DOI: https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004724235_005
Motte, A. (2025). "3 Solidarity Politeness in Old Kingdom Speech Captions". In *(Im)politeness in Ancient Egypt*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill.

Solidarity Politeness in Old Kingdom Speech Captions

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Abstract

The present paper explores the politeness strategies at work between socially equal individuals of low-ranking status in the so-called daily-life scenes of the Old Kingdom tombs (2675–2250 BC). These face-to-face interchange depictions are part of a highly standardized and idealized compositional frame that reflects the ancient Egyptian elite's view of society. Many of them are accompanied by short texts intended to replicate the dialogues between the interlocutors—they are as-if-spoken speech captions. Exemplifying Brown and Levinson's concept of positive politeness, the sources display various linguistic means by which they build and reinforce a framework of solidarity, thus illustrating Scollon and Scollon's concept of "solidarity politeness" (Scollon & Scollon, 1995). The article opens with preliminary remarks on the socio-pragmatic context and decorum (§1-2) and presents the corpus (§3). It then exposes the methodology and frameworks (§4) before focusing on politeness strategies in requests and responses (§5). The paper follows a data-driven approach to explore the horizontal politeness strategies in use in the Old Kingdom speech captions (§§5.1–5.2). A discussion follows on volition and discernment, building on previous politeness theories, to better understand which aspect is developed in the Old Kingdom depictions of such face-to-face interchanges (§5.3). It is argued that these multimodal sources, even if framed within the ruling group ideology, are extremely fruitful research avenues for sociolinguistics and historical politeness research (§6).

Keywords

Old Kingdom Egypt – elite tomb – face-to-face interchange depiction – socially equal individuals – volition – discernment – positive politeness – solidarity politeness – in-group identity

1. Introduction

This paper explores a corpus of multimodal sources often unknown outside the Egyptological field. Ancient Egyptian elite tombs exhibit so-called[1] daily-life scenes on their wall. These are unique depictions of interactions complemented by textual content, and vice versa.[2] This paper centers on the textual component, even if nonverbal aspects are just as important to extend

[1] These scenes are not actual depictions of daily-life events but rather an idealized version. For a discussion of their meaning, see for instance Kessler (1987, p. 60), van Walsem (1998a, p. 1205, fn 1), Bryan (2009), or Hartwig (2016, p. 36) with further references.

[2] For an explanation of the image-text relationship in ancient Egypt, with bibliographic references and examples, see for instance Motte & Neven (2022, pp. 31–36), Laboury (2022a–b), or even the extensive work of Baines (2007).

beyond the pragmatic focus on linguistic strategies (Hall, 2019, pp. 225–226). These face-to-face interchange depictions display interaction between individuals of unequal status (superiors vs subordinates) and between socially equal low-ranking individuals. Interactions between superiors and subordinates have been intentionally excluded from this study (see section 2 for further limitations). Instead, the focus shifts to the ordinary people depicted in these elite tombs. Until recently, limited attention has been devoted to the lower strata of ancient Egyptian society, largely due to the wealth of data available from and for the ruling group. However, it is possible to examine lower social status individuals through archaeological, iconographic, and textual evidence (see Driaux, 2020 with previous literature). Conversely, prior research on politeness in ancient Egypt has predominantly concentrated on asymmetrical (or vertical) relationships (see Almansa-Villatoro & Motte, this volume, introduction, section 2.2 and Lazaridis, this volume, fn 7). I aim therefore to investigate an underexplored aspect of politeness in ancient Egypt by looking at symmetrical (or horizontal) relationships within the lower strata of the society and shed light on the linguistic behaviour of these low-ranking individuals (see Hainline, Allen, Chantrain, and Sojic, this volume for asymmetrical relationships). Specifically, these interactions offer telling data to test the modern frameworks' (un)relevance and fuel the volition/discernment discussion.

These past two decades the concept of "discernment" has been much discussed and redefined since its first mention in Politeness literature (see *inter alia* Hill et al., 1986; Ide, 1989; Watts, 1992; and Ridealgh & Jucker, 2019 with previous bibliography). Discernment and volition were first seen as mutually exclusive, but they are two aspects of a continuum. While volition is a strategic aspect of Politeness, in which the interactants have the freedom of choice to enhance or maintain their face or their addressee's face, discernment is more characterized by the observance of social norms and the impact of the culture on interactions (cf. Almansa-Villatoro & Motte, introduction, this volume). It displays conventionalized utterances and address terms, and it uses culturally recommended linguistic patterns. In short, in the words of Ide (1989, p. 231), "the use of polite discourse formulae/registers is not optional but socio-pragmatically obligatory." It raises the awareness of the social context and the power differential between the speaker and the addressees. It exposes one's place in a strictly hierarchical society.

Ancient Egypt is usually perceived as a respect-based culture, with a strictly hierarchically ordered society in which each individual held a specific position within the hierarchy, whether at the top, the bottom, or somewhere distinctly defined in between (see, for instance, Ridealgh, 2016; Ridealgh and Jucker, 2019; see also Grajetzki, 2010, pp. 188–196). However, the ancient Egyptian texts, such as the selected corpus in this paper, present an alternative narrative, challenging our etic perceptions and projections (cf. Almansa-Villatoro & Motte, introduction, this volume and see discussion in section 5.3 below).

In the following pages, I discuss first the socio-pragmatic context and the principles of decorum (section 2) before delineating the corpus (section 3). I then elaborate on the models and concepts that informed my reflections on politeness within the lower strata of Egyptian society (section 4) before concentrating on the politeness strategies at work in requests and responses (section 5). Adopting a data-driven perspective, I expose cases of zero politeness (section 5.1) and investigate the positive (or solidarity) politeness strategies developed in the Old Kingdom speech captions (section 5.2). My focus then shifts back to the volition and

discernment concepts (section 5.3), to discuss their relevance in light of the data exposed in sections 5.1 and 5.2. Even if the Old Kingdom's representations of face-to-face interactions have been shaped by the ideological framework of the ruling elite, they represent highly valuable avenues for advancing sociolinguistic studies and historical research on politeness (section 6).

2. Preliminary remarks: the socio-pragmatic context and decorum

The face-to-face interchanges are depicted in the so-called daily-life scenes in ancient Egyptian elite tombs. As such, the data reflect the view and ideology of the elite, i.e., high-ranking individuals, the ruling group gravitating around Pharaoh himself. They belong to the court. They controlled and supervised the development of the decorative program of their tomb. Decorative programs were conceived by scribes and artisans, another group of individuals evolving (partly) in the higher spheres of Egyptian society. Still, the tomb owner participated – to some extent – in the conception of the decorative program of his (her) tomb (see, for instance, van Walsem, 2005, pp. 52–53; Hartwig, 2016, pp. 33–35). These tombs were built for the afterlife of the worthy. They are not random monuments built for just anyone. These tombs were meant – to put it simply – to guarantee eternal life in the underworld to the tomb owner, as well as to provide him (her) everything he (she) might need in his (her) afterlife. They also serve as memorials to be visited and keep the tomb owner's memory alive. As such, part of these "daily-life" scenes' intended function is to provide him (her) food, drinks, offerings, etc. for his (her) well-being. Furthermore, they promote the social order of the household (see, for instance, Münch, 2020) and an idealized conception of cosmic order to "maintain the harmony of the universe" (see Moreno García, 2006, p. 219 and Bussmann, 2015, p. 5's remark about the underrepresentation of women, children, and elderly individuals in the workforce). A strong ideology lies behind these scenes, hence why one speaks of **so-called** daily-life scenes in Egyptological literature (cf. fn. 1). They are **not** depictions of **actual** daily-life events.

