How does politeness reflect social structure? Explaining diachronic changes in Ancient Greek politeness

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Explaining Diachronic Changes in Ancient Greek Politeness

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1 Introduction[1]

How do politeness systems change over time? To what extent do languages' politeness systems reflect the contemporary social structures of the cultures using them, and to what extent do inherited politeness systems reflect the social structures with which earlier speakers of the languages operated? The Greek language offers excellent data for studying such questions, since it is continuously attested over a period of more than two and a half millennia, during which numerous changes in the social structures of Greek speakers are well documented. The present study focusses on a portion near the beginning of that period, the nine hundred years from the beginning of the Classical age in the fifth century BC to the late Roman period in the fourth century AD.

During that time the politeness system of Ancient Greek underwent significant changes, as can be seen both in the choice of free address forms (vocatives) and in the phrasing of directives (orders and requests). The rate of change does not appear to have been constant: There were periods of relative stability and others of fairly rapid change. Historical developments during this time frame caused several significant changes to the government and social structure of the cultures in which Greek was spoken. The purpose of the present study is to examine how much connection existed between the social and the linguistic changes; to do so it will summarize the results of earlier and more detailed studies of forms of address and directive usage at various periods, which should be consulted for the evidence behind the factual assertions made here.[2]

1 I am grateful to Philomen Probert for her usual insightful comments, and to the editors for inviting me to participate in the 2018 conference and in this volume. This paper was written in 2018–19, and only limited updating has been possible since, for which I apologize to the authors of all the good work on historical politeness that has appeared in the interval.

2 For directives these are Denizot (2011) and Dickey (2016a: 238–243) for the Classical period, Dickey (2016a: 244–262) for the Hellenistic period, and Leiwo (2009) and Dickey (2009) for the Roman period. For forms of address these are Dickey (1996) for the Classical period, Dickey (2004a: 497–500) for the Hellenistic period, and Dickey (2001) and (2004a) for the Roman period. Also worth noting, though not directly the source of the data used in this piece, are Mari's chapter in this volume and the collection of Unceta Gómez and Berger (2023).

2 Historical background and nature of the evidence

The Greek texts examined here come from three different periods, in each of which the government and social structure of the world in which their authors lived was distinctively different. But the nature of the evidence surviving from these different periods is also different, so that care must be taken to distinguish genuine linguistic changes from illusions due to shifts in what kind of material survives.

In the Classical period (the fifth and much of the fourth century BC), Greek speakers typically lived in independent city-states, some of which (including Athens, from which most of the surviving evidence comes) were egalitarian and highly democratic in political and social structure—at least for adult male citizens. But the egalitarian social structure did not apply to women, children, or slaves, and even free adult males faced severe disadvantages outside the city-states of which they were citizens. Moreover, since citizenship often required legitimate birth from parents who were both citizens of the same city, some free men were not citizens of any city.

Most of our evidence for Greek usage at this period comes from literary works such as Plato's dialogues, Herodotus' histories, the tragedies of Sophocles and Euripides, and the comedies of Aristophanes. Some literary genres were closer to ordinary conversational language than others, but in general comparison of the usage in different genres with each other and with (later) documentary texts allows us to work out the main features of conversational language, at least for social groups well represented in the most useful literary genres (especially free adult men) (Dickey 1995; 1996: 30–42; 2016a: 247–248). Documents such as personal letters or petitions mostly do not survive from the Classical period; we have some inscriptions on stone, but these are not normally the kind of text in which politeness or impoliteness can be detected.

Towards the end of the fourth century most Greek speakers were conquered by the Macedonians, who themselves adopted a form of Greek very close to the Athenian literary standard. The Macedonian conquests (especially those of Alexander the Great) spread this form of Greek across a large area where other languages had previously been spoken, from Egypt to Persia and beyond. These developments ushered in the Hellenistic period, which occupied roughly the third and second centuries BC. During this period Greek speakers were part of large, hierarchical kingdoms; in some of these kingdoms the pre-Greek social structures and language were largely retained, with the imposition of a Greek-speaking layer at the top. As is only to be expected in such circumstances, many Hellenistic Greek speakers either learned Greek as a second language or were descended from people who had done so, but nevertheless the Greek they used was very similar to that spoken in Greece in the Classical period, with remarkably few traces of substrate influence from other languages.

Surviving evidence for Hellenistic Greek comes both from literary works such as Polybius' history and from documents (letters, petitions, contracts, etc.) written on papyrus and recovered by excavation in modern times; the vast majority

of surviving papyri come from Egypt. Many documents can be dated only approximately (often to a period of a century) by their archaeological context, the handwriting used, or the dates of earlier or later texts written on the same piece of papyrus. As a result, for simplicity's sake all dates will be given by centuries here, even for texts that can be more precisely dated.

