

Problems in Intercultural Communication Related to the Verbal Dimension

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Verbal communication is not a simple process aimed at the mere expression of thoughts and opinions. By virtue of this complexity, it is important for both interlocutors to establish an active exchange, free of prejudice, that is empathic and supportive. Let's briefly take a look at the principal elements that regulate verbal communication.

1 Language: Tone of Voice and Rate of Speech

Internationally, Italians are perceived (Gannon 1994) as often speaking in a rather high tone of voice as a sign of participation and engagement, at least in informal contexts and above all in social situations. This fact groups the Italians and Sudanese together as the Sudanese also adopt a 'high' tone of voice, although data analysis shows how the use of tone "depends also on the person that is in front of you", the reason for which one attempts to lower their voice in the presence of "elderly people or with one's boss". For the Sudanese, an elevated tone of voice "is not problematic", as indeed it would seem not to be for Italians. Contrary to Italians who use more elevated tones also during conflictual verbal exchanges, for the Sudanese it seems that a high tone "is not used to quarrel", especially with someone more senior in age, as it is a "sign of bad manners".

Greetings for the Sudanese, both Muslims and non-Muslims, represent an almost ritualistic moment: the exchange of a peaceful greeting takes

place (*as-salaam* ^ʿ*alekum*) the question “how are you / is everything ok?” (*keyf / tamām? Keyf miyya-miyya?*), is asked, and concludes by thanking god in the event of an affirmative response (*al-hamdulillah*). *Al-hamdulillah* can also directly substitute a positive answer (fine, thank you), which is implicit in “thank God”. On the whole, the exchange is characterised by quite elevated tones and with great emotional expressiveness.

Overall, the velocity with which one speaks in Sudan is perceived by foreigners as “high” or “very high”, so much so that the request to speak slower is perceived in a positive way, without creating any embarrassment. Despite the high tones and quick rate of speech, interruptions and speaking over the interlocutor is unanimously not “considered to be agreeable and polite behaviour”, which is why “it is better to let the interlocutor finish first” and then express your opinion.

This factor can cause issues of an intercultural nature, as instead, Italians speak and interrupt one another in situations of non-conflictual dialogue without generating any type of problem (see Gannon 1994; Balboni, Caon 2015). For the Sudanese, Italians often tend to interrupt and speak over their interlocutor. Therefore, in this case, the communicative ‘risk’ is that Italians unintentionally appear rude. Despite the above tendency, there are also variations within Sudan based on the nature of the context, formal or informal, the latter being more flexible.

2 Word and Topic Choice

Topic and word choice is a rather delicate element in any social context, whether it be formal or informal. Every culture demonstrates varying degrees of openness regarding certain lexical fields, some considered taboo in one context, yet not in another.

2.1 Taboo Words

The relational limits set by taboos are very important as they can influence the evolution of a relationship and can even drastically suspend the flow of communication.

This aspect of intercultural communication could take on greater significance in a country like Sudan, which is led by *Sharia* and its guiding principles (cf. in this volume Lobasso, box *Sharia*).

On the whole, in Sudan the most taboo topics are tied to the private sphere; sex or anything that is considered personal, like “disease... gender differences, homosexuality and money”. In particular, data analysis highlights how these taboos are mainly “social” as, for example, “sex and homosexuality is openly spoken about only between close friends”.

Therefore, there is a gap between communication in intimate settings and communication among acquaintances or within institutional frameworks, where the latter respects social norms deriving from taboos.

Italy tends to be reluctant to deal with a series of 'taboo' topics (like homosexuality or certain illnesses, such as tumours and mental or eating disorders). Thanks to an increased sensibility in promoting both social and scholastic trainings and educational activities that raise awareness, it appears as if these 'collective fears' are slowly being overcome and that there is more willingness to tackle previously unspoken about topics. Instead, while in Sudan illness does not seem to be one of the foremost taboo topics, it is also not given much importance as it involves factors of cultural and religious origin.