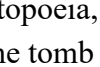
Further, the funerary monument itself displays the fixed hierarchical social order. As Baines (2007, pp. 217–218) phrases it, "in compositional terms, register lines (…) and the manipulation of scale contribute to the dominance of principal figures, as is appropriate to conventions produced in the service of royal ideology. Taken together, these conventions emphasize the "heroic" status of individual figures." In Figure 1, the tomb owner, Mereruka, is depicted in bigger dimensions, with high and wide hieroglyphs referring to him. On the other hand, workers are represented in these so-called daily-life scenes in a much smaller size. The hieroglyphs of their speech captions are also treated differently. They are just as small as the workers. While the tomb owner is watching, looking at his people, and displaying symbols of his high status, such as the animal skin, the sceptre, and the staff, the workers are depicted in various postures, dressed with a simple loincloth, when not naked (a common occurrence in so-called daily-life scenes, though not in this specific large-scale composition; see also Baines, 2007, p. 220 and Moreno García, 2017, p. 142). All these low-ranking individuals are working for the well-being of the tomb owner (cf. Vernus, 2011, pp. 83–89). Workers and tomb owner(s) do not belong to the same sphere. They do not hold the same position within ancient Egyptian society, and wall scenes make this readily visible. This differentiation relates to the elite concept of "decorum." Baines (1990, p. 20) defines decorum as "a set of rules and practices defining

what may be represented pictorially with captions, displayed, and possibly written down, in which context and in what form. It can be related to other constraints on action and reports on action. (…) and was probably based ultimately on rules of conduct and etiquette, of spatial separation and religious avoidance." Further, "decorum has much to do with enacting and representing the proper order of the world" (Baine, 2007, p. 16), through the lens of the ruling group (see also Allon, 2020).

[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE]

FIGURE 1. Tomb of Mereruka, room A3, East wall (Kanawati et al., 2010, pl. 74)

3. Corpus presentation and limitations

Speech captions are first recorded in "daily-life" scenes of elite tombs[3] as early as the second half of the third millennium BC (during the 4th dynasty, 2675–2545 BC). They continued to be used until the 4th century BC, but with varying frequency and popularity. They range from single onomatopoeia, such as  *hhhh* "hehehehe" and  *iiii* "iiii" in Figure 2, to small texts like in the tomb of Paheri in Figure 3 (see for instance white frame).

[PLACE FIGURE 2 HERE]

FIGURE 2. Processional dance in the Middle Kingdom tomb of Khety in Beni Hassan (Newberry, 1894, pl. XIII), courtesy of the Egypt Exploration Society

[PLACE FIGURE 3 HERE]

FIGURE 3. "Daily-life" scenes in the tomb of Paheri in Elkab, picture: A. Devillers

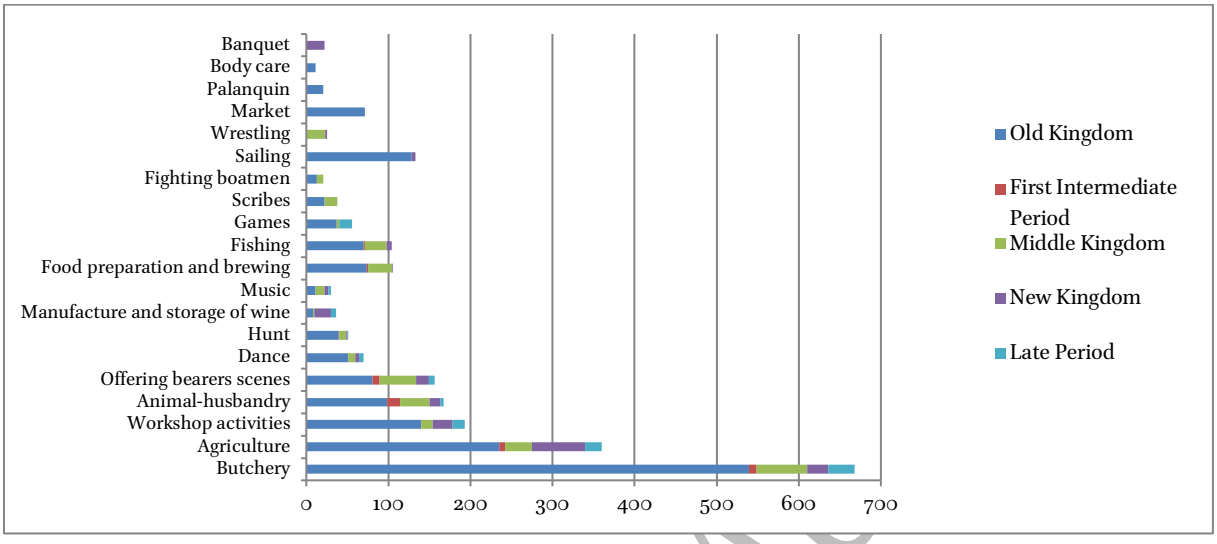
Captioned "daily-life" scenes include—but are not limited to[4]—agriculture, animal husbandry, butchery, brewing, fishing, fowling, etc. (Table 1, see also Motte, 2018, pp. 298–300 and Motte, 2023, n. 12). These written face-to-face communications illustrate the lower strata of ancient Egyptian society: individuals belonging to similar socio-professional groups being "non-elite," by contrast with the elite, by whom they are depicted as underlings to serve their ideological discourse and self-presentation. The captions record what they would purportedly have said in such a situation. They should, however, not be taken as true records of spoken ancient Egyptian (see also section 5.3). They participate in a specific discourse written for the benefit of the elite tomb owners, thus obeying the principles of decorum (cf. section 2).

TABLE 1. Chronological and thematic dispersions of speech captions in elite tombs. Old Kingdom = (2750–2250); First Intermediate Period = (2250–2045); Middle Kingdom = (2045–

[3] Speech captions are also recorded in royal monuments but are not part of this study. The ancient Egyptian elite was, in the words of Baines (2007, p. 67), "a professional class, a group of administrators rather than a nobility, and in principle if not in practice lacking an independent source of wealth." See also van Walsem (2005, pp. 17–18).

[4] For an extensive presentation of this corpus, see for instance Motte (2018).

1700); New Kingdom = (1539–1069); Late Period = (664–332) following Tallet et al. (2019, pp. 417–425).



Up to 2300 speech captions have been inventoried in the known and published[5] elite tombs over a 2,000–year time frame. This paper considers only Old Kingdom material (2750–2250 BC). It provides a workable sample for a better understanding of Politeness in ancient Egypt[6] and secures data from a single socio-political system.[7]

Additionally, the corpus has been narrowed to focus on face-to-face encounters between low-ranking, socially equal individuals, leaving aside low-to-high and high-to-low exchanges (cf. section 1). Ancient Egyptian society provides limited evidence of individuals from lower social strata (see, for instance, Driaux, 2020 for an overview of poverty in ancient Egypt). The "daily-life" scenes in elite tombs provide (certainly with bias; see sections 2 and 5.3) unique material for studying politeness in the lower strata of ancient Egyptian society.

Specifically, this paper explores the linguistic coding of requests and responses and their (external/internal) modifiers. House & Kádár (2021, p. 108)—adopted from Edmondson (1981, p. 88)—define a request as "a speech act in which the requester asks the requestee to do something which is in the interest of the requester (…)." In requests, the risk of imposition is high. They are Face Threatening Acts (FTAs). Brown & Levinson (1987, pp. 68–69; first wave approach) identified five strategies the speaker could use to mitigate the imposition (cf. Almansa-Villatoro & Motte, introduction, this volume).

As Hall (2019, p. 229) points out, making requests "typically involves several different phases: the initiation of a social exchange, the articulation of the request itself, and its acceptance or refusal." In this specific corpus, exchanges are limited to their core; ritual speech

[5] Ongoing excavations continue to unveil speech captions in tombs newly discovered. It was for instance the case with the tomb of Wahti, which was uncovered in 2018. See https://egymonuments.gov.eg/news/a-virtual-tour-through-the-tomb-of-wahti/ (last accessed on 05.04.2023).

