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POLITENESS IN EARLY PTOLEMAIC PAPYRI: A FRAME-BASED APPROACH

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ABSTRACT: This paper deals with the expression of linguistic politeness in early Hellenistic documentary papyrus letters, through a data-oriented approach exploiting the notion of "frame" (cf. Terkourafi 2001), which accounts for politeness in terms of regular correlations between forms and contexts. The study focuses on a subset of epistolary types, i.e., business and administrative letters, recommendations and petitions, considering those situational and expressive features that make them distinct frames of interaction. Deviations from the frame of the petition within the corpus are then taken into account and evaluated in terms of impoliteness or rudeness.

KEYWORDS: Directive acts, face threats, frames, (im)politeness, language of papyri.

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1. Recent approaches to linguistic politeness generally reproach the Brown and Levinson (1987) model with neglecting the inherent relativity of the linguistic strategies that trigger polite attitudes in human relationships (cf. Culpeper 2011a for a survey of some recent alternative models).

In linguistic interactions, politeness judgements vary not only from one society to another, but also depending on the relation between the interlocutors and the context in which they act. In this view, Terkourafi (2001; 2008; 2009) offers an approach to politeness grounded on the analysis of actual contexts of interactions (i.e., "micro-contexts"), which are defined by the gender, age and social class of the interlocutors, as well as by their mutual relationship and the setting of the exchange. In this framework, politeness is defined in terms of the use of the "expected" form in a given situational context: the polite effect of a form then depends on its degree of "conventionality" in a "certain" context in order to achieve a "certain" illocutionary goal (cf. Terkourafi 2015, 15). Speakers judge as polite those forms that regularly recur in a given context, where, because of their frequency, they can lose their literal meaning and become polite formulas marking the speech act in question (cf. also Culpeper & Terkourafi 2017).

Because this model is grounded on the evaluation of concrete linguistic occurrences and their frequency in particular contexts of use, it is particularly promising for the study of linguistic politeness in corpus languages such as ancient languages (cf. Dickey 2016), especially when minimal contexts of interactions are singled out.

In this regard, Greek private papyrus letters[1], which provide instances of language use in everyday life, have given a unique impulse to historical pragmatics, and since they are often written in order to induce the addressee to take a particular action, they have particularly enriched our knowledge of the expression of the so-called "directive" speech acts (Searle 1969). The relevance of this act for the study of ancient Greek epistolary practice is suggested by the early sense itself of the word ἐπιστολή 'epistle, letter', which is related to the verb ἐπιστέλλω 'enjoin, command' (cf. Sarri 2018 on its lexical specialization)[2]. In particular, it was under the Ptolemies, in Hellenistic Egypt, that epistolary exchanges became increasingly common in the Greek tradition, as letters became bureaucratic instruments by means of which orders and injunctions of the central government spread into the periphery of the reign, and common people interacted with the authorities.

Directive acts can be perceived by addressees as threats to their freedom of action, which the addresser may try to mitigate by means of a polite attitude. Politeness consequently plays a crucial role in their linguistic expression: directives are complex interactions in which language conveys identity tensions between the interlocutors. Compared to Classical Greek, Hellenistic letters testify to a change in the strategies for expressing requests: while Classical Greek lacks a structured formulary for requests (cf. Dickey 2016, 239), these letters show a more fully articulated set of formulas, which vary according to the interactional context with the aim of mitigating the face-threat that can characterize the request (cf., e.g., Bruno 2020).

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[1] A distinction is conventionally made between private and public / official documents (cf. Palme 2011, 361). However, given the frequent overlaps between these two types (cf. Evans & Obbink 2010, 10), and in accordance with White (1986, 5), who argues for a more extensive use of the designation "private", in the present study letters by the administration and government and individual petitions to the authorities are considered as pieces of "private" correspondence alongside interactions between individuals.