2.2 Specialised Terminology

Specialised terminology can, depending on the country of relevance, come up regularly during discussions of a technical – scientific nature, as if the use of this terminology reflects the desire to express belonging to a group in an established field (ie. the medical sciences).

For example, in recent decades, Italians have definitely increased their use of specialised terminology and Anglicisms. Nowadays, Italians refer to an ideal situation as a 'win-win situation' and they use the expressions 'know-how' and 'knowledge'. Legal language has adopted the terms '*bullismo*', 'stalking' and 'mobbing'. Companies increasingly refer to the lack of staff as '*sotto (under) staffato*', deriving from the English expression, 'under staffed', while also using the term 'staff meeting'. Furthermore, from French we have taken common terms like 'chic', 'routine', 'atelier', 'bricolage', 'brioche', and it is from the French that we have the words 'biberon' (bottle), 'brochure' and 'bidet', among many others.

Overall, the Sudanese rarely use specialised terms, referring more frequently to the use of dialecticisms, even for medical terminology. However, we can find the presence of Anglicisms and Italianisms in the spoken word. In this sense, colonisation, like importation and globalisation, has introduced a slight Anglicisation of some terms so that it is not unusual for the Sudanese to say 'mobile phone or mobile' (instead of '*haatif mahmuul*'), or '*tilifon*' (instead of '*haatif*'), and 'computer' (instead of '*hasuub*') or '*yalla go*' (come on, let's go!).

There are many words in common with the Italian language: *torta* (cake), *salsa* (sauce), *sala* (room) and *bastone* (stick or cane). In addition, there are instances of clear assonance: *ma'kkaruun* (maccheroni), *za'fraan* (zafferano in Italian or saffron in English), *qutun* (*cotone* in Italian or cotton in English), *zabiib* (zibibbo), *limuun* (*limone* in Italian or lemon in English), *salata* (*insalata* in Italian or salad in English), even if in Sudan salad is equivalent to a mix

of produce like tomatoes, cucumbers and onion. There are other variations of Italian terms in relation to weight, measurements and precious stones.

2.3 Titles and Honorifics

In Sudan titles and honorifics are widely used and appreciated; their usage seems to indicate social status. While in a professional English context, titles are reduced to 'Mr.' and 'Ms.' (Lobasso, Pavan, Caon 2007), in Sudan titles and honorifics precede first names (usually two names are included: the individual's first name followed by the father's first name: Mohammad Ahmad etc.).

Although archaic, in Italy certain titles are still used today. For example, in the written word a dean is 'Magnificent', an ambassador is 'His Excellency', a royal descendant is 'His Serene Highness', and in certain cases the aristocrat can be identified by their noble title (The Prince Colonna, the Marquis del Grillo, etc.). This fondness for titles and honorifics is common in both countries. While in Italy it is not unusual for a Roman parking attendant to call anyone who passes through the parking lot 'doctor', perhaps in hopes of obtaining a more substantial tip or out of mere politeness, in Sudan the use of 'excellency' seems very widespread. "When the right title for a person is unknown, you cannot go wrong with 'excellency'; no one will take offense".

With the exception of these few examples, in formal Sudanese situations, it is always good to put a title before a first name (Prof. Mohammad), while surnames are used less in comparison to Italy where the title precedes the surname, like *Ing. Rossi* ('Ing.' signifying the title of engineer). In general, as far as titles are concerned, Italy is in line with Sudan, with the exception that in Italy the title 'doctor' is generic and belongs to any university graduate, while in Sudan and in other countries, doctor is reserved for physicians and graduates that hold a PhD. In Italy, a classic formal presentation is *Dott. Rossi*, if then Dr. Rossi has a specialisation in a particular discipline, it is common to use it (*Ing. Rossi* (engineer), *Avv. Rossi* (lawyer), *Arch. Rossi* (architect), *Notary Rossi*, etc.).