[6] Cf. politeness as a social practice as in Kádár (2013, p. 2). He notably raised the importance of defining time and social space.

[7] The conception(s) of politeness might indeed differ over time, from one period to another. To illustrate my point, see for instance the (over)simplified view of the changing culture of politeness from Old English to Present-day English in Leech (2014, p. 283), with further references.

acts like opening and closing are absent. The speaker immediately utters his (more rarely her) request, to which the addressee(s) may or may not respond. Responses to requests are (non)verbal. They are either "yes" or immediate action. There are no "no" answers in Old Kingdom speech captions or even attitudes denoting a refusal (for a specific case of refusal gesture in 18th Dynasty tomb chapels (1539–1295 BC), see Bryan, 2015). They display instead many compliant replies, which can be grouped into three categories: (1) a formulaic expression (□*ry(.□) r ḥs.t.k* meaning literally "I will act according to what you will praise," for "yes, alright," "yes, I'll do (it)"), (2) responses mirroring the requests, and (3) the formula *mk w*□ *ḥr.s* (meaning "see, I'm on it"). Figure 4a-d exposes the three commonest case scenarios alongside a less common one. In Figure 4a, the speaker formulates his request while the addressee remains silent (see ex. 18 below). In Figure 4b, the speaker, who stands crouched on the right-hand side, utters his request (*mḥn ʿḏ pw s*□*n mk ʿḏ šw(.w)* "Coil this reel, hurry up. See, the reel is empty"), to which the addressee responds with the compliant formula □*ry(.□) r ḥs.t.k* ("yes, alright"). In the third case scenario (Figure 4c), both fishermen express a request (see ex. 12 below). A less frequent case scenario is illustrated in Figure 4d, in which two players comment on their game (see ex. 17 below).

[PLACE FIGURE 4 HERE]

FIGURE 4. a. Case scenario 1: tomb of Ty (Wild, 1953, pl. CXIV) © Ifao. 4. b. Case scenario 2: tomb of Pepiankh (Kanawati & Evans, 2014, pl. 71). 4. c. Case scenario 3: tomb of Kagemni (Harpur & Scremin, 2006, pl. 499). 4. d. Case scenario 4: tomb of Nebkauhor (Pusch, 1979, pl. 6).

4. Methodology and frameworks

I prepared this paper with a data-driven approach, being aware of the politeness literature (cf. Almansa-Villatoro & Motte, introduction, this volume). The specificity of the data—fictional records of captions uttered by low-ranking individuals and belonging to the ideological discourse and self-presentation of the ruling elite—led me to proceed in two steps to engage in dialogue with scholars outside the field of Egyptology. I first focused on the ancient inscriptions, temporarily ignoring the broader context (i.e. dominant views of lower-class manners). In this view, I built on the pragmalinguistic approach of Leech (1983; 2014) in combination with facework (Brown & Levinson, 1978; 1987) to highlight strategical forms of politeness in verbal behaviour. I also relied on the "solidarity politeness" concept used by Sifianou (1992; 1997) for politeness in modern Greek and on Richard Watts' notion of "politic" (appropriate) behaviour, which divides into positively marked ("polite") behaviour and unmarked ("non-polite") behaviour (cf. Watts, 1989; 1992; 2003; 2005 as well as Almansa-Villatoro & Motte, introduction, this volume and Sojic, this volume). In a second step, I considered the data in light of the broader context, to fuel the discussion on the volition/discernment dichotomy in (historical) politeness (cf. section 1 and Almansa-Villatoro & Motte, introduction, this volume) and gain a more balanced understanding of politeness in ancient Egypt.

Before moving on to the first step, a few words are in order, to expose the frameworks and concepts used in this paper. Brown and Levinson's model, facework, is based on the key notions of "face" (from Goffman, 1955/1967), which distinguishes between "the desire to be

unimpeded in one's actions (negative face), and the desire (in some respects) to be approved of (positive face)" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 13), and "Face Threatening Acts" (FTAs), which inherently risk damaging social face (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 60), the weight of which varies depending on power (P), distance (D), and rank of imposition (R, Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 74). They also built on the four maxims of Erwin Grice (1975)—Maxim of Quality, Maxims of Quantity, Maxim of Relevance, and Maxim of Manner—, which define "the basic set of assumptions underlying every talk exchange" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 95). They accordingly conceptualized five possible strategies, among which a speaker chooses to deal with these FTAs (Brown & Levinson, 1987, pp. 59–60 and pp. 68–70). The speaker may use positive politeness (friendliness) or negative politeness (deference) strategies. In this framework, the speaker's volition is high, as interactions are viewed as the outcome of deliberate, strategic choices. That said, the volition aspect has been dealt with in the second step, which considers the larger context (cf. section 5.3).

Leech (2014), on the other hand, explores the "manifestation of politeness" (or "communicative altruism") through pragmatics, making a distinction between pragmalinguistic politeness ("absolute politeness" in Leech 1983), which is "context-free," and sociopragmatic politeness ("relative politeness" in Leech 1983), which is "context-sensitive." Even if politeness is as much a social and cultural phenomenon as a linguistic one (Leech, 2014, p. 13), in his book *The Pragmatics of Politeness*, he focuses on the linguistic realization of politeness. For several reasons, he avoids the Brown & Levinson concepts of "positive politeness" and "negative politeness" and replaces them with "pos-politeness" and "neg-politeness" (Leech, 2014, pp. 11–12, pp. 24–27, and pp. 99–100). Specifically, Brown & Levinson (1978/1987) do not account for "face enhancement" (or "face-maintaining act") in their model, which creates an imbalance in their treatment of negative and positive faces (Leech, 2014, pp. 25–26 and p. 99, with reference to Kerbrat-Orocchioni, 1997). He adds:

> "I see face-threat mitigation as the function of neg-politeness only, whereas face enhancement is the function of pos-politeness. For Brown and Levinson, positive politeness is simply an additional set of strategies for avoiding face threat." (Leech, 2014, pp. 25–26)

Another main difference concerns the solidarity strategy. In Leech's view, employing familiar forms of address is not a form of "pos-politeness," whereas Brown and Levinson include it in the positive politeness strategies (Leech, 2014, p. 13 and p. 99). I, however, follow Brown and Levinson and see familiarizers as evidence of positive politeness. For this reason, even if I agree with his remark about face-enhancing acts, I do not use his concept of "pos-politeness" to avoid confusion. I do not aim to coin a new term that would account for both solidarity (or in-group) strategy and face enhancement—this is beyond the scope of this paper—but the reader should be aware of this when encountering mentions of "positive politeness" in this paper.

Finally, Sifianou's work on modern Greek has been influential on my understanding of politeness. She contributed to counterbalancing the model of Brown & Levinson, which has been criticized, among other things, for its Anglo-centrism (cf. Almansa-Villatoro & Motte, introduction, this volume with references). Greek society could be characterized as a positive-politeness culture (e.g., Sifianou, 1992). Directness should not be "associated with lack of

politeness in expression" and "although formal negative politeness is a motivation for indirectness in some contexts, it is neither the only one, nor the one prevalent in all societies*"* (Sifianou, 1997, pp. 163–164; see also Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 245 for a comment on the negative-politeness cultures, such as the British versus the Americans). Modern Greek employs a "solidarity politeness," with contexts in which "the main aim of the Speaker is not to avoid the imposition, but to give the addressee the opportunity to show his or her generosity, solicitude for the addressee, and eagerness to be of help*"* (Sifianou, 1997, p. 169; see also Saberi, 2012 for cases of solidarity politeness in Persian, with further references). Solidarity politeness (or positive politeness) fosters in-group membership and maintains social cohesion. Scollon and Scollon (1995, p. 45) define a solidarity politeness system as "-P, -D": no feeling of a "power difference (-P) or distance (-D) between the participants" (see also Figure 5).