[2] Cf. White (1986, 192) and the references therein, who refers to some passages of Herodotus and the tragedians where ἐπιστολή is used for an oral injunction. Cf. also Sarri (2018) for a discussion of these cases.

In accordance with the aim of the letter, the bulk of the papyri that have been preserved are generally categorized in types distinguished by clearly identifiable formulas. To write a letter means to use the formulaic conventions imposed by tradition under certain circumstances. In that respect, papyrus letters bear a strong similarity to the frames that Terkourafi (2001) identifies as the functional units of linguistic politeness research. A "frame" is the "combination of information about extralinguistic features of the situation and the (socio-culturally defined) appropriate use of language therein" (Terkourafi 2001, 3).

In this framework, this paper analyzes some peculiar formats of letters of the early Hellenistic stage in a small corpus of about fifty private papyrus letters from the third and the second centuries BCE taken from White (1986)[3], focusing on the situational and expressive aspects that make them peculiar frames of interaction. The letter types where the directive intent is more explicit (i.e., business and administrative letters, letters of recommendation and petitions) were particularly taken into account. Section 2 gives a survey of some recurrent strategies at work in some crucial components of these formats, i.e., the opening, the closure and the modulation of the requests in the body of the letter. Section 3 then focuses on some deviations encountered within the "frame" of the petition, evaluating the possible consequences on the politeness judgement of the addressee according to the sender's profile.

2. Documentary papyrus letters have a tripartite structure (i.e., opening, body and closure) marked by the extended use of standard formulae that vary according to the epistolary type[4].

Business and administrative letters between officers or employees giving instructions or reminding the receiver of deadlines are the most commonly encountered type: they testify to the complex set of hierarchical relationships on which the administration of the Ptolemaic reign was based. Intimate letters that aim only at preserving an affective relationship with the addressee are in fact very rare. Apparently, under the Ptolemies, people mainly wrote in order to obtain something from someone. Moreover, besides ordinary business and administrative communication, there are more targeted types, such as letters of recommendation, which aim at introducing someone to the addressee, or petitions, by which the sender asks the recipient to repair a wrong suffered. These types hardly fit the categorization of letters by the rhetors, such as the twenty-one types listed by the Pseudo-Demetrius or the forty epistolary styles by the Pseudo-Libanius, whose "sample letter descriptions are more appropriate for the literary letter tradition than for the documentary papyrus letter tradition" (White 1986, 202)[5]. However, scholars generally agree that the standardized format of these letters must be based on handbooks or models of writing aimed at instructing the sender —to paraphrase the Pseudo-Demetrius— "to write in the style fitting the particular circumstances" (cf., e.g., Poster 2007, 40). Each type displays distinct formulaic patterns for the opening and the clo-

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[3] This is generally considered as a "structured representative corpus for the purposes of linguistic analysis" (Porter & O'Donnell 2010, 294) according to both the body of epistolary types and the producers' profiles (cf. White 1986, 3). The translations of the passages are mostly taken from White (1986), except for P.Cair.Zen. I 59021 (in 4) and PSI V 538 (in 2 and 11), which are not included therein. All of them are provided with literal rephrasings of the original text when necessary.

[4] For a discussion of the formulas recurring within the papyrus letters, see, e.g., Exler (1923), Koskenniemi

(1956) and White (1986). Cf. also Bruno (2015), and Logozzo (2015), on some aspects of the variation encountered within Ptolemaic papyri.

[5] The Pseudo-Demetrius is the author of the *Epistolary Types*, which is a brief technical treatise comprising short letter models written and revised many times between the II BCE and the III CE. Later it was the Pseudo-Libanius' *Epistolary Styles* (IV CE), which with its forty epistolary styles testifies to the continuous evolution of epistolary theory (cf. Poster 2007 for a discussion).

sure, as well as for the introduction of the request in the body of the letter: it is the specific combination of these features that makes the writing appropriate to the diverse situations.

