formulae in Tieken-Boon van Ostade's categorisation) includes the following occurrences:

Yours affectionately (Letter CLX. From a Country Gentleman in Town, to his Brother in the Country, describing a publick Execution in London);

Yours most affectionately (Letter CLXIX. From one Brother to another, on the rash Marriage of a beloved Daughter of one of them, to a profligate young Fellow);

Your truly affectionate, &c. (Letter XLVI. To a young Trader generally in a Hurry in Business, advising Method as well as Diligence);

Your most affectionate, &c. (Letter IX. An elder to a younger Brother, who is in Love with a young Lady of great Gaiety, &c.);

Yours ever, most affectionately (Letter CLXVII. From a Gentleman to his Lady, whose Overniceness in her House, and uneasy Temper with her Servants, make their Lives uncomfortable);

Your's most faithfully (Letter CIX. An Offer of Assistance to a Friend who has received great Losses by a Person's Failure);

Your faithful, &c. (Letter CXXVII. Her Answer.);

Sincerely yours (Letter CXLIII. Against a second Marriage, where there are Children on one Side, and a Likelihood of more)²⁶

Looking at who the senders in these examples from *Familiar Letters* are it may be justifiable to conclude that brothers writing to each other (CLX, CLXIX, IX) or male encoders in general (uncle to nephew in XLVI, husband to wife in CLXVII, male interlocutors in CIX and CXLIII) tend to

²⁶ In these group also belong such idiosyncratic uses of the formulae as, for example, "Your unkindly used, &c." (Letter CXXI. To a Friend, on a Breach of Promise in not returning Money lent in his Exigence) or "Your Celestial, &c." (Letter LXXXIX. Ridiculing a romantick Rhapsody in Courtship). While the former helps to emphasise the sender's strong feeling of having been let down by a friend, the latter mocks epistolary conventions with its disrespectful and potentially offensive use of the subscription.

give preference to abbreviated formulae. But with only a handful of examples available, it would be too ambitious to claim to be able to identify any certain patterns. However, in addition to the presence of several variations, it can be noted that examples of hybrid formulae, as in subscriptions that combine elements from the two main groups, Group 1 and Group 2 formulae (see Table 2), are also present (italics have been added to mark elements typical of Group 2 subscriptions):

I am, very sincerely, / Your Friend and Servant. (Letter XLIII. In Answer to the preceding);

[...] and so can only say, I am sorry I have it not in my Power to shew you how *sincerely I am* / Your most humble Servant. (Letter CXVIII. On the same Subject);

And that you'll believe me to be, *unfeignedly,* / Your obliged humble Servant. (Letter XLV. In Answer to the preceding).

Letter XLIII is a reply sent to comply with the request of the sender's correspondent from the country to settle the balance of their accounts; Letter CXVIII offers an example of a polite refusal to lend money, while Letter XLV deals with a business-related situation. What these three letters have in common is the pressure on the three encoders to deal with a given sensitive situation in the most diplomatic way, protecting the future of the business relationship. This may explain the need to emphasise the encoder's sincerity, so as to signal the willingness to maintain the relationship. If that was indeed what guided Richardson's choice of formulae in these specific cases, it would once again confirm his extraordinary awareness of how nuances of meaning could be inscribed in formulaic epistolary elements.

5. *Conclusions*

When in 1781 Lady Mary Hamilton, a governess in the royal household, was presented with the difficult task of writing a resignation letter to her

employer, Queen Charlotte, in its (only surviving) draft version she worded her subscription as “Your Majesties most Dutiful,/Faithful, & most Respectful/ Servant”. Hamilton then revised the subscription to “Your Majesties most Faithful, & most Dutiful / Servant” in the final version of the letter that was sent to the Queen (Garnder 2017).²⁷ We may speculate on the importance of deleting ‘most respectful’ and changing the word order for ‘most dutiful’ and ‘most faithful’, by ascribing this revision either to oversensitivity to epistolary conventions, or the psychological pressure to word the request of quitting the Queen’s employment in the most convincing and, at the same time, the least face-threatening way. Whether it was the former or the latter (or both), this rare example of a draft containing a revision of the closing formula shows that these formulaic elements were carefully and meticulously considered and reconsidered by the encoders. In other words, the selection of the appropriate formula was not always a mechanical, routinised task of adhering to epistolary conventions. In the present study an inventory of eighteenth-century epistolary closing formulae has been extracted from Samuel Richardson’s *Familiar Letters*, a miscellany with a special position within the English letter-writer genre. The analysis of the patterns of usage of these formulaic elements has revealed how these can assume multiple pragmatic functions and contribute to the meaning-making process as an integral component of the message encoded in the letter.

²⁷ “Letter from Mary Hamilton to Queen Charlotte, 25 June 1781”, Mary Hamilton Papers, HAM/1/1/2/8, The University of Manchester Library. I would like to thank Anne Gardner for kindly providing me with the details of this intriguing example.

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