During the Hellenistic period the various Greek-speaking regions were gradually conquered by the Romans, a process finally completed towards the end of the first century BC.[3] The first century AD and later centuries, therefore, form the Roman period, in which Greek speakers were part of the Roman empire. (The first century BC is omitted from this study as being a transitional period.) The pre-Roman languages and social structures were largely retained, but Latin was used to varying extents in the army, the courts, the law schools, and the top level of the provincial government.[4]

Both literature and papyrus documents survive from the Roman period, but almost all the Greek literature from this period is archaizing, imitating the Classical language with varying degrees of success. Its language was clearly very different from that of ordinary conversation and can be misleading if used as a basis for linguistic analysis, though lower-register literature such as the New Testament forms a partial exception. The papyri show a variety of Greek much closer to ordinary conversational language, and linguistic work on Roman-period Greek therefore tends to rely on their evidence. As papyri come mainly from Egypt, studies of Roman-period Greek often have an evidential bias towards Egypt.

The length of the Roman period is a vexed question, and one could certainly make a case that in Egypt it lasted until the Arab conquests in the seventh century AD. The final centuries before those conquests, however, were different from preceding centuries, as the center of Roman rule shifted from (Latin-speaking) Rome to (Greek-speaking) Constantinople and the Latin-speaking portions of the empire were lost. This period, known as 'late antiquity', is not considered here: The latest texts used for this study come from the fourth century AD.[5]

3 Directives

Directives are expressions used to get another person to do something, whether orders ('Open the window!'), requests ('Please could you open the window?'), or utterances indirectly suggesting that the speaker would like something to be done ('It's awfully hot in here, isn't it?'). In many languages the phrasing of directives is considered to be a key component of the politeness system; consider for example the emphasis that English-speaking parents typically place on teaching their children to say 'please' when requesting something.

3 Southern Italy was conquered in the third century BC, Greece in the second century BC, and Egypt near the end of the first century BC.

4 More detail e. g., in Rochette (1997).

5 The Greek politeness system of late antiquity is very interesting, and different from the ones considered here; for more information on it see Zilliacus (1949).

3.1 Classical period

In the fifth and fourth centuries BC directives normally consisted simply of an imperative, unmodified by any equivalent of English 'please'; this usage remained constant regardless of the status of the parties involved (see e. g., Denizot 2011: 488; Dickey 2016a: 238–243). Such imperatives were not rude in Greek as they would be in English, because they were standard (see Terkourafi 2002; 2004; 2005; 2008). The difference between Greek and English usage is appreciated by translators, who tend to add softeners in English to avoid an impression of rudeness not present in the original. Examples (1)–(3) are typical.

(1) ὦ βασιλεῦ, ἐπὶ γῆν γὰρ μέλλεις στρατεύεσθαι τῆς οὔτε ἀρηρομένον φανήσεται οὐδὲν οὔτε πόλις οἰκεομένη· σύ νυν γέφυραν ταύτην ἔα κατὰ χώρην ἑστάναι, φυλάκους αὐτῆς λιπὼν τούτους οἵ πέρ μιν ἔζευξαν. (Herodotus 4.97.3)
'O king, you are about to march against a land where no farmland or inhabited city will appear, so leave this bridge standing where it is, with the people who built it as guards for it.' (subordinate urging the Persian king Darius to rescind his orders to destroy a bridge; Sélincourt [1972: 303] translates the directive 'Surely it would be wiser to leave this bridge intact'.)

(2) ἀλλὰ διὰ ταῦτά τοι, ὦ Διοτίμα, ὅπερ νυνδὴ εἶπον, παρὰ σὲ ἥκω, γνοὺς ὅτι διδασκάλων δέομαι. ἀλλά μοι λέγε καὶ τούτων τὴν αἰτίαν καὶ τῶν ἄλλων τῶν περὶ τὰ ἐρωτικά. (Plato, *Symposium* 207c)
'But as I said just now, o Diotima, it's on account of this that I've come to you, knowing that I need teachers. But tell me the cause of these things, and of all other matters concerning love.' (Socrates to his mythical teacher Diotima; Waterfield [1994: 50] translates the directive 'So will you explain it to me, please?')

(3) ἀντὶ δ' ὧν ἐσπεισάμην ἠκούσατ'; ἀλλ' ἀκούσατε. (Aristophanes, *Acharnians* 294)
'But have you heard why I made a treaty? But listen.' (Dicaeopolis to people threatening to kill him; Henderson [1998: 93] translates the directive 'Please listen!')

Table 1 gives an overview of usage in a sample of 1488 directives from Classical literature. Passages like examples (1)–(3), in which the imperative is used without a softener ('bare imperatives') make up 64 % of the total directives and were evidently the unmarked way of expressing directives. Directives expressed in other ways were not necessarily more polite than bare imperatives, for in some contexts Greek speakers tended to replace the imperative with other forms for syntactic reasons; each way of expressing directives has to be independently evaluated by examining the contexts in which it occurs to determine whether it is markedly polite. When that is done (see e. g., Denizot 2011; Dickey 2016a: 239 n. 4), more

than half the remaining forms appear to be no more polite than the bare imperatives, with only 11 % of the directives in the sample displaying marked politeness.