Letters of recommendation and petitions display a more standardized writing style compared to business and administrative letters. This corresponds to the different circumstances under which they occur: since business and administrative letters apply either to exchanges between equals or between superiors and inferiors, they cover a wider variety of situational contexts. Conversely, letters of recommendation are typical instances of symmetrical interaction between equals with "enough status to benefit the person recommended" (White 1986, 194), while petitions, where the sender appeals to a more influential addressee, typify an asymmetric interaction from low-to-high.

The petitions in particular display the major restrictions relative to each of the standard components of the letter. Unlike other formats, where in the *salutatio* opening of the message the name of the recipient regularly follows that of the sender (cf. 1a) and ἔρρωσο (lit. 'be healthy!') is the normal closure (cf. 1b), in petitions, the name of the sender usually follows that of the recipient in the *salutatio* (cf. 2a) and εὐτύχει (lit. 'be fortunate!') is the closure (cf. 2b).

(1a) P.Mich. I 10, 1; 257 BCE
Ἀντιμένης Ζήνωνι χαίρειν. 'Antimenes to Zenon greeting' (White 1986, no. 12)

(1b) P.Mich. I 10, 5; 257 BCE
ἔρρωσο. 'Good-bye' (White 1986, no. 12)

(2a) PSI V 538, 1-2; 3ʳᵈ ct. BCE
Ἀπολλωνίωι διοικητῆι χαίρειν Δημήτριος καὶ Πετεχῶν δεκαδάρχαι τῶν | ἐμ Φιλαδελφείαι Ἀράβων. 'To Apollonios *dioikḗtḗs*, greetings from Demetrios and Petechonsis, *dekadárchai* of the Arabs in Philadelphia.'

(2b) PSI V 538, 8; 3ʳᵈ ct. BCE
εὐτύχει. 'Farewell.'

Both these features reflect the greater status of the recipients in petitions and their power of decision on the subject matter: their name is accordingly the first to be introduced in the letter and they are greeted with the formula εὐτύχει, which is typical of messages where distance between the correspondents is emphasized (cf. White 1986, 25), such as legal documents where a higher level of formality is in order.

Further and more marked differences among the letter formats emerge in the body of the letter concerning the strategies for requests. As argued by Denizot (2011), and assumed by Dickey (2016), in Classical times, "regardless of the identity of the addressee or the magnitude of the request, speakers' normal tendency is to use the bare, unsoftened imperative" (Dickey 2016, 239). Within our corpus of letters, the imperative clause is still the form prevailing in requests: it occurs frequently in ordinary business and administrative letters, showing that it is appropriate both in high-to-low (cf. the order of an officer to his subordinate in 3) and low-to-high (cf. the report of the misconduct of a colleague to a superior in 4) interactions; it is also appropriate for symmetric interactions such as in the format of the recommendation (cf. 5 where Sostratos addresses Zenon, *dioikḗtḗs'* secretary):

(3) P.Hib. I 43, 2-9; 261-260 BCE
σύνταξον μετρῆσ[αι] | τὸ σήσαμον τὸ ἐμ Πέλαι | Πρωτομάχωι \καὶ τῶι σιτολόγ[ωι,]/ οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν | ἐν τῆι πόλει σήσαμον. ἵνα οὖν | μηθὲν ὑστερῆι τὰ ἐ[λ]αιουργῖα | *φρόντισον* ἵνα μὴ αἰτίας ἔχης | καὶ τοὺ[ς] ἐ[λ]αιουργοὺς ἀπόσ-|*τειλόν* μοι. '*Command* that the sesame which is at Pela be measured out to Protomarchos and to the *sitologos* ('grain / seed of-

ficer'), because there is no sesame in the city. *Take care* therefore that the oil manufacture not fall behind, lest you be blamed; and *send* the oilmakers to me.' (White 1986, no. 3)