> "The characteristics of this solidarity face system are that it is:
> 1 symmetrical (-P), that is, the participants see themselves as being in equal social positions;
> 2 close (-D), that is, the participants both use politeness strategies of involvement."
>
> Scollon, Scollon & Jones (2011, p. 54)

[PLACE FIGURE 5 HERE]

FIGURE 5. Figure solidarity face system in Scollon, Scollon & Jones (2011, p. 54, fig. 3.2)

In sum, these models and concepts nurtured my thought process about politeness in the lower strata of Egyptian society, in which distance and power appeared to be low (see section 5.3 for the volition/discernment discussion).

5. Politeness strategies in requests and responses

The coding of requests in Old Kingdom speech captions revealed a propensity for directness. Requests are formulated with and without redress. Unsoftened imperatives (bald on-record FTA in Brown & Levinson terms) are frequent, and, far from being a case of rudeness, they display zero politeness. As mentioned in section 3, responses have a more restricted set of coding, displaying only (non)verbal compliance. Section 5.1 exposes a few examples of zero politeness, in contrast to section 5.2, which develops positive politeness and solidarity strategies. Section 5.3, on the other hand, questions the impact of the lens of the ruling group and of the production circumstances.

5.1 Zero politeness

In Old Kingdom speech captions between lower-status individuals, blunt imperatives, being cases of bald on-record FTA according to Brown and Levinson's model, are regular coding categories in requests (for information about asymmetrical relationships, see for instance Hainline, Allen, Chantrain, and Sojic, this volume). Examples 1-3 illustrate direct requests with the three commonest case scenarios as exposed in Figure 4a-c above (cf. section 3). The head act of the request is a directive.

Ex. 1 case scenario 1 (speaker: request – addressee: ø)
Scene of offering bearers, the tomb of Ankhmahor (Kanawati & Hassan, 1997, pl. 41)
Request: □*r n(.□) w³.t*
"Make way for me."
Response: ø

Ex. 2 case scenario 2 (speaker: request – addressee: compliant response)
Scene of papyrus gatherers, the tomb of Ty (Wild, 1953, pl. CX)
Request: *ṯz ṯw*
"Raise up."
Response: □*ry(.□) r ḥz.t.k*
"Yes, alright." (see section 5.2.1.1)

Ex. 3 case scenario 3 (speaker 1: request 1 – speaker 2/addressee: request 2)
Scene of butchery, the tomb of Senenuankh (Borchardt, 1964, pl. 59)
Request 1: *nḏr nw nt(y) m-ʿ.k*
"Hold what is in your hand."
Request 2: □*ṯ* □*r.k zfṯ*
"Pull toward you and slice."

Leech (2014, p. 147) observed for English that "imperatives without *please* that demand little favors—i.e., where the cost is small—are often the small change of everyday interaction (e.g. family)." In classical Greek, unsoftened imperatives were used regardless of the status of the addressee but Dickey (2010, p. 337) observed that in postclassical Greek:

> "and particularly in the subliterary language, the unmodified imperative was much more likely to be used to subordinates than to superiors, as is the case in English. It therefore became a marker of the addressee's lower status, and other directive strategies became markers of higher status. (…) these changes clearly reflect changes in social structure from democratic Athens to the intense stratification of the early Byzantine world."

The context in which these captions are encapsulated explains the linguistic form (an imperative). The depictions supposedly describe the everyday events and interactions of lower-status individuals at work (for the benefit of the tomb owner), which calls on the lack of face mitigation. Both parties are more focused on immediate task realization (cf. Figures 1-4) than on social relations. In this specific context, blunt imperatives should not be understood as rude commands. Rather than impolite, they are "non-polite."[8] This is "zero politeness," which Leech (2014, p. 216) defines as "a property of utterances that have no politeness value of any kind." This is, in his terms, a "zero zone," or what Watts (1989) calls "politic behaviour," that is to say routine politeness (it should not be confounded with Lakoff's "non-politeness": a "behaviour that does not conform to politeness rules, used where the latter are not expected." Cf. Lakoff, 1989, p. 103). Nevertheless, specific linguistic strategies are also at stake to produce

[8] "Non-politeness" ("non-politesse" or "apolitesse" in French) is a concept defined by Kerbrat-Orecchioni. See for instance Kerbrat-Orecchioni (2010).

polite interactions between socially equal low-ranking individuals (for politeness strategies marking deference, with a higher degree of power and distance, see Hainline, Cross, Cromwell and Delattre, this volume, as well as false deference in Sojic, this volume).

5.2 Positive politeness and solidarity strategies

A few linguistic strategies expressing solidarity and positive politeness are common to requests and responses, but the underlying compliance of responses must first be discussed. Section 5.2.1. accordingly focuses on the coding of the responses before exploring four solidarity (or in-group) strategies in sections 5.2.2 to 5.2.5.

5.2.1 Compliant responses

Responses express positive politeness in their linguistic coding through their compliant nature. The most frequent is exposed in section 5.2.1.1 while the response mirroring the request and the formula *mk w□ ḥr.s* (meaning "see, I'm on it") are discussed in sections 5.2.1.2 and 5.2.1.3.

5.2.1.1 *□ry(.□) r ḥs.t.k* "yes, alright"

The most frequently used response to a request in Old Kingdom speech captions is the phrase *□ry(.□) r ḥs.t.k* (cf. example 2), which is a speech act oriented toward the requester. The main verb, *□ry(.□)* (> *□r□* "to do, to act[9]"), is here a subjunctive *sḏm.f* conveying both a strong volitive and an immediate future meaning. The response is presented as a promise, with a face threat for the negative face of the speaker, to please the addressee. This positive-politeness-laden message literally means, "I will act according to what you will praise," but it is a routinized expression[10] to say, "Yes, I'll do it" or "Yes, alright."

5.2.1.2 Responses mirroring the request

Another willing way to comply with a request consists of partially repeating it in the response. This is not something specific to ancient Egyptian. Similar practices are recorded in other languages (see e.g. the positive politeness strategy 5: seek agreement, repetition in Brown & Levinson, 1987, pp. 112–113 about Tzeltal, and Leech, 2014, pp. 176–177), but as far as ancient Egyptian is concerned, the repeated element is always the verb (cf. bolded words in ex. 4–5). In example 4, the imperative from the request is repeated in the response and turned into a first-person subjunctive *sḏm.f*, to convey a similar promise-meaning as in the phrase "yes, alright" (*□ry(.□) r ḥs.t.k*).

Ex. 4 Scene of butchery, the tomb of Ptahshepses Shepsipuptah (Kanawati & Abder-Raziq, 2001, pl. 42)
Request: *□**r** wn*
"**Do** (it). Hurry!"
Response: *šd(.□) ḥ³ty □**r(.□)***
"I'll extract the heart. **I'll do** (it)."

[9] See for instance Winand (2004, pp. 221–223) and Winand (2006, pp. 127–128).

[10] In cross-cultural pragmatics, such "formulaic, routinized expression, which makes a speech act explicit" (House & Kádár, 2021, p. 254) is labelled as Illocutionary Force Indicating Device (IFID).

Similarly, the response in example 5 exemplifies its compliance through the repeated verb, *wgm*, and the concomitant present meaning stressing that he is already engaged in the requested action (see also ex. 25 below).

Ex. 5 Scene of food-processing, the tomb of Kaemrehu (Borchardt, 1937, pl. 48)
Request: ***wgm*** *mnḫ prr m nšz*
"**Grind** thoroughly what comes out as grain."
Response: □***(w.□) wgm.***□ *r-pḥt(y)*
"**I am grinding**, with strength."