Table 1: Expression of directives in a sample of Classical Greek literature

	Herodotus, *Histories*	**Plato, *Symposium***	**Aristophanes, *Acharnians & Knights***	**Sophocles, *Philoctetes & Antigone***	**Euripides, *Hippolytus & Medea***	**Total**
Bare imperative	228	77	320	171	158	954 (64 %)
Other with similar meaning	89	37	97	86	55	364 (24 %)
Markedly polite	29	16	41	44	40	170 (11 %)
Total directives	346	130	458	301	253	1488
% markedly polite	8 %	12 %	9 %	15 %	16 %	11 %

The 11 % of directives displaying marked politeness have certain features in common, but those features are not specific words, rather a set of strategies. These strategies could be expressed in different words on each occasion; they were not formulas like English 'please' and 'could you'. Example (4) illustrates the strategy of indirectness, which is common in many languages for making polite requests. Although in some contexts this utterance might be a request for information, in its context here, where the speaker is offering for sale an eel that the addressee Dicaeopolis has just taken, it is evidently a request for payment.

(4) ἐμοὶ δὲ τιμὰ τᾶσδε πᾷ γενήσεται; (Aristophanes, *Acharnians* 895)
'And how am I going to get payment for it?'

Example (5) illustrates the strategy of using the optative mood with the modal particle ἄν. It is uncertain how consistently this usage was polite; I have counted it as such except where the context clearly indicates otherwise, but Denizot considers it polite only under certain circumstances (Denizot 2011: 409–419, 490–491). If one were to exclude more of the examples that use this strategy, the number of markedly polite examples would be even smaller.

(5) οὐκ ἄχθομαί σ' ἰδών τε καὶ λαβὼν φίλον.
ὅστις γὰρ εὖ δρᾶν εὖ παθὼν ἐπίσταται,
παντὸς γένοιτ' ἂν κτήματος κρείσσων φίλος.
χωροῖς ἄν εἴσω. (Sophocles, *Philoctetes* 671–674)

'I am glad to have seen you and got you as a friend. For whoever being kindly treated knows how to be kind in return would be a friend better than any possession. You might go inside.' (Neoptolemus to his new friend Philoctetes)

These two strategies could not be formulaic in any case, but the ones that follow could in theory have been formulaic. In practice, however, they are expressed differently on each occasion that they occur. Examples (6) and (7) illustrate the strategy of stating that the speaker would consider it good if the addressee would do something, while (8) and (9) illustrate the strategy of adding a phrase meaning 'if you agree' to an imperative.

(6) οἱ μὲν οὖν ἄλλοι πάντες ἡμεῖς εἰρήκαμεν· σὺ δ' ἐπειδὴ οὐκ εἴρηκας καὶ ἐκπέπωκας, δίκαιος εἶ εἰπεῖν, εἰπὼν δ' ἐπιτάξαι Σωκράτει ὅ τι ἂν βούλῃ, καὶ τοῦτον τῷ ἐπὶ δεξιὰ καὶ οὕτω τοὺς ἄλλους. (Plato, *Symposium* 214c)
'All the rest of us have spoken; but you, since you have drunk and have not spoken, ought to speak (lit. 'you are just to speak'), and having spoken to order whatever you want for Socrates, and he to order the person on his right, and the others in the same way.' (Eryximachus to his dining-companion Alcibiades)

(7) μέχρι δὲ τούτου, ἐπείτε οὕτω μετέδοξε, φυλάσσετε τὴν σχεδίην, πᾶσαν προθυμίην σωτηρίης τε καὶ φυλακῆς παρεχόμενοι. ταῦτα δὲ ποιεῦντες ἐμοὶ μεγάλως χαριεῖσθε. (Herodotus 4.98.3)
'But until that time, since I have changed my mind, guard the bridge and show all possible care for its safety and protection. If you do this you will greatly please me.' (Persian king to subordinates)

(8) καὶ μέντοι οὑτωσὶ ποίησον. ἐάν τι μὴ ἀληθὲς λέγω, μεταξὺ ἐπιλαβοῦ, ἂν βούλῃ, καὶ εἰπὲ ὅτι τοῦτο ψεύδομαι· ἑκὼν γὰρ εἶναι οὐδὲν ψεύσομαι. (Plato, *Symposium* 214e)
'But do as follows. If I say anything that is not true, interrupt me, if you wish, and say that I'm lying about that; for I shall not deliberately lie about anything.' (Alcibiades to his old mentor Socrates; Lamb [1925: 217] translates 'have the goodness to take me up short')

(9) ἔρπ', εἰ θέλεις. (Sophocles, *Philoctetes* 730)
'Go in, if you wish.' (Neoptolemus to his new friend Philoctetes; for the meaning of εἰ θέλεις see Jebb 1890: 121)

More difficulties are posed by the addition of phrases meaning 'I ask/beg/entreat'. Cross-linguistically entreaty is not usually polite, and indeed urgency can be seen as the reverse of (negative) politeness. In Latin, however, the equivalent phrases often do seem to express (positive) politeness, because they put the

addressee in a position of superiority over the speaker (see Hall 2009; Dickey 2012; 2015; 2016b: 207–215). I believe that in Classical Greek such expressions can also express politeness; those who disagree on this point would find even fewer markedly polite directives. Examples (10) and (11) are typical.