(4) P.Cair.Zen. I 59021, 46-50; 258 BCE

περὶ μὲν | γὰρ τινων ὡς ἡμῖν χρῶνται οὐ καλῶς | εἶχεν γράφειν, ἀλλ᾽ὡς ἂν παραγένηι ἀ- | κρύσει[ς —ca.?—] γρά- | ψον μοι περὶ τούτων ἵνα οὕτω ποιῶ. 'It is not proper for me to say in writing how some people are treating me, but as soon as you are back you will hear … *Write* to me on these matters that I may follow your instructions.' (Austin 1981, no. 238)

(5) P. Mich. I 6, 3-4; 257 BCE

ἐὰν δ᾽ ἀρὰ μὴ κατα-|[λάβηι ἐκεῖνον παρ᾽ ὑμῖν, ἐπιστολὰς πα]ρὰ τῶν φίλων *λαβὲ* πρὸ αὐτόν. 'And if he does not [come upon the latter in your company,] *get* [letters of introduction] to him (i.e. Kleonikos) from his friends.' (White 1986, no. 11)

Apparently, in continuity with the Classical stage, imperatives behave as a "neutral" strategy (cf. Palmer 1986, 29-30) fitting a wide range of situations, where the speaker merely presents an event within the addressee's scope of action (cf. also Risselada 1993, 111 on Latin data).

Moreover, besides imperatives, in similar contexts, papyrus letters attest the tendency to introduce the object of a request by a collocation with καλῶς 'well' and ποιέω 'do', which has a mitigating effect on the act due to the positive evaluation of the recipient's compliance. Like imperatives, it is used in business and administrative letters to mark the requests from both superiors to their employees (as in 6 addressed by the finance minister to his secretary) and employees to their superiors (as in 7 from Panakestor to the finance minister), and it is also appropriate between the high-level peer correspondents of the recommendation letters (cf. 8).

(6) P.Mich. I 48, 3-4; 251 BCE

καλῶς οὖν *ποιήσεις* ἀγοράσας ἡμῖν καὶ ἀποστείλας εἰς | Πτολεμαίδα. 'Therefore, *please* (litt. '*you will do well*') buy them for us and send them to Ptolemais' (White 1986, no. 25)

(7) PSI V 502, 29-30; 257 BCE

καλῶς ἂν οὖν *ποιήσαις* μηδεμίαν ἡμῶν καταγινώσκων ὀλιγωρίαν 'Therefore *you would do well* not to lay any charge of negligence against us' (White 1986, no. 18)

(8) P. Mich. I 6, 2-3; 257 BCE

καλῶς ἂν οὖ[ν] | *ποιήσαις* φιλοτιμηθεὶς ὅπως ἂν συστήσηις αὐτὸν Κλεονίκωι. ἐὰν δ᾽ ἄρα μὴ κατα- | [λάβηι ἐκεῖνον παρ᾽ ὑμῖν, ἐπιστολὰς πα]ρὰ τῶν φίλων λαβὲ πρὸς αὐτόν. τοῦτο δὲ | π[οιήσ]ας ε[ὐχαρι]στήσεις ἡμῖν· σπεύδω γὰρ περὶ αὐτοῦ. 'Therefore, *please (litt. 'you would do well')* make a sincere effort to introduce him to Kleonikos; and if he does not [come upon the latter in your company,] get (letters of introduction) to him (i.e. Kleonikos) from his friends. By doing this, *you will do* us *a favor*; for I am interested in him.' (White 1986, no. 11)

The formula occurs in (8) alongside another request strategy emerging across Ptolemaic papyri, which involves the use of verb forms derived from χάρις 'favour' (cf. εὐχαριστέω 'bestow a favour').