Undoubtedly, the Italians and Sudanese highly appreciate the use of titles, honorifics and other forms of courtesy. In Sudan, for example, "when you are in the car, the most important person in a hierarchy sits alongside the driver". This is true also in Italy. If there is a supervisor and two colleagues of equal rank, it is good etiquette to offer the front seat to the supervisor and leave the rear seats for the others. It is undoubtedly difficult for the leader, unless he is particularly young, to leave the front seat and sit next to one of his subordinates.

As for informal contexts, however, Sudan is characterised by very affectionate interactions. It is not unusual to address someone as "*Ya habiibi / habiibt*" (translates literally to hi love or treasure, to be used among close

friends), while “*Ya Sadiiq/a*” (hi friend) is extended to less intimate acquaintances. In particular, *ya sadiiq* also reoccurs in questions between strangers, for example when asking for directions (used by the outsider or foreigner). A commonly used phrase could be “*ma^s as-salaama, ya sadiiq*”, etc.

2.4 Formal and Informal

A fundamental aspect of communication is linked to the discernment between formality and informality. It goes without saying that being too direct where a more indirect approach is expected risks creating a communicative fracture. In England, for example, a question is formulated in a very ‘polite’ and courteous way. An English person would never say “pass me the water” but would introduce the question with a very polite phrase like “would you mind / would you please” etc. Little if nothing changes between formal and informal contexts. Furthermore, “please” is always used, as is “thank you / you are welcome”.

Italy is also characterised and internationally perceived as a romantic, long-winded country of formality (Gannon 1994; Balboni 2007). Requests are traditionally made by Italians using variations of “please” or forms similar to “would you like some water?”, followed by “thank you / you are welcome”. Sudan would seem to follow the same model of communication, characterised by generalised politeness, both in formal, informal, familial and friendly relationships. In comparison to Italians, there is a difference in that “the Sudanese are very polite during a communicative exchange, but also very direct”. The grammatical structure “*hal turid / turidin*” (would you like) can be substituted by a direct offer of tea and/or coffee, water and anything else that would make a guest feel at ease. The Sudanese “welcome you with ‘*tfaddal/I*’ (please, sit down), and a table with water, tea or coffee is always ready”. This cultural trait, with some exceptions, goes for both formal and informal relationships.

In direct communicative exchanges, contrary to Italy where relational formality is revealed in the distinction between *tu* (‘you’ used with a peer, friend, family member or person of inferior age) and *Lei* (‘you’ used with a stranger, older person, authority figure), in Sudan only *tu* is used (*anta/anti*). In very exceptional cases, in the presence of a particularly illustrious person (president, etc.), the Sudanese will express maximum respect using *voi* (plural form of ‘you’, as in ‘you all’), similar to the south of Italy, especially in the areas between Naples and Salerno where students still use *voi* when addressing a professor, with the verb conjugated accordingly (“Professor, would you (all) like a coffee?”).

In general, when interacting with the Sudanese, “it is better to show respect but to be informal”. Respect is signified by a diplomatic, neutral, calm and peaceful communication style, free of insults and yelling, even if there is a disagreement.

3 Problems in Communication Related to Grammar

At times, grammar can create problems in intercultural communication when it conveys values. Let's look at some examples in detail.

3.1 Superlatives and Comparatives

Like Italians, the Sudanese have no reservations in utilising superlatives and comparatives, both in everyday conversations to describe places, objects or people, and during informal and formal presentations ("*mashuur/a giddan*", "*gamiil/a giddan*", very famous, very beautiful, etc.). Being rather proud, the Sudanese tend to use both superlatives and comparatives, appreciating these forms for general compliments regarding their country, culture, and not least, in reference to themselves.

3.2 Verb Tenses

There is not any particular difference in tense usage between the Sudanese and Italians. As a general rule all tenses are used, albeit standard differences between "*kul / i*" (eat) used with children and "*maashi*" (let's go!) used with someone that you know well. This is as common in Sudan as in Italy. Yet, while classical Arabic, employed above all in academia and mass media, applies every verbal tense in its proper grammatical construction, dialectal Arabic "more often uses the present tense and is simplified".