5.2.1.3 *Mk w*□ *ḥr.s* "see, I am on it"

A less frequent formulaic expression occurs a few times in face-to-face interchanges in Old Kingdom elite tombs. It is the adverbial sentence *mk w*□ *ḥr.s* "see, I am on it" (ex. 6), alongside its variant □*w.*□ *ḥr.s* "I am on it" (ex. 7). The main difference lies in the used particle. Whereas *mk* is an alerter, an attention-getter adding emphasis on the fact that the speaker is already doing what has been asked, the particle □*w* points out a statement that is temporarily true in specific circumstances (i.e. *hic et nunc*; *e.g.* Allen, 2014, §10.3 or Stauder, 2014, §4.4.1.1.2). Both variations are further cases of positive politeness strategies.

Ex. 6 Scene of butchery, the tomb of Pepiankh Heny the Black (Kanawati & Evans, 2014, pl. 96)
Request: *nḏr r-*□*qr*
"Hold on firmly."
Response: *mk w(*□*) ḥr.s*
"See, I'm on it."

Ex. 7 Scene of butchery, the tomb of Qar (Simpson, 1976, fig. 29)
Request: □*t* □*m.f*
"Get out of there."
Response: □*w(.*□*) ḥr.s*
"I'm on it."

5.2.2 Familiarizers and endearing vocatives

Requests and responses display a variety of similar address forms (or vocatives), the aim of which is to maintain and (re)affirm social relationships, with a minimal social distance (see Shiina, 2000a-b, for a discussion of the four pragmatic functions of vocatives, with examples from Early Modern English). They foster a sense of in-group belonging and index closeness and familiarity, as in other languages (for vocatives indexing familiarity in Modern Greek, for instance, see Sifianou & Tsakona, 2019). The vocatives add an element of politeness. As in-group identity markers, they are a form of Brown & Levinson positive politeness[11], or Scollon and Scollon solidarity politeness (cf. section 4).

[11] Unlike Leech (2014, p. 13 and p. 99), I do not exclude the solidarity strategy (or Lakoff's camaraderie) from Brown & Levinson's positive politeness. I do see endearment (or familiarizers) as evidence of positive politeness. See also section 4 above.

The address forms (vocatives) refer to the addressee and belong to the "external modifiers" category. External modifiers, separate from the head act, are added before or after the utterance to enhance politeness, friendliness, or persuasiveness (cf. Leech, 2014, p. 171). In these snapshots of dialogues, vocatives frequently terminate (more rarely precede, see example 18) the utterance to soften the imposition of the request and claim camaraderie (see ex. 8–18 in which the vocatives have been emphasized in boldface).

Following Leech (2014, p. 173) and House & Kádár (2021, p. 118), terms of address could be: title/role (+ surname), name (be it surname, first name, nickname, or pet name), familiarizer, endearment, or banter (an offensive term being a rude form of endearment). Leech (2014, p. 172) states that "by far the most frequent type of vocative in English is the first or given name of the addressee, which can be in the full form—the one you would find on a birth certificate—(*e.g., Robert*) or in the more familiar short form (*Rob*) or hypocoristic (pet name) form (*Bobby*)." In speech captions, though, names are rather infrequent. This is a clear case of name avoidance,[12] due to the context in which they arise, i.e. monuments meant to glorify a deceased elite member (cf. section 2).

Titles are, in speech captions, descriptive address forms: characteristics (ex. 8), epithets, or trades' names (ex. 9, see also Figure 6).[13]

Ex. 8 Scene of agriculture, the tomb of Neferiretinef (van de Walle, 1978, pl. 11)
Request: □*t̲ t̲w ʿ.k* □***rw-ḫ.t***
"Pull your arm, you, **worker**."
Response: *ø*[14]

Ex. 9 Scene of butchery, the tomb of Ptahhotep I (Murray, 1905, pl. XXXVII-XXXVIII)
Request: □*t̲ r.k mnḫ* ***sšm pw***
"Pull firmly towards you, **butcher**."
Response: □*ry(.□) r ḥs.t.k wr.t*
"I'll do it hard."

[PLACE FIGURE 6 HERE]

FIGURE 6. Scene of butchery, the tomb of Ptahhotep I (Murray, 1905, pl. XXXVII-XXXVIII), courtesy of The Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, UCL

Leech (2014, p. 173) distinguishes "endearments" (e.g. *darling*, *dear, honey, love*) from "familiarizers" (e.g. *bro, buddy, dude, folks, guys, sis*). In his opinion, the endearment term claims closeness and affection, whereas the familiarizer claims camaraderie. In this paper, I merged both in a single category as the ancient Egyptian data are not as clear-cut as English in this view. For instance, the expression *sn(.□)* "my brother" in ex. 10 is used to denote closeness and camaraderie, not an actual kinship.

[12] Very rarely, names are found in low-to-high and high-to-low relationships, but this discussion is beyond the scope of this paper. See, for instance, a woman addressing a fishmonger in a market scene with the terms □*my-rꜣ* □*bꜣ* "Overseer Ibi" in Bárta (2001, fig. 3.10 and 3.17).

[13] In Imperial Latin, the addressee may also be usefully identified by one feature. See for instance Dickey (2002, pp. 245–256).

[14] This sigla indicates the absence of a verbal response.

Ex. 10 Scene of butchery, the tomb of Seshemnefer (Barsanti & Maspero, 1900, fig. 7)
Request: □*ṯ r.k* ***sn(.□)***
"Pull towards you, **(my) brother**."
Response: ø

"Brother" is a familiarizer denoting a relationship between equals. This is a frequent in-group identity marker in letters to minimize social distance (Cf. for instance Brose, 2012, p. 41 about Middle Kingdom letters in contrast to the deferential distance exposed in Allen, this volume, see also the terms of address "brother" and "sister" in Coptic letters, in Cromwell and Delattre, this volume). Similar usages are found in other linguacultures. For instance, in Classical Latin letters, it "seems to be a polite address for men of status approximately equal to the speaker; it is friendly but does not indicate any real intimacy" (cf. Dickey, 2002, p. 124)[15]. In Late Babylonian Letters, the term "brother" is used for addressees of equal or lower standing (cf. Schmidl, 2017, p. 381), while in Hittite State correspondence, it is limited to equal-standing individuals, scribes, or officials (cf. Cajnko, 2016, p. 161 and p. 163).

Between social equals in the lower strata of ancient Egyptian society, the most common address form is the phrase *nty-ḥnʿ(.□)* literally "(you) the one that is with me," meaning "comrade, fellow." It is a formula specific to these speech captions, added to a request (ex. 11–12) or a response (ex. 12–14), both being second-person oriented[16] (see Figure 4b above for ex. 12).

Ex. 11 Scene of butchery, the tomb of Mereruka (Kanawati et al., 2011, pl. 86 and pl. 106)
Request: *pnz tp.f* ***nt(y)-ḥnʿ(.□)***
"Turn its head, **comrade**."
Response: □*ry(.□) r ḫz.t.k*
"Yes, alright."

Ex. 12 Scene of fishing, the tomb of Kagemni (Harpur & Scremin, 2006, pl. 499)
Request (speaker 1): *sṯ³* ***nt(y)-ḥnʿ(.□)***
"Pull, comrade."
Request (speaker 2): *ḫn wr.t* ***nt(y)-ḥnʿ(.□)*** *wn ṯ(w)*
"Row hard, **comrade**. Hurry up."

Ex. 13 Scene of butchery, the tomb of Tjauty (Säve-Söderbergh, 1994, pl. 27)
Request: *[zfṯ] ḥm s□f nḏr*
"[Slaughter] indeed. Cut and hold."
Response: *mk w(□) ḥr.s* ***nt(y)-ḥnʿ(.□)***

[15] For a comparison between Imperial Latin and Roman-period Greek about the use of "brother" (and "sister"), see for instance Dickey (2004, p. 509 and pp. 513–516). For ancient Greek, see Dickey (1996, pp. 88–89) with mention of Hindi.

[16] Shavel (1998) raised up interesting conclusions about vocatives in third-person oriented sentences in Latin, used "as a device which creates or emphasizes the contact between interlocutors, whether to enhance the intimacy between them or to form a verbal bridge corresponding to the cohesion in the exchange between speakers."