In a complementary way, the two strategies contribute to repairing the face-threat involved in the request: while the former appeals to the positive face of the addressee (i.e., his need to be appreciated)[6], the latter, which presents the request as a favour, emphasizes the discretionary power

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[6] The variation in the adverbs and in the verbal inflections encountered in the corpus display the user's awareness of the compositionality of the formula, and then its overt appeal to their positive face. In P.Ryl. IV 560, ὀρθῶς | ἐποίησας (ll. 2-3) 'You did right' are the words through which the *dioikētḗs* Apollonion shows his appreciation for the compliance of his stewards. See Leiwo (2010), for the increased degree of idiomatization of the formula in the later letters from Mons Claudianus.

of the addressee, whose negative face is then preserved. The strategy is shaped on the pattern of an exchange of favours between peers: it is typical of the interaction among high-status equals, such as the letter of recommendation, where it is particularly common.

Unsurprisingly, due to the emphasis on the symmetry of the interaction, the pattern is avoided in petitions, where broad-spectrum strategies such as the imperative and the καλῶς plus ποιέω formula do not normally introduce requests either. This is presumably because of the unspecified illocutionary force of the former and the assessment of the recipient's behaviour in the latter, which may not properly fit the emphasis on the sender's subordinate role typical of these contexts. Here, the sender marks the request of redress by means of performative verbs such as δέομαι 'beg', ἱκετεύω 'beseech' or ἀξιόω 'require', plainly referring to the speech act subtype and expressing the sender's need. This is exemplified by the passages in (9) and (10), both taken from the entreaty of the Greek Simale, the mother of a certain Herophantos, for whom she begs Zenon to intercede with the *dioikētḗs* Apollonios.

(9)   P.Col. III 6, 6-8; 257 BCE
      εὐπρεπῶς *δέομαι* οὖν σου | καὶ *ἱκετεύω* ἐπιστροφὴν ποιήσασθαι περὶ τούτων καὶ ἀναγγεῖλαι Ἀπολλωνίωι ὅν [τινα] | τρόπον μου ὑβριζόμενον τὸ παιδίον διατετέληκεν ὑπ' Ὀλυμπιχοῦ. 'Accordingly, therefore, *I request* and *entreat* you to bring about a correction of these things and to report to Apollonios in what manner my boy has been so thoroughly mistreated by Olympichos' (White 1986, no. 10)

(10) P.Col. III 6, 12-13; 257 BCE
      ἀξιῶ οὖν σε ἅμα δὲ καὶ *δέομαι* εἴ τι συντε[λεῖν τέ-] | ταχε Ἀπολλώνιος αὐτῶι ὀψώνιον ἀποδοθῆναί μοι. 'Therefore, *I request* and *entreat* you in the light of that' if Apollonios has ordered to pay him anything else (still outstanding), his wages be paid to me.' (White 1986, no. 10)

Depending on the textual format of the petition, senders exploit a specific directive strategy, through which their illocutionary intent is made explicit. Due to the emphasis on the sender's intention, the strategy attenuates the threat to the recipient's freedom of action, which is thus backgrounded. Since the Classical stage, similar forms were also available in requests, but, as pointed out by Dickey (2016, 246), they introduce very urgent and emotionally heightened messages, whereas in papyri they represent "the standard way of making certain requests", since they conventionally mark the object of the entreaty.

What emerges is then a picture in which according to the regular association between forms and situational contexts (i.e., letter types), different frames are singled out. The patterns most frequently encountered in each of the standard components of the letter across the different letter types are in particular summarized in the table below (fig. 1).

	SALUTATION		CLOSURE		REQUESTS			
	Ad[ER]-Ad[EE]	Ad[EE]-Ad[ER]	ἔρρωσο	εὐτύχει	IMPTV.	καλῶς π.	χάρις	PRFM.
Business/administrative letters	+		+		+	+		
Recommendation letters	+			+	+	+	+	
Petitions		+	+					+

FIGURE 1

3. According to McKay (2016, 207), the petitions' high level of conventionalization may reflect the efforts of the sender to be very polite in a formal context. On the other hand, while this set of features is unusual outside of petitions[7], they represent the "normal" way for senders to express themselves in petitions. The polite evaluation of the utterance may then have more to do with the unmarkedness of these features relative to the petition than with their markedness in comparison to the other letter types. It is the conformity of the writer to the petition's frame that triggers the polite effect. Conversely, frame deviations due to the use of forms that are incongruous with the context may trigger impoliteness or rudeness evaluations: the latter involves a deliberate attack to the recipient's face, whereas the former does not relate to face-threatening intentions (Terkourafi 2008, 62)[8].