However, there is a particularity regarding the use of the future. We must start with the premise that the Sudanese expression *إن شاء الله* *inshallah* is the principle term used at the end of a sentence and even more so when talking about the future. The Sudanese, "not knowing how the future will be because they do not know what will happen tomorrow", usually end phrases using (إن شاء الله, God willing), to express the hope that an event, under the guidance of Allah, will come to pass, as God wants. Also for the future simple tense, the difference between classical Arabic and dialectal Arabic emerges, the latter preferring the use of the present tense followed by "*bukra*" (*ana maashi bukra... inshallah*: Literal translation: I walk/go + tomorrow, dialectal Arabic to say "tomorrow I will go... God willing").

3.3 Negation

The way in which a Sudanese person understands negation is a very important factor to be aware of in order to be able to interpret some events that could otherwise be misinterpreted. While generally the relationship between Italians and negation is linked more to personal characteristics – as far as Italy does not belong to the group of countries “to directly negate” – for the Sudanese “it is impolite to say ‘no’”. Abrupt refusal is perceived as a profound lack of respect, which is why the Sudanese could say ‘yes’ and then express the ‘no’ through concrete action. For the Sudanese, responding negatively “represents a lack of respect”, as negation is considered “rude and unnatural” and therefore “bad manners”.

This difficulty with negation seems to be of a cultural nature, difficult to eradicate and, at the same time, important to be aware of in order to avoid the embarrassment related to a commitment made that doesn’t respect procedures or an agreed upon time frame.

The Sudanese difficulty with negative answers emerges in the example of asking for directions: “They really feel that it is difficult to say ‘no’, or ‘I don’t know,’ so it is possible that they will say yes and perhaps make you take the wrong street”.

3.4 Communication Problems Related to Text Structure

The Anglo-Saxon text is concise and direct, usually breaking up passages into many short interdependent sentences. On the contrary, the Italian text is more similar to the Russian. It is long-winded, digressive, full of examples, references and descriptions. It is generally very difficult for an Italian to synthesise a concept without including preambles and digressions. Even the German text has a complex structure, rich in subordinate clauses, but without allowing for too many digressions and approximations (Balboni 2007). The Sudanese written text generally reflects the ‘Middle Eastern’ structure and therefore a less concise and more verbose, poetic and descriptively rich style. Obviously there are differences related to the nature of the text, whether it be epistolary, academic or professional, but in all of these cases, the main emerging features are “repetitiveness”, “religious references”, as well as terminological and conceptual redundancy.

The main difference between written texts and oral communication is the use of language: either standard or dialectal Arabic. Oral speech appears to be characterised by greater explanatory length. For example, “if you have to ask for a favour, it starts from the dawn of time, how are you doing, everything alright? Listen...”. So, in the end, the written text appears slightly less verbose than the oral one.

3.5 Forms of Courtesy

As we have seen in the paragraph dedicated to the distinction between “Formal and Informal” (§ 2.4), the Arabic language does not include *Lei* (‘you’ used with a stranger, older person, authority figure), but instead relies on *tu* (‘you’ used with a peer, friend, family member or person of inferior age). Exceptions only apply to this pattern when speaking with a person of particular importance (president, etc.) who would be referred to using *voi* (plural form of you, as in ‘you all’), with the verb conjugated accordingly.