(10) Ἰᾶσον, <u>αἰτοῦμαί</u> σε τῶν εἰρημένων
συγγνώμον' εἶναι (Euripides, *Medea* 869–870)
'Jason, <u>I beg</u> you to be forgiving of the things I said.' (Medea wheedling Jason; Harrison [1999: 63] translates 'Jason, please forgive me for what I said.')

(11) εἶπ', <u>ἀντιβολῶ</u>, τίς ἐστιν; (Arisophanes, *Knights* 142)
'Speak, <u>I supplicate you</u>: who is it?' (one slave to another; Henderson [1998: 247] translates 'Tell me, <u>please</u>, who is it?')

3.2 Hellenistic period

A very different directive system appears in papyrus documents of the third and second centuries BC.[6] In these texts there is a sharp distinction between directives addressed to social superiors and those to inferiors. The inferiors still receive bare imperatives as in the earlier period, but superiors regularly receive expressions using the strategies that in the Classical period indicated marked politeness—and these strategies have now been fixed into formulas, so that they regularly occur with the same words. Table 2 indicates the increase in the percentage of directives using markedly polite expressions.[7]

Table 2: Expression of directives in a sample of 644 papyrus documents from the third century BC

Documents in sample	**Bare imperative**	**Markedly polite**	**Other**	**Total**	**% markedly polite**
P.Enteux. (petitions to king: directives are addressed to superiors)	–	78	–	78	100 %
P.Enteux. (responses to petitions: directives are addressed to inferiors)	91	–	1	92	0 %
P.Cair.Zen. I–III (letters: the polite directives are addressed to superiors and the others to inferiors)[8]	208	212	21	441	48 %
Total	299	290	22	611	47 %

6 For more information see Dickey (2016a: 244–262).

7 A complete list of the expressions concerned, where they occur, and whether they are markedly polite is provided in Dickey (2016a: 250–262).

8 But some contexts are fragmentary, making identification of addressees conjectural. These directives are listed and discussed in Dickey (2016a: 244, 254–262).

Example (12) illustrates one of the new formulas: καλῶς ἂν ποιήσαις + conditional participle 'you would do well if' / καλῶς ποιήσεις + conditional participle 'you will do well if', which is a development of the strategy seen in examples (6) and (7) above. In the Classical period this phrase is very rare and not necessarily polite, but in documents of the third century BC it is common and always polite.[9]

(12) ἀπέσταλκα Ἀπολλώνιον φέροντα τὴν γεωμετρίαν τοῦ κτηματίου οὗ οὔπω μοι γέγονεν γένημα. καλῶς ἂν οὖν ποιήσαις προσαγαγὼν αὐτὸν Ἀπολλωνίῳ ὅπως συνγράψηται. (*P.Col.* 3.16 lines 2–11)
'I have sent (my assistant) Apollonios, carrying the plan of the vineyard from which I have not yet had the produce. You would do well if you led him to (the *dioiketes*) Apollonios so that he can draw up a contract.' (Charoppas to Zenon; the original editor in *P.Col.* 3.16 translates the second sentence 'Please lead him to Apollonios that he may make a contract.')

Examples (13) and (14) illustrate the formulas εἰ δοκεῖ and ἐὰν φαίνηται, both of which mean 'if it seems (best to you)'. These are developments of the strategy seen in examples (8) and (9) above; although both expressions are rare in the Classical period, they are common in documents of the third century BC.[10]

(13) δέομαι οὖν σου, εἴ σοι δοκεῖ, μὴ περιδῇς με ἀδικηθέντα ὑπ' αὐτοῦ, ἀλλὰ προστάξαι Ἀφθονήτῳ τῷ στρατηγῷ γράψαι Σηράμβῳ … (*P.Mich.* 1.71 lines 5–7)
'So I ask you, if it seems best to you, don't ignore the fact that I have been wronged by him, but order the strategos Aphthonetos to write to Serambos …' (petitioner to king Ptolemy)

(14) ἐὰν οὖν σοι φαίνηται, γράψαι Ἀρχήβι τῷ οἰκονόμῳ … (*P.Lille* 1.9 lines 17–19)
'Therefore if it seems best to you, write to Archebis the oikonomos …' (Apollon to Asclepiades)