In petitions, the most remarkable deviations from the regular format encountered concern the expression of the request of repair. The passages below display some contexts in which, instead of the conventional performatives, the sender uses an imperative expression (cf. σύνταξον in 11 and the string <συνταξαι> in 12, where editors generally suggest the reading σύνταξον, cf. White 1986, 46[9]) and the καλῶς plus ποιέω collocation (cf. 13).

(11) PSI V 538, 5-6; 3rd ct. BCE
καὶ περὶ | τοῦ ὀψωνίου *σύνταξον* ὅπως ἂν ἔμμηνον ἀποδιδῶται ἡμῖν ἐπιμελῶς. 'And, about the wage, *order* that it must be paid to us duly each month.'

(12) P.Mich. I 29, 4-5; 256 BCE
ἴ σοι δοκεῖ, *συντάξαι* ἀποδο[ῦ-] | ναι αὐτήν. 'If it pleases you *command* (him) to return her (to you)' (White 1986, no. 20)

(13) P.Col. IV, 66, 21-22; 256-255 BCE
σὺ ο\ῦ̃/ν *καλῶς* ἂν *ποιήσαις* | ἐπιστροφήν μου ποιησάμενος. 'Therefore, *please* cause a change of attitude toward me.' (White 1986, no. 22)

Both these patterns are regularly used within the corpus for requests (cf. Section 2), but not in petitions, where performatives are routine for the request of redress. This is shown for instance in P.Col. III 6 seen in (9) above or (14) below, which actually represent more conventional rephrasings of the passages respectively in (13) and (11)-(12)[10].

(14) P.Col. IV 66, 19-20; 256-255 BC)
δέομαι οὖν σου \εἴ σοι δοκεῖ / *συντάξαι* αὐτοῖς ὅπως τὰ ὀφειλόμενα | κομίσωμαι. 'Wherefore, *I entreat* you, if it seems acceptable to you, to instruct them that I am to receive what it is still lacking' (White 1986, no. 22).

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[7] For instance, within the corpus, only ἀξιόω among the performatives is documented beyond petitions, just once in P.Cair.Zen. I 59015, 30 (cf. White 1986, no. 29). Such cases, in which typical petition features are encountered elsewhere, may constitute instances of "marked-politeness" (cf. Terkourafi 2008, 61). Cf. also in cf. P.Cair.Zen. III, 59426, from Dromon to Zenon, where the εὐτύχει closure is unexpected in a peer interaction (cf. White 1986, 52).

[8] There is no agreement among scholars on the definition of impoliteness. Cf., e.g., Culpeper (2010), who does not oppose accidental vs. intentional impoliteness, i.e., impoliteness vs. rudeness in Terkourafi's (2008) terms. See Culpeper (2011b) for a discussion of the meta-language of impoliteness.

[9] The string can be taken both as a middle imperative or an imperative infinitive. As suggested in Bruno (2020), it may be also interpreted as an infinitive lacking its main verb. This is particularly suggested by the comparison with similar passages (as, e.g., 14 in the text), where συντάξαι is the infinitive complement of δέομαι 'beg'.

[10] Note in (12) as in (14) the parenthetical conditional phrase 'if you agree', which softens the request "by pointing out that the addressee does not have to comply and indicates deference to his opinion" (Dickey 2016, 242).