Unlike Italian and some other cultures that demarcate the formal from the informal by using *Lei* as a sign of respect and courtesy (the young person who interacts with the adult, etc.), in Sudan honorifics offer a valid alternative. For example, “*hadratak/ik*” (Your Lordship) can be directed to a professor but also an elder, “*sa’aadatuka/ki*” (Your Excellency) is reserved for the military (and also retirees), both of which are followed by the verb conjugated in the second person singular (male/female). Other than the generosity previously discussed with “*tfaddal/i*”, the Sudanese use other forms of courtesy to express their kindness and respect, like when “giving compliments and using flattery”, “in greetings”, in their absolute respect of parents, in their general peaceful behaviour, and in a curious acceptance of foreigners. Italy is also famous for its tendency to flatter and, not surprisingly, the term “*salamelecco*” (flattery) has a clear cultural relation to Islam as the root itself “*salaam-lek*” (peace be with you), is a known Sudanese (Arabic) salute of profound respect, peace and love.

There is a difference between the two cultures in question: while Italy tends to be obsequious even with apologies, the Sudanese “apologise but always justify”, because in general, “they have difficulty apologising directly”. We must always keep in mind how the Sudanese (Muslim) binds any act or deed to the will of God (*inshallah*) and among the most commonly used terms, *إن شاء الله* (*inshallah*, God willing), *الحمد لله* (*al-hamdulillah*, thank God), *ما شاء الله* (*ma shaa’ Allāh*, God willing), there is always *معلش* (*malesh*, a middle ground between being sorry, expressing patience and confirming that no problematic situation has occurred).

This cultural characteristic created the IBM acronym (Obayani 2014), which originated in Libya and spread throughout North Africa and the Middle East, and stands for: *Inshallah* (God willing), *Bukra* (tomorrow in dialectical Arabic), and *Malesh* (have patience, no problem). It should be noted that although this model praises Allah and may seem representative of Muslims, it would appear that it is also widespread among religious minorities in these cultures (Coptics, etc.).

If we want to conclude with a brief cultural reference, we can also refer to the Italian expression “*ci vediamo domani*” or “see you tomorrow, if God wants / if God likes / if God permits”, which binds the concept of the near future with the uncertain and unknown sphere of divine will.

4 Communicative Moves

The concept of a move, as described by Balboni, presupposes a vision of communication as a “chess game” (Balboni 1999). The exceptionality of the communicative moves when set in an interactive context lies in the possibility that the victory of one does not mean the defeat of the other (Caon 2007).

To be effective, intercultural communication should be characterised by a culturally-based interpretative effort, capable of understanding, pondering and re-elaborating information received in the verbal and nonverbal forms, removed from any prejudice. The main communicative moves are twenty and, as mentioned, are evaluated in different ways depending on the culture of origin. The importance of an intercultural analysis like this one is that it is able to provide interpretative insights on how to observe oneself and others through different points of view, while also knowing how to decentralise oneself when interpreting communicative acts.

4.1 Attacking and Reprimanding

Attacking and reprimanding are direct moves that can be interpreted differently within a given context. The attack externalises thought towards an adversary, while reprimanding is reminiscent of a more closed, protected, familiar and/or professional context. Attacking a competitor is comparable to an ‘enemy’, while one would scold a nephew or blame a colleague.

Italians tend not to attack, but if they must, they do so in a roundabout way in order to disguise and soften both moves (Balboni, Caon 2015).

In the wake of Italians, the Sudanese do not like to attack or reprimand and, consequently, do not like to be attacked or reprimanded. Both moves are therefore evaluated negatively, both in the input and output phases.

4.2 Disagreement and Taking a Stance

Disagreement and taking a stance are characteristic of all mankind despite cultural and social differences. While an English person will disagree covertly by approving first then bringing something in to question, “yes... it could be... but”, a Greek, preferring clarity, will go directly to the main point, dissenting and disclosing their opinion. The Sudanese negatively perceive both moves. Disagreement is acknowledged “with great politeness”. Furthermore, both behaviours are to be constricted to one’s inner circle.

On the contrary, Italians, while previously defined as not being fond of attacking, explicitly disagree and take a stance. They do this also for defence. This feature is more prevalent among youth and in the media. If

the first group does so in the face of opposing cultural values (for example, the parental model, etc.), the second seems to do so as a pro-audience strategy and for anything else that could provoke the circulation or “sharing” of information.