"See, I'm on it, **comrade**."

Ex. 14 Scene of cooking, the tomb of Idu Seneni (Säve-Söderbergh, 1994, pl. 10)
Request: *wdḥ r.k*
"Pour, you."
Response: □*r(.□) r ḥz.t.k* ***nt(y)-ḫnʿ(.□)***
"Yes, alright, **(my) comrade**."

Similarly, but less frequently, the endearing vocative *mry(.□)* "my dear" terminates a request (ex. 15) or a response (ex. 16), which incidentally mirrors the request by means of the negated verb *m/n*[17] *rd*□ (see also section 5.2.4).

Ex. 15 Scene of body care, the tomb of Khentika (James, 1953, pl. XI)
Request: □*r nw r nḏm* ***mry(.□)***
"Do this gently, **my dear**."
Response: □*ry(.□) r ḥs.t.k*
"Yes, alright."

Ex. 16 Scene of craftsmanship, the tomb of Wepemnefret (Hassan, 1936, fig. 219)
Request: *m rd*□*(.w) pꜣq.k nw nt(y) m ʿ.k*
"Do not give your thin object and what is in your hand."
Response: *n rd*□*(.□)* ***mry(.□)***
"I will not give (them), **my dear**."

A few face-to-face interchanges include rude form of endearment (banter), after (ex. 17) or before (ex. 18) the request. Leech (2014, pp. 100–101) defines banter as "a way of reinforcing or achieving in-group solidarity;" it is "offensive on the surface but at a deeper level is intended to maintain comity."[18] Banter is therefore *mock* impoliteness, not genuine impoliteness (cf. Culpeper 2011, pp. 210–215 and Almansa-Villatoro & Motte, introduction, this volume). Ex. 17 (Figure 4d above, case scenario #4) takes part in a playful context. Two players, being depicted as social equals (cf. section 2), compete in a board game (known as "senet" in ancient Egyptian). The presence of the banter *wḫꜣ p(w)* ("fool") signals a minimized social distance between the interlocutors. On the other hand, the response of the teased addressee suggests he perceived the banter as such, giving a sense of closeness (or Leech's camaraderie).

Ex. 17 Scene of board-game "senet," the tomb of Nebkauhor (Pusch, 1979, pl. 6)
Request: *fꜣ nn wny* ***wḫꜣ p(w)***
"Take this one off. Hurry, **fool**."
Response: *d*□*(.□) ḥm sšm(.□) ḏbʿ.k r pr ks-3*
"I will indeed cause that your finger leads the way to the house of the three bones."

[17] Ancient Egyptian displays a variety of negations. In this example, the direct request is negated with the verb *ỉmy*, in its imperative form (*m*), while the response is a 1st-person prospective negated with the negation *n*.
[18] See Leech (2014, p. 238) for an explanation of how some over-impoliteness turns into camaraderie.

The vocative in example 18, on the other hand, has an interpretative ambiguity in the absence of a verbal response from the teased or other devices, like prosodic features or laughing. (cf. Culpeper, 2011, pp. 213–215 for cases of mismanaged mock impoliteness). Yet, the iconographic context does not suggest any malicious intent from the teaser. A farmer (the teased) carries a calf on his back to encourage the mother and the other animals in the herd to follow him across the body of water (see Figure 4a above). The heifer bellows so much for her calf that the drover standing by her (the teaser) strokes her to calm her down and advises his companion to hurry across, by teasing him with the insult *mḥsḫs* "yokel." This word is a hapax legomenon,[19] known only in this specific speech caption. The difficulty in interpreting the success or failure of the banter in ex. 18 lies in the absence of a verbal response. Nevertheless, the farmer's non-linguistic behaviour, centered on his duty to drive safely the oxen across the river, serves as a means of expressing his approval (cf. section 3) and might point to the success of the banter. Relying on the other vocatives from this corpus, the intention of which is to mark solidarity between interlocutors, one could consider this example as a case of a rude form of endearment.

Ex. 18 Scene of animal-husbandry, tomb of Ty (Wild, 1953, pl. CXIV)
Request: □ ***mḥsḫs pw*** □ʿ *bḥs pw d*□*.k šm* □*wꜣ.wt* □*ptn*
"**Hey yokel**, drive this calf. Make these oxen go away."
Response: ø

In sum, ancient Egyptian vocatives in speech captions are "semantically oriented to positive politeness"[20] (cf. Shiina, 2000b, p. 140 about Early Modern English and Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 108). The above-listed and exemplified terms of address indicate reciprocal vocative forms. They expose symmetrical relationships and emphasize proximity and solidarity (compare with Almansa-Villatoro, this volume about Old Kingdom and First Intermediate Period letters). Endearments and familiarizing vocatives add solidarity politeness, to uphold social cohesion and promote in-group membership.

5.2.3 Upgraders as illustrations of an in-group strategy

Old Kingdom speech captions present a variety of upgraders. Whereas downgraders reduce the pragmatic force of a speech act, upgraders increase it. House & Kádár (2021, pp. 124–125), inventory ten subcategories: intensifier, commitment indicator, expletives, time intensifier, lexical uptoner, determination marker, autographic/suprasegmental emphasis, emphatic addition, emotional expressions/exclamations, and pejorative determiner). The speech captions abundantly use upgraders in requests and responses, being (time) intensifiers. Leech (2014, p. 229) considers upgraders as illustrations of rudeness (for modern English). As far as ancient Egyptian is concerned, it seems to denote an in-group strategy (or Leech's camaraderie) in the same vein as banter, which is no longer overt impoliteness. One way to explore the degree of offensiveness in requests lies in the responses' coding (upgraders are in boldface). In ex. 19 and

[19] This hapax is built on the bi-consonantal root *ḥs*, the reason of which previous authors sometimes translated it "shitty, shitter." See van Walsem (1998b, p. 1475) for a detailed explanation.

[20] On a side note, absence of vocatives rather seems to be "non-polite" (as in zero politeness, cf. section 5.1) than actual and intentional rudeness.

20, the time intensifier *ḫr-ꜥ.w(y)* "straightaway" modifies the request head act. Yet, responses do not differ from requests coded without time intensifiers (compare with ex. 1 and 2, free of upgrader). In one case (ex. 19), it is non-verbal, while in the other (ex. 20 and Figure 7), the addressee uses the prototypical response □*ry(.□) r ḥs.t.k* "Yes, alright."

Ex. 19 Scene of animal-husbandry, the tomb of Mehu (Altenmüller, 1998, pl. 17)
Request: □*r* ***ḫr-ꜥ.w(y)*** □*my ḫp ḫr pr*
"Act **straightaway**. Give and go to the household."
Response: ø

Ex. 20 Scene of butchery, the tomb of Kagemni (Harpur & Scremin, 2006, p. 512)
Request: □*my ḥ³ty pn* ***ḫr-ꜥ(.wy)***
"Give this heart **straightaway**."
Response: □*ry(.□) r ḥs.t.k*
"Yes, alright."

[PLACE FIGURE 7 HERE]
FIGURE 7. Scene of butchery, the tomb of Kagemni (Harpur & Scremin, 2006, p. 512)

A similar situation is displayed with intensifiers, like the adverbs *mnḫ* (cf. ex. 5 above), *r-□qr* (cf. ex. 6 above), or *wr.t* "much, very" (ex. 21), which derives from the adjectival or verbal stem *wr(r)* "to be great, to be large" (Gardiner, 1957³, §205.4).

Ex. 21 Scene of butchery, the tomb of Ty (Wild, 1966, pl. CLXIII)
Request: □*t r.k* ***wr.t***
"Pull **hard** towards you."
Resolve: □*ry(.□) m□ sb³.k*
"I'll do as you teach."