All the "unconventional" requests in (11)-(13) share a common feature: they are taken from documents written in a non-Greek environment. The unexpected imperatives in (11) and (12) occur respectively in the entreaty to the *dioikētḗs* Apollonios by Demetrios and Petechonsis, two Arab leaders, whose names (since the former is Greek, the latter is Egyptian) may suggest familiarity with local customs (cf. Rostovcev 1922, 179), and in the petition of Senchons, an Egyptian widow, appealing to Zenon for the recovery of her donkey. The writer who inappropriately uses the καλῶς plus ποιέω formula in (13) is a worker of Apollonios' Syrian estates, maybe an Arab, complaining about the abuses of his Greek superiors[11].

As a result, in (11)-(13), the incongruity of the request could —like other deviations from the norm encountered in these texts— be due to the imperfect language mastery of a non-native Greek speaker. In particular, in Senchons' petition, not only the poor grammar and spelling mistakes, but also some palaeographic aspects, such as the use of the brush, which was common among Egyptian scribes in the early Ptolemaic period (cf. Clarysse 1993), trace the document back to a non-Greek (i.e., demotic) community. In the case of the Syrian worker, although the language is less uncertain, the sender displays some difficulties in dealing with the epistolary conventions, as shown by two further incongruities found in the formulation of the letter opening (cf. 15).

(15) P.Col. IV 66, 1-2; 256-255 BCE
      .. δ .... Ζήνωνι χαίρειν. καλῶς ποιεῖς εἰ ἔρρωσαι. ἔρρω- | μαι δὲ καὶ αὐτός. '…to Zenon, gree-
      ting. You do well if you are healthy.' (White 1986, no. 22)

The former concerns the order of the correspondents in the *salutatio*, where the (lost) name of the addresser is put before that of the addressee; the latter concerns the health wish following the opening greeting, which is normally avoided in petitions, where "the epistolary situation […] was a deterrent to expressions of familiarity" (White 1986, 195)[12].

Such violations of the frame of the petition may be perceived by the addressee as a face attack, and because unintentional —due to the user's lack of pragmatic competence— may correspond to what Terkourafi (2008) considered impolite acts. Moreover, the same violation may trigger a different interpretation depending on the user's profile. Another petition within the corpus displays the same deviation in the order of the correspondents as (15): it is the entreaty of Simale to Zenon about her son, already quoted above in (9) and (10).

(16) P.Col. III 6, 1; 257 BCE
      Σιμάλη Ἡροφάντου μητὴρ Ζήνωνι χαίρειν. 'Simale, mother of Herophantos, to Zenon gree-
      ting.' (White 1986, no. 10)

Simale is an upper-class Greek woman, whose family enjoys privileges, such as the regular allotment of oil mentioned in her letter (cf. White 1986, 33). The writing of the letter is fluent and "orthography, morphology, and syntax are remarkably correct" (Bagnall & Cribiore 2006, 100). Her deviation from the conventional *salutatio* is unlikely to be the unintentional result of a non-

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[11] The sender claims to be ill-treated because βάρβαρος (l. 19). An Arab origin is suggested by White (1986, 47), in view of his involvement in the camel trade (cf. l. 3).

[12] In the early Hellenistic letters, sometimes the opening *salutatio* can be followed by a transitional formula conveying "the wish of health or well-being" (cf.

Klauck 2006, 21), such as [εἰ ἔ]ρρωσαι, ἔχοι ἂν καλῶς 'If you are well, it would be excellent' (P.Cair.Zen. I 59060, 1; 257 BCE). Cf. Bruno (2015) about the possible contamination with the impersonal expression καλῶς ἔχει in the rephrasing of the topos as a polite request in (15), where an εἰ complement occurs instead of the expected participle.

native competence of the language as for the Syrian worker. It is more likely to be a deliberate affirmation of her identity: Simale rejects the emphasis on the subordinate role of the petitioner involved by the format of the petition and addresses Zenon as a peer[13]. In Terkourafi's (2008) terms, due to the sender's awareness, the deviation from the canonical order can then be interpreted by the addressee as rudeness.