4.3 Demanding and Prohibiting

Demanding and explicit prohibition as the remaining communicative moves follow a precise social scheme which varies from culture to culture. Generally, in English, the imperative is perceived as impolite, and hides behind a ‘polite’ form, “would you mind opening the door? / would you mind keeping quiet?” while the Greeks, in line with what’s already been seen, are more direct and use fewer pleasantries.

The Sudanese consider both moves inappropriate, especially giving orders: “Never in front of someone, if anything it is a more private act”. On the other hand, prohibition seems more acceptable, “in relation to role and age”. The Italians, similarly to the English, tend to disguise an imposition behind a suggestive form, “what do you think about checking to see if the package arrived in the reception?” or “I strongly suggest that you not do business with that person!”, leaving one to understand from the nonverbal elements the masked authority behind the courteous statement.

4.4 Interrupting

Interrupting in Sudan is not perceived or experienced favourably, being something “that is not done”, which could annoy the interlocutor; it should be avoided by waiting for one’s turn to speak, even in the event of a disagreement. On the contrary, Italians are famous for this, like the Greeks, and they may seem chaotic, or in other words, “a bit rude”. Like we’ve already said, the tendency to interrupt is typical of Italians and often assumes a collaborative tone with those who are speaking, as if the discourse was being co-constructed (Caon 2007).

4.5 Asking Questions

For some cultures, asking questions appears to be a neutral move, like in Italy or England, while for other cultures it may represent an obstacle for communication. The Sudanese culture negatively interprets this communicative move which is linked to admitting that one does not understand, and is experienced as a threat to their strong sense of pride. On the contrary, Italians are not particularly resistant to questions, “excuse me, can you

re-explain point B", sometimes considered necessary in order to get more in-depth explanations, insight, or it can simply be used in a strategic way to gain more time when processing an answer.

4.6 Summarising and Checking Comprehension

Summarising a concept that has recently been presented is not considered negative by the Sudanese, however, one must always take into consideration "the means, the context and the interlocutor". This move can be defined as neutral. It can be welcomed, for example, by a professor or employer and would not be unpleasant even if it came from a friend/relative.

Checking what has been understood takes on a different tone, being generally considered negative by the Sudanese. It is as if, implicit in the very act of checking, the fact that the interlocutor has not understood is being masked. On the whole, "if the person has the power to do so, for example, the professor at the university who asks the student to reformulate the concept to check their understanding, that's ok", suggesting that it is not a welcome practice in normal peer-to-peer conversations.

4.7 Changing the Subject, Postponing and/or Giving up on a Discussion, Keeping Quiet

These moves can be interpreted as defeatist and indicative of failure when, instead, if regulated appropriately in a given context, they can encourage reconsideration, change of strategy and may mitigate conflict.

In Italy, changing the subject, postponing and/or giving up on a conversation are, in principle, strategies aimed at disguising a communicative defeat; however, if those who postpone and set the pace of a conversation are in a dominant position, such moves may involve power dynamics.

Silence for Italians has different meanings based on the context. This move should not always be considered negatively, like when accompanying an 'asymmetrical' silence linked to a subordinate position (a reverential silence of utmost respect, the mortified silence of a secretary who, with an involuntary click, cancelled the CEO's agenda, a resigned silence). In addition, silence exists as an act of force, we think of silent consent or silence as an implicit refusal (the CEO controls the pace of a conversation and/or reacts with silence at a subordinate's request). At times, silence assumes value only when linked to a temporal dimension: "I'll remain silent, I'll think about it, I'll reformulate the concept and then, with a clear head, I'll give an answer". In Sudan all these moves are perceived positively. The Sudanese have no problems changing the subject, postponing a conversation, and/or remaining silent. In particular, silence could be a form of

respect, an admission of responsibility, as for the Sudanese “silence can even be an apology in disguise”.