Example (13) also illustrates the formula δέομαι 'I ask', and example (15) ἀξιῶ 'I ask'; again these are much more common in documents of the third century BC than in the Classical period.[11]

(15) ἀξιῶ οὖν σε γράψαι ᾧ καθήκει ἀποστεῖλαι πρός σε ἵνα ἐὰν ἃ γράφω ἀληθῆ, τύχω τοῦ δικαίου. (*P.Lond.* 7.2009 lines 16–19)

9 For the Classical examples (only three are certainly datable to this period: see below, n. 12) and more detailed discussion of this phrase's history and usage see Leiwo (2009: 99–106). Hellenistic examples (there are more than 140 occurrences just in the third century) are detailed in Dickey (2016a: 245, 250–262).

10 Together these expressions occur more than 100 times in third-century papyri; see Dickey (2016a: 245–246, 250–262).

11 More than 50 occurrences in third-century papyri; see Dickey (2016a: 246–247, 250–262).

'Therefore I ask you to write to the relevant person to send him to you, so that if the things I write are true, I may obtain justice.' (petitioner to official)

Therefore a major shift in directive strategies seems to have occurred between the Classical and Hellenistic periods. Classical Greek had polite request strategies used occasionally for exceptional politeness; Hellenistic Greek (at least in Egypt) had polite request formulas used regularly to social superiors. Although the changing nature of the evidence available might make one wonder if this shift is an illusion (cf. section 2 above), examining the contexts of the precursors of the Hellenistic formulae when these appear in Classical texts makes clear that the people who produced those texts were not familiar with the Hellenistic directive formulas.[12] The shift must therefore have been a real feature of Hellenistic Greek. It was probably caused by the transplantation of the Greek language from an egalitarian culture to one with a highly stratified social hierarchy: In Hellenistic Egypt, a key element of politeness expected in directives was overt acknowledgement of a social superior's superiority.

3.3 Roman period

In the first century AD and later the distinction between directives to superiors and to inferiors was maintained, but the formulas changed to reflect Roman politeness. The Hellenistic formulas did not disappear, but they were joined by translations of the most common Latin request formulas: ἐρωτῶ for *rogo* 'I ask' and παρακαλῶ for *oro* 'I beg' (Dickey 2009: 208–217). Latin *rogo atque oro* 'I ask and beg' was reflected in ἐρωτῶ καὶ παρακαλῶ 'I ask and beg', and Latinate constructions (imperative, subjunctive) were often used for the clause following these formulas (Dickey 2009: 217–218). Such usage was not universal, however; the infinitive, which was the usual Greek way of complementing a verb of asking, also occurred after these verbs (Dickey 2009: 211–213, 215–216). In modern Greek παρακαλῶ survives as the word for 'please'. Examples (16)–(18) are typical.

(16) ἐρωτῶ, κύριε, δοῦναί μοι ὑπαρχόντων διακατοχὴν ἐκ μέρους ἡμίσεως Αὐρηλίου Σαραπίωνος τοῦ καὶ Λουκίου τοῦ προγεγραμμένου πατρός μου. (*P.Oxy.* 43.3108 lines 7–11)
'I ask you, lord, to give me possession of a half share of the property of Aurelius Sarapion, also known as Lucius, my aforesaid father.' (δοῦναι 'to give' is an infinitive, the regular Greek construction with verbs of requesting)

12 E. g., of the three certainly Classical examples of expressions approximating καλῶς ποιήσεις (Aristophanes, *Ecclesiazusae* 804; Andocides 1.40.9; Demosthenes 20.133), none of which is actually a directive, two are impolite. See Leiwo (2009: 100) and Dickey (2016a: 247–248).

(17) παρακαλῶ ἵνα καὶ τὴν τιμήν μοι αὐτῶν δηλώσῃς (*P.Mich.* 8.503 lines 14–15)
'I beg that you also reveal to me their price' (ἵνα 'that' and the subjunctive δηλώσῃς imitate *ut* + subjunctive, the regular Latin construction with verbs of requesting)

(18) ἐρωτῶ δέ σε καὶ παρακαλῶ, γράψει μοι ἀντιφώνησιν περὶ τῶν γενομένων. (*P.Oxy.* 2.294 lines 28–30)
'I ask and beg you, write me an answer about the things that have happened.' (γράψει is probably a misspelling of the imperative γράψαι; the imperative is common after verbs of requesting in subliterary Latin)

From the Hellenistic to the Roman period, therefore, Greek saw a second shift in the way politeness was expressed in directives. This time the change affected not when politeness was expressed but how, with the advent of Roman political control resulting in the need for polite request formulas closely matching the Latin ones.