Based on the responses, requests formulated with upgraders do not appear to be perceived as offensive. Far from expressing genuine rudeness, upgraders depict a solidarity framework in which the participants, being social equals, may utter non-offensive direct requests. They add details to the solidarity politeness strategies developed in Old Kingdom speech captions. They betray the urgency of the situational context, making such requests therefore acceptable and giving a vivid tone to the face-to-face interchange depiction. Ex. 22 illustrates a unique situation in which two requests—one with intensifiers, one without—are addressed with the same compliant response supplemented with the term of address *nty-ḥnꜥ(.□)* "comrade" as an in-group identity marker (cf. section 52.1.).

Ex. 22 Scene of butchery, the tomb of Meryteti (Kanawati & Abder-Raziq, 2004, pl. 52b)
Request 1: □*r* ***r-mnḫ*** ***wr.t***
"Do (it) **very thoroughly**."
Request 2: □*.dm ds pn s□n*
"Sharpen that knife, hurry."
Response: □*r(.□) r ḥz.t.k nt(y)-ḥnꜥ(.□)*
"Yes, alright, comrade."

5.2.4 Grounders as a positive or a negative politeness device

Grounders are external modifiers, falling under the umbrella of supportive (or supporting) moves, the function of which is to justify the request by making it seem reasonable to ask in the circumstances (cf. Leech, 2014, p. 175). They can mitigate the force of the speech act (House & Kádár, 2021, pp. 125–127), in which case they function as a negative politeness strategy. Yet, building on Brown and Levinson's positive politeness strategies, one could also understand grounders as positive politeness[21] devices, depending on the context. Let us explore the examples below, in which the grounder has been highlighted with boldface. Figure 8 depicts three (or more) fowlers suspended from a rope to prevent the birds from escaping while their companion approaches the net and extracts a few birds. The request runs above the fowlers and could be uttered by the standing companion. The fowlers' compliant response is understood from the iconographic context, showing them focused on their task, maintaining the net closed.

Ex. 23 Scene of bird-hunting, the tomb of Kahep (Kanawati, 1980, fig. 12)
Request: *wn ṯn r.s* □***w ḥb nfr*** □***m***
"Hurry it up. **A beautiful catch is in there.**"
Response: ø

[PLACE FIGURE 8 HERE]
FIGURE 8. Scene of bird-hunting, the tomb of Kahep (Kanawati, 1980, fig. 12)

In ex. 23, the grounder follows the head act. It may also precede it, as in ex. 24. Two butchers are busy around an animal, dismembering it and cutting off one of the front legs.

Ex. 24 Scene of butchery, the tomb of Tjauty (Säve-Söderbergh, 1994, pl. 26-27)
Request: □***w ø***[22] ***wdf(.w)*** *pr ḫpš wr.t*
"**It is late.** Take the foreleg out, very."
Response: *mk w(□) ḥr* □*r.t r ḥs.t.k*
"See, I am acting according to what you will praise."

In both cases, the grounder is an explanation to make the addressee feel concerned about the situation in which the request is uttered. The speaker creates rapport and asks for solidarity. The compliant (non) verbal responses in both examples strengthen symmetrical solidarity (cf. also the "reciprocal involvement" in Scollon & Scollon, 1995, p. 48). Specifically, the request in ex. 24 has two elements of politeness: the grounder (□*w ø wdf(.w)*) and the upgrader (*wr.t*). The addressee emphasizes his involvement through the linguistic coding of his response, switching from a subjunctive *sḏm.f* form (**mk* □*ry.*□ *r ḥs.t.k*) to a progressive present (*mk w(□) ḥr* □*r.t r ḥs.t.k*), which anchors a higher degree of compliance (cf. section 5.2.5) and points to solidary reciprocity (see also Sojic, this volume, section 3.9 about the concept of reciprocity).

[21] Grounders are not explicitly framed in the Brown and Levinson positive politeness.

[22] The neutral subject has been omitted. This is something common in Old Kingdom speech captions. See for instance Motte (2023) with more references.

In a nutshell, grounders could be understood as attempts to soften the request (negative politeness strategy) but the context in which they take place, free of power difference and social distance (cf. Scollon & Scollon's –P, –D in section 4), rather align them with solidarity and positive politeness.

5.2.5 A spectrum of intensified compliance

The addressee's replies also exemplify the previously discussed in-group strategies (cf. sections 5.2.2 and 5.2.3). Vocatives and upgraders increase the positive-politeness-laden message conveyed through the initial compliant responses (cf. section 5.2.1) and accentuate the solidarity framework. In ex. 25, the endearing vocative *mry(.□)* "my dear" is added after the formulaic expression *mk w(□) ḥr.s* "See, I'm on it" (see also Figure 9).

Ex. 25 Scene of offering bearers, the tomb of Ankhmahor (Kanawati & Hassan, 1997, pl. 43b-c)

Request: *d□ □w.t n(.□) m³-ḥḏ pn ḏr □y.t ḫr(y)-ḥb*

"Make this oryx come to me before the lector priest arrives."

Response: *mk w(□) ḥr.s* ***mry(.□)***

"See, I'm on it, **my dear**."

[PLACE FIGURE 9 HERE]

FIGURE 9. Scene of offering bearers, the tomb of Ankhmahor (Kanawati & Hassan, 1997, pl. 43b-c)

In ex. 26-28, the intensifiers *wr.t*, *n-□qr*, and *ḥr-ʿ.wy* respectively reinforce the pragmatic force of the response.

Ex. 26 Scene of butchery, the tomb of Ty (Wild, 1966, pl. CLXIII)

Request: *□ṯ r.k sšm pw*

"Pull towards you, butcher."

Response: *□w(.□) □r(.□)* ***wr.t***

"I am doing (it) ***hard***."

Ex. 27 Scene of butchery, the tomb of Ankhmahor (Kanawati & Hassan, 1997, pl. 49)

Request: *ḥʿ wr.t nt(y)-ḫnʿ(.□) d□.k ḫpš pn ḥr ḫ³.t wn*

"Stand up firmly, comrade, and put this foreleg on the offering table. Hurry up!"

Response: *□ry(.□) r ḥz.t.k f³(.□)* ***n-□qr***

"Yes, alright. I will carry (it) **diligently**."

Ex. 28 Scene of butchery, the tomb of Mehu (Altenmüller, 1998, pl. 49)

Request: *□ṯ □r.k nt(y)-ḫnʿ(.□) m(y) ḫpš pn*

"Pull towards you, comrade. Take this foreleg."

Response: *[□r]y(.□) [r] ḥz.[t].k* ***ḥr-ʿ.w(y)***

"Yes, alright, **straightaway** (literally: I'll do it as you will praise, straightaway)."

Minimal social distance relationship is emphasized in ex. 29 via the familiarizer *nt(y)-ḥnʿ(.□)*, while the time intensifier adds details on the compliant response mirroring the request with the help of the verb *rd□* (*□my* in the imperative form[23] of the request and the subjunctive *d□(.□)* in the reply, cf. underlined words).

Ex. 29 Scene of butchery, the tomb of Nikauisesi (Kanawati & Abder-Raziq, 2000, pl. 57)
Request: *□my □wf n ḥ³.t □w ḫry-ḥb ḥr □r.t ḫ.t*
"Give the filet! The lector priest is performing the ritual."
Response: *d□(.□) n.k* ***ḫr-ʿ.wy nty-ḥnʿ.□***
"I'll give (it) to you **straightaway, comrade**."

The addressee in ex. 30 increases the pragmatic force of his speech act even more by connecting two intensifiers (*r-mnḫ□* and *wr.t*) to the head act of his response.

Ex. 30 Scene of butchery, the tomb of Manefer (Lepsius, 1849-1859, pl. 66-68)
Request: *ndr nw*
"Hold this."
Response: *□ry(.□)* ***r-mnḫ□ wr.t***
"I'll do (it) **very thoroughly**."