4. Due to its definition of politeness in terms of "conventionalization" and its intrinsic data-orientation, a frame-based approach appears suitable for capturing linguistic politeness in ancient languages. In particular, due the extensive use of conventional formulas among the various epistolary types, the notion of frame (cf. Terkourafi 2001, 3) particularly fits the empirical evidence of early Hellenistic papyri. As a frame "is the regular co-occurrence of particular types of context and particular linguistic expressions" (Terkourafi 2005, 248), politeness is defined in terms of the congruity of a form with a context. Linguistic politeness refers then to forms (conventionally) associated with contexts where they activate politeness attitudes (cf. Culpeper 2011a, 32). Deviations from the regular frame are accounted for by this model in terms of impoliteness and rudeness (cf. Terkourafi 2008). Both impoliteness and rudeness are perceived by the recipients as face-attacks, which are evaluated differently according to the intention of the speaker. Unintentional (accidental) attacks are thus evaluated as impolite, and intentional attacks as rude.

Recurrent frames of interaction emerge across the epistolary exchanges in Ptolemaic Egypt, most of which —due to the extensive use of the letter as bureaucratic instrument— involve directive utterances. Among the various formats, ordinary business and administrative correspondence, recommendations and petitions are taken as distinct directive frames, where different contexts of interaction (i.e., "minimal-context", cf. Terkourafi 2009, 27) are regularly associated with specific patterns of expressions, particularly, as summarized in Fig. 1 in Section 1, in the *salutatio*, closure and modulation of the request.

It is the conformity of the writer to these frames that triggers the recipient's evaluation of the degree of politeness, which does not simply rest on the identification of a form, but on its association to the appropriate context. Accordingly, the same formal pattern can trigger different interpretations according to the context in which it occurs (i.e., the letter's intent and the user's profile). Within the corpus, imperatives and the καλῶς plus ποιέω formula are congruent (and therefore polite) with the business and administrative letter frames and the recommendations, where both strategies are normally exploited in requests; they are however incongruent (and therefore non-polite) with the petition (especially in the introduction of the object of the entreaty). In the latter, they are encountered in the entreaties of non-native Greeks, where —due to the senders' imperfect mastery of the language— they can be assumed to be unintentional (and hence impolite). Similarly, while in the *salutatio* of most letter types the name of the addressee regularly follows that of the addresser, in petitions, this is not the usual order of the correspondents, where the addresser is expected to follow the addressee. Such a violation of the canonical order occurs twice within the corpus: in the entreaty of the Syrian worker to Zenon, where it is likely to be the accidental misuse by an incompetent author (and therefore impolite), and in the petition by the Greek Simale, where it may represent a deliberate affirmation of identity by an influential Greek woman (and thus rude).

[13] This attitude of Simale is consistent with the closing of her petition, where she addresses Zenon through the imperative with no mitigation of the face threat. Cf. Bruno (2020) for a discussion of these forms, which Simale avoids for the object of the petition, where performatives are regularly used.

What emerges from the early Hellenistic correspondence is a more intricately articulated picture when compared to the Classical language, which lacks such a diverse set of directive frames. As argued by Dickey (2016, 248-249), the wider repertoire of directive utterances encompassed by early Hellenistic papyri can be traced back to the different socio-cultural environment faced by the Greeks in Egypt, where the more rigid distinctions between social classes called for the conventionalization of strategies which facilitate interaction between the two parties and preserve social cohesion, while minimizing the threat of the act. On the other hand, in these contexts, politeness is something more than a remedy for the face threats, since it is also an instrument for gaining the recipient's compliance, thus working as a persuasive strategy relative to the request. Again, the effectiveness of the strategy is a function of the communicative context, since even deviations from the norm may work as instruments of persuasion, as in Simale's petition, where the woman's challenge to conventional norms while emphasizing her social status urges the recipient to comply with her request.

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