4 Forms of address

Forms of address are used to express politeness and impoliteness in many languages. Linguists often divide addresses into 'bound' and 'free' forms, with the former comprising addresses incorporated into a sentence's grammatical structure (e. g., second-person pronouns and verb forms) and the latter ones independent of it (in Greek these are usually in the vocative case). In languages with a *tu/vous* distinction bound addresses can be part of the politeness system,[13] but in Ancient Greek, as in English, second-person pronouns and verb forms rarely play a role in politeness; therefore for our purposes 'address' means a free form of address.

4.1 Classical period

Addresses are common in Greek literature of the fifth and fourth centuries BC; although the practices of different authors and in different genres are not identical, there is enough similarity to enable one to work out with reasonable confidence the system that must have prevailed in ordinary conversational usage (Dickey 1995; 1996). The use of an address was customary at the beginning of an interaction, and failure to employ one seems to have been impolite except in emergencies or when the addressee was of significantly lower status than the speaker (Dickey 1996: 190–195). Adult male citizens were normally addressed by name, often preceded by the particle ὦ 'o'. Since at this period Greeks had only one

13 See for example in this volume the papers by Scharinger, Ghezzi, Gennies, Monte, and Fleming.

name, this address system did not offer any choice of names and usually resulted in a simple two-word address, as in example (19).[14]

(19) οὐδείς σοι, ὦ Ἐρυξίμαχε, φάναι τὸν Σωκράτη, ἐναντία ψηφιεῖται. (Plato, *Symposium* 177d)
'"No-one will vote against you, o Eryximachus," said Socrates.' (Socrates speaking to his friend Eryximachus)

More flexibility existed for people who were not adult male citizens (women, children, slaves, and foreigners) and for close relatives of the speaker. Although address by name was often used for people in most of these categories (e. g., to a woman in example (2) above), it was also common for such addressees to receive terms indicating the category they belonged to, without an increase or decrease in politeness. This usage is illustrated in examples (20)–(23).[15]

(20) τί δ' ὧδ' ἀθυμεῖς, ὦ γύναι, τῷ νῦν λόγῳ; (Sophocles, *Electra* 769)
'But why are you so taken aback, o woman, at the present talk?' (servant speaking to queen Clytemnestra)

(21) ἐὰν μὲν ἄρα σοφὸς γένῃ, ὦ παῖ, πάντες σοι φίλοι καὶ πάντες σοι οἰκεῖοι ἔσονται – χρήσιμος γὰρ καὶ ἀγαθὸς ἔσῃ (Plato, *Lysis* 210d)
'So if you become wise, o child, everyone will be your friend and everyone will be familiar with you—for you will be useful and good' (Socrates speaking to the boy Lysis)

(22) παῖ παῖ, καθελών μοι τὸ δόρυ δεῦρ' φέρε. (Aristophanes, *Acharnians* 1118)
'Boy, boy, get my spear and bring it here to me!' (warrior speaking to his slave)

(23) ΑΘ. Θεὸς ἤ τις ἀνθρώπων ὑμῖν, ὦ ξένοι, εἴληφε τὴν αἰτίαν τῆς τῶν νόμων διαθέσεως;
ΚΛ. Θεός, ὦ ξένε, θεός, ὥς γε τὸ δικαιότατον εἰπεῖν … (Plato, *Laws* 624a)
'Athenian: Was it a god or some mortal man, o strangers, who took the credit for the establishment of your laws?
Clinias the Cretan: A god, o stranger, a god, to give the rightest answer …' (Athenian, Cretan, and Spartan having a philosophical debate)

The above addresses were the basic, unmarked ones used when no particular emotion was being conveyed; as such they were neither particularly polite nor particularly impolite. When marked politeness was desired, therefore, they were replaced by words indicating respect or affection, particularly βασιλεῦ 'king', δέσποτα 'master', φίλε 'dear, friend', φίλτατε 'dearest', βέλτιστε 'best', and ἄριστε

14 More detail in Dickey (1996: 43–50).
15 More detail in Dickey (1996: 145–149, 208–211, 214–227, 231–235, 243–245).

'best'.[16] Thus in example (1) above Darius is addressed not by name but with βασιλεῦ 'king', because a subordinate is attempting to persuade him on a matter of importance; in example (24), from earlier in the same story, at a point when Darius is not yet king, he is addressed as δέσποτα 'master' by a servant trying to gain his trust; in example (25) a father pleading with his son addresses him not by name but with the affectionate term 'dearest'. Such politeness was not common, however: About three-quarters of the singular addresses surviving in Classical prose authors consist of a name alone, and many of the remainder fall into one of the other unmarked categories (Dickey 1996: 46–47).

(24) Εἰ μὲν δή, ὦ δέσποτα, ἐν τούτῳ τοι ἐστὶ ἢ βασιλέα εἶναι ἢ μή, θάρσεε τούτου εἵνεκεν καὶ θυμὸν ἔχε ἀγαθόν, ὡς βασιλεὺς οὐδεὶς ἄλλος πρὸ σεῦ ἔσται· τοιαῦτα ἔχω φάρμακα. (Herodotus 3.85.2)
'If indeed, o master, it depends on that to be king or not, cheer up about it and be of good spirits, since no-one else will be king before you: such arts do I have.'