4.8 Working Together, Cooperating, Proposing, Suggesting, and Coming to an Agreement

This group of moves has positive connotations in both cultures. The Italian graduate in search of their first job who is compiling a CV will write unequivocally “oriented to team-building”, “ability to work in groups”, and “excellent interpersonal skills” (although they have never worked before). These moves represent the secret ingredient for optimal and successful ‘team work’ and are all considered highly positive. This discourse remains basically the same for Sudan, where this group of communicative moves is unanimously considered ‘useful’ and ‘positive’.

4.9 Irony and Minimisation

An Italian can downplay serious communicative exchanges in order to gather courage or confidence. Italians minimise with words and gestures. Irony, however, as it can be misinterpreted as sarcasm, is less used, especially in formal contexts. But, irony, from a psychosocial point of view, if well measured, is appreciated and perceived as creative, while sarcasm is read negatively. In any case, if you are inclined to defuse a situation, be careful with irony. It is precisely this ‘borderline’ feature linked to sarcasm that makes it risky. The discourse is the same for both formal and informal contexts, for example, with friends.

The Sudanese rarely minimise and use irony. They do “downplay an exchange in their own way”. Recalling what was said previously about the IBM model (see § 4.3.5), the most commonly used structure could be “*malesh*”, “*bukra*” and “*inshallah*”: ‘darn it, I’m sorry’ (*malesh*), ‘we hope that this situation will be resolved, tomorrow’ (*bukra*) or ‘if God wants’ (*inshallah*). This way of thinking is due to the strong influence exerted by religion.

Box Malesh Syndrome

The resilient, patient and almost stoic attitude regarding life events, including those that are negative, materialises in the almost untranslatable and apotropaic expression, *malesh*. Here is a brief analysis:

Malesh – a colloquial term that in standard Arabic is equivalent to ‘no harm’ – is above all a life philosophy, variable and adaptable to many daily situations, translatable as something between ‘it does not matter’, ‘what a shame’, ‘there is no problem’, and ‘I’m sorry’.

Some examples?

In Khartoum there isn’t an Italian school? *Malesh*.

I haven’t met the deadline for a project? *Malesh*.

Arrived an hour late to an appointment in the office? *Malesh*.

That guy rear-ended me! *Malesh*.

Going up the stairs, they inadvertently pushed Caio: *Malesh*.

The streets are full of holes? *Malesh*.

Business is bad for now, what a mess! *Malesh*.

A careful observation of Sudanese (and general Arab) behaviour leads us to think that this trend is deeply rooted in local existential dynamics and that it can reveal much more about the culture. Using it in regards to life events, even the important ones, the ‘*malesh* way’ probably means much more than ‘darn / sorry / no problem’. In *malesh* there is resilience in the face of misfortune, tolerance for careless behaviour or an error committed by oneself or by an interlocutor. There is a self-indulgence which, at the highest levels, could signify a dull, perhaps existential indolence. In *malesh* there is the sacred and profane, spiritual and intellectual, resistance and weakness, pacifism and courage.

The ‘*malesh* way’ will be studied more, analysed and connected to a general theorisation that we could call, before more in-depth studies, ‘*Malesh Syndrome*’. Although there is still much to be discovered, Malesh Syndrome is a widespread trend. That is why, following this initial, brief reference, scholars from various academic backgrounds in the behavioural sciences will explore the concept to understand its most hidden and fascinating components and present it to a large-scale audience.

4.10 Defending Oneself

The Italian accused by their boss of having made an error, tends to defend themselves by making timid apologies and then, eventually, will fall into a profound silence in recognition of their own error and of their relationship as a subordinate.

The Sudanese seem not to move far from this model, “aware of the absolute power in the hands of a superior”. In the event of a serious delay in the office or a simple appointment, they could react by justifying it due to an occurrence outside of their control (broken alarm, car tire puncture, accident, cell phone dropped in a sewer, need to hospitalise a relative, etc.), or simply, by keeping silent when reproached. This is akin to an apology.