(25) ἴθ' ἀντιβολῶ σ', ὦ φίλτατ' ἀνθρώπων ἐμοί,
ἐλθὼν διδάσκου. (Aristophanes, *Clouds* 110–111)
'Go, I beg you, o dearest to me of men, go and learn.'

4.2 Hellenistic period

In the third and second centuries BC the use of direct address seems to have declined dramatically. Most literary works composed during this period include very few addresses; for example the surviving work of the historian Polybius, who wrote at the beginning of the second century BC, uses only 44, or 14 per 100,000 words. By contrast the Classical historians Herodotus and Thucydides use 291 and 60 direct addresses respectively, that is 157 and 40 per 100,000 words.[17]

Papyrus documents from the third and second centuries BC make little use of addresses, so that on average in this period we find one for every twelve surviving letters and petitions. Of course this figure cannot be directly compared with the Classical period, since we do not have papyrus letters or petitions earlier than the Hellenistic age. Nevertheless, these genres cannot have been inherently averse to the use of address forms, since papyrus letters and petitions from later periods contain many more. For example, in the fourth century AD there is

16 The majority of our surviving evidence for the Classical use of addresses such as φίλε, φίλτατε, βέλτιστε, and ἄριστε comes from contexts (particularly Socratic dialogues) in which they serve mainly to indicate that the speaker is in control of the conversation, but that usage seems to have arisen because they were basically polite (Dickey 1996: 121–122). More detail in Dickey (1996: 90–145, 271–283).

17 Classical authors writing in dialogue genres used even more addresses; for example Plato has 3,487, or 513 per 100,000 words. For more detail see Dickey (1996: 259–261; 2004a: 524).

approximately one direct address for every two surviving letters and petitions (Dickey 2004a: 496).[18]

The implication of these statistics is that in Hellenistic Greek the use of direct address at the beginnings of interactions was no longer expected, and its omission no longer considered impolite. That shift represents a major departure from the Classical address system—but when addresses do appear in Hellenistic texts, the terms used are generally Classical. Polybius' addresses to individuals are normally by name, kinship term, or title as appropriate.[19] In Hellenistic petitions βασιλεῦ 'king' is regularly used as a polite address for the kings of Egypt, and when another man is addressed, his name is used (Dickey 2004a: 497, 500).

Why did the Hellenistic Greeks (mostly) give up using direct address? Parallels with the contemporary change in the directives raise the possibility that one factor might have been the fundamentally egalitarian address system of the Classical period, in which status distinctions were not normally encoded in the addresses used; perhaps that system was unsuited to the more hierarchical social structures of the Hellenistic kingdoms. But such unsuitability could have been remedied by adapting the address system; it need not have resulted in giving up direct address entirely. The question of the reason for the dramatic decline in address usage must therefore remain open.

4.3 Roman period

Shortly before the first century AD the use of direct address started to increase in letters and petitions—but the terms employed were no longer those of the Classical period. Some of the changes could have a purely historical explanation, for once there was no longer a king ruling Egypt there would have been little reason to address anyone as βασιλεῦ 'king'. But the almost total absence from the address system of names, and of the generic terms seen in examples (20)–(23), requires a different type of explanation. In fact, comparison of the new Greek address system with the Latin one used by the new Roman masters of Egypt indicates that the former was largely based on the latter (Dickey 2004a: 501–520).

Direct address was not always used in Roman-period papyrus letters and petitions, and its absence was probably not perceived as impolite the way it would have been in the Classical period. When they did appear, addresses usually imparted additional politeness to the correspondence: All the most common address terms in these texts were specifically polite. Most common was κύριε/κυρία 'lord/lady' (whose use was not restricted to social superiors), ἀδελφέ/ἀδελφή 'brother/sister'

18 Of course, for practical reasons letter headings normally contained information on who the intended recipient was, but that information was typically in the dative case and therefore excluded from consideration here because of not being a free form of address (cf. section 4 above). The distinction is highly relevant to considerations of politeness: Greek speakers used different terms in headings and as addresses (Dickey 2004b: 139–144).

19 E. g., names 4.85.3, 8.12.5, 31.23.9; μῆτερ 'mother' to the speaker's mother 10.4.8; βασιλεῦ 'king' politely 18.22.8; στρατηγέ 'general' politely 10.18.12.

(whose use was not restricted to siblings or even to close friends), and φίλτατε/φιλτάτη 'dearest' (whose use did not indicate genuine affection) (see e. g., Dickey 2001; 2004a: 498–499, 511–517; 2004b: 144; Bagnall and Cribiore 2006: 85–87). These terms mirrored the use of *domine/domina* 'lord/lady', *frater/soror* 'brother/sister', and *carissime/carissima* 'dearest' in contemporary Latin letters (Dickey 2004a: 501–502). The most common multi-word address in the papyri was κύριε (μου) ἀδελφέ 'lord brother'; cf. Latin *domine frater* 'lord brother'. Addresses were often accompanied by μου 'my', which translated Latin *mi* 'my': e. g., ἀδελφέ μου = *mi frater* = 'my brother' (Dickey 2004a: 519–520). Examples (26)–(30) are typical.

(26) ἔγραψέ μοι Τεεῦς εὐχαριστοῦσα ὑμῖν, ὥστε, κυρία, ἔγνων ὅτι αἱ ἐντολαί μου μενοῦσι. (*P.Brem.* 63 lines 19–21)
'Teeus wrote to me thanking you all, lady, so I knew that my instructions will remain valid.' (woman to her daughter or daughter-in-law)

(27) Ἑρμαῖον φίλον ὄντα τοῦ πατρός μου παρατίθεμαί σοι, ἀδελφέ, ὅπως αὐτῷ συλλάβῃ, ἕως ἂν διατρέχῃ ἐν τῷ ὑπὸ σοὶ νομῷ. (*P.Brem.* 7 lines 4–6)
'Brother, I commend to you Hermaion, who is a friend of my father, so that you may assist him when he travels in the region you govern.' (a former holder of the office of Strategos to the current holder of that office)

(28) ἵν' οὖν, φίλτατε, καὶ παρὰ σοὶ τὴν ἀναζήτησιν αὐτῶν ποιησάμενος ἐὰν εὑρεθῶσι ἀναπέμψῃς ἔπεμψά σοι. (*P.Oxy.* 60.4060 lines 74–76)
'So, dearest, I have written to you so that you too having made a search for them may send them up if they are found.' (official in charge of one region of Egypt to official in charge of another region)

(29) ἐρρῶσθαί σε εὔχομαι, κύριε ἄδελφε. (*PSI* 12.1259 line 27)
'I pray that you are well, lord brother.' (man to friend or brother)

(30) καὶ εἰ ἤκουκας περὶ σουκκεσσόρων ἀκριβέστατα, γράψον μοι. μὴ οὖν ἄλλως ποιήσῃς, ἀδελφέ μου. (*O.Did.* 339 lines 8–11)
'… and if you have heard something specific about the relief team, write to me. Don't do otherwise, my brother.' (man to friend)

Greek literature of the Roman period does not always reflect this new system. Many authors, such as Lucian, wrote in a consciously archaising style that aimed to reproduce the Classical language as accurately as possible; these writers often reproduced the Classical address system to a greater or lesser degree. But others, notably the philosopher Epictetus and the authors of the New Testament, used a written language closer to that of contemporary conversation; these employed address systems clearly related to that of the Roman-period papyri (Dickey 2004a: 522–524). Therefore the changes visible in the papyri were not local to Egypt, but part of the more general evolution of the Greek language over a wide area, as all

Greek-speaking regions were gradually conquered by the Romans. Hellenistic Greek speakers, who did not normally use forms of address at all, felt the need for Latin-style polite addresses once they came under the rule of Latin speakers. They met this need by translating the Latin polite addresses into Greek, thereby creating an address system that was almost entirely polite.

5 Conclusions

Sharp changes in both elements of the politeness system examined here occurred along with each major change in the government and social structure of the peoples using the Greek language. The strikingly egalitarian (at least as concerns adult male citizens) address and directive systems of the Classical period were connected to the egalitarian (at least as concerns adult male citizens) and democratic society of that period. When the Greek language was transplanted to the hierarchical and socially stratified world of Hellenistic Egypt, the directive system immediately changed to reflect that social stratification, by conventionalising markedly polite phrases and turning them into formulaic softeners regularly used to social superiors. At the same time (though whether for the same reason is unclear), Greek speakers largely stopped using direct address. Later, when conquered by the Romans, Greek speakers adapted their politeness system yet again by adopting translations of the main Latin polite request formulas and polite addresses.

That Latin influenced the Greek politeness system is in one sense not surprising, for Latin also influenced Greek in other ways. (For example, many Greek words acquired new meanings and uses as Greek speakers learned to discuss Roman concepts, and hundreds of Latin words were borrowed directly into Greek.[20]) But the changes in the politeness system are striking because—at least on the basis of the evidence currently deployed by scholars—they seem to have been both earlier and more pervasive than most of the non-politeness influence. In the case of the address system the translations from Latin were made as it were into a vacuum, since there was no pre-existing address system for them to compete with, and that fact is no doubt relevant to their complete takeover of that portion of the politeness system. But the translated request formulas duplicated existing Greek formulas and yet competed with them so successfully that the modern Greek word for 'please' descends from one of the Latinate formulas. Was the politeness system of the conquered population more responsive to foreign influence than the other parts of their language?

20 For the repurposing of Greek words see e. g., Mason (1974); for the loanwords e. g., Dickey (2023).

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