The last recorded strategy to intensify compliance in the addressee's reply consists of playing on the formulas. For instance, in ex. 25 (cf. section 5.2.4), the volitive and immediate future meaning of the subjunctive *□ry(.□)* from the response *□ry(.□) r ḥs.t.k* ("yes, alright") is replaced with the construction *ḥr* + infinitive (*ḥr □r.t*), which expresses a progressive present. It presents the response as a concomitant action, emphasizing the addressee is already doing what has been asked: *mk w(□) ḥr □r.t r ḥs.t.k* "See, **I am doing** (it) according to what you will praise" (cf. Vernus, 1990, pp. 20–21 and p. 27). It also interplays with the response *mk w□ ḥr.s*, adopting a similar structure (cf. section 5.2.1.3). Ex. 31 demonstrates a creative use of the compliance formulas to produce an even more compliant reply. The response combines the common expression *□ry(.□) r ḥs.t.k* "yes, alright" to the request repetition strategy with the verb *m³³*, which means "inspect, look at" in this context.

Ex. 31 Scene of craftsmanship, the tomb of Ankhmahor (Kanawati & Hassan, 1997, pl. 40)
Request: ***m³³*** *ḥr.f ds m³(w) pw d(□) m ṯb.t.t.f nt(y)-ḥnʿ(.□) ḥn.k m ʿnḫ*
"**Inspect** its surface. It is a new jar. Put (it) down at its base, comrade, and be careful".
Response: *□ry(.□) r ḥz.t.k* ***m³³(.□)***
"Yes, I'll do (it). **I'll inspect** (it)."

In sum, speech captions display diverse techniques to intensify the "yes" answers, with additional familiarizers/endearing vocatives and upgraders, or with plays on the formulas. As a result, the replies present amplified compliance thanks to a combination of positive politeness strategies, whose purpose is to outline the solidarity framework between the participants.

[23] Cf. e.g. Allen (2014, §15.2.3) but as Allen (2017, pp. 133–134) points out, hybrid spellings challenge this assumption of regular and irregular forms of the imperative.

5.3 Volition versus discernment?

In the introduction (see section 1), I stressed that ancient Egypt was often regarded as a highly hierarchical society with a respect-based culture. However, ancient Egyptian texts offer an alternative perspective, questioning our external (etic) interpretations and assumptions. For instance, Almansa-Villatoro (2024, p. 364) concluded in her study on Old Kingdom letters—a corpus of texts from the same time exposing asymmetrical and symmetrical relationships—that "(…) language in the Old Kingdom, like politeness, was not used to create distance and distinction. Rather, it was used to emphasize proximity and similarity."

The Old Kingdom face-to-face interchange depictions between socially equal low-ranking individuals unveil a camaraderie culture in which **in-group identity is elevated**. The request acts show various linguistic options for crafting a polite communicative act, which we could link to the positive politeness or solidarity politeness strategies. In these "daily-life" scenes, requests may be expressed via several linguistic forms, ranging from blunt (unsoftened) imperative to imperative forms with familiarizers or endearing vocatives, upgraders, and grounders. Responses, being nothing else than compliance, display a more restricted range of options in line with the positive (or solidarity) politeness instances listed in the requests. This gives an impression of freedom of choice (cf. also van Walsem, 2005, pp. 51–61). Figure 10 is a telling example in this regard. The two lower registers of the East wall in Room 5 of the tomb of Pepiankh depict eleven butchery scenes in which requests and responses are uttered. The full range of (non)verbal politeness strategies is illustrated (cf. bolded words in the transliterations and translations below). For instance, in scene 3, the speaker utters his request with a blunt imperative (□*ṯ ḫpš pw* "take this foreleg"), being zero politeness, to which the addressee responds with the short routizined expression □*ry(.□)* "yes" (literally "I'll do (it)"). In scenes 2 and 7, the upgrader □*qr* completes the request (scene 2: *nḏr* □***qr*** "hold on **firmly**", scene 7: *nḏr* □***qr*** *d*□*(.i) pr ḫpš.f* "hold on **firmly**, I will make this foreleg come out"). Responses are the formulaic expression *mk w*□ *ḥr.s* "see, I am on it" and the positive-politeness-laden message □*ry(.□) r ḥs.t.k* "yes, I'll do (it)" respectively. In scene 9, a grounder is added after the request (□*my pr* □*wf n ḥ³.t* ***ḏr*** □***y.t ḫry-ḥb r*** □***r.t ḫ.t*** "make the flank steak come out **before the lector priest comes to perform the ritual**"), while the response is again the "yes, I'll do (it)" formula (□*ry(.□) r ḥs.t.k*). Lastly, scene 11 exemplifies how in-group strategies may be combined in a request: □*ṯ* □*m* □***qr nt(y)-ḫnʿ(.□)*** "pull out of there **firmly, comrade**" (upgrader □*qr* with the familiarizer vocative *nt(y)-ḫnʿ(.□)*). The addressee responds with a concise □*ry(.□)* "I'll do (it)" and in turn, he states another request (□*my pr ḫpš.f* "cause this foreleg to come away"), to which the first speaker responds non-verbally through his immediate action. Scene 1, in which the offering bearer kindly requests the foreleg with the addition of a grounder to ask for solidarity and involvement (□*my n(.□) ḫpš pw* □***w ø hrw.y*** "Give me this foreleg. **It is time.**") also illustrates non-verbal response and prompt action, which gives rise to reciprocal involvement (or symmetrical solidarity, see section 5.2.4 above).

[PLACE FIGURE 10 HERE]

FIGURE 10. Tomb of Pepiankh, room 5, East wall (Kanawati & Evans, 2014, pl. 96)

Nevertheless, to what extent can we speak of "freedom of choice"? Several aspects should be considered in this discussion. The apparent "freedom of choice" also depends on stylistic considerations and the available space for the written text within the visual representation. The scribes and artists who worked on the tombs' decorations consciously chose specific idioms, formulas, and linguistic forms to make these "daily-life" scenes appear more life-like and real with sound recorded, in a way, through the captions, to provide a life-like experience, while dealing with material constraints and limited space. Texts and scenes were also copied from tomb to tomb across the country in order to emphasize the in-group identity at the elite level and promote their self-representation (cf. decorum in section 3). These external and technical factors partially influence the apparent "freedom of choice."

Furthermore, far from being true samples of the spoken ancient Egyptian, these captions are short texts written as if spoken with a deliberate choice of linguistic features. They aim at mimicking the actual vernacular language (cf. *inter alia* Vernus, 2009–2010, p. 79; Vernus, 2010, p. 319, n.1). Such face-to-face exchanges are found until the end of Pharaonic Egypt. And yet, they display a relatively identical language through time, while we know, thanks to texts from everyday life, that the vernacular language changed over time. It is a rather complex phenomenon, dealing with register variations and linguistics indexicality. Speech captions belong to a specific literary genre, with its set of principles (cf., for instance, Motte, 2018).

These face-to-face exchanges in elite tombs are the products of the scribes who elaborated the tomb decoration. As such, it parallels the observation of Kádár (2013, p. 163), according to which "the understandings of politeness that arise in historical data reflect dominant views and ideologies, often even in cases when they animate the language usage of the lower classes." It raises questions about how these interactions between socially equal, low-ranking individuals genuinely exemplify a camaraderie culture and an in-group identity. The consistency in their use across the different scenes would seem to suggest as much, even if one should keep in mind that these speech captions belong to a written discourse with a high degree of preparedness (cf. House & Kádár, 2021, pp. 134–136). All these samples of politeness also reflect how the ruling group imagined the way not (so) educated people should interact with each other in this idealized version of society for the afterlife of the tomb owner. The replies make it feel even more choreographed. No is not an option. Workers may only take immediate action or respond with one compliant reply (1), the phrase □*ry.*□ *r ḥs.t.k* "Yes, I'll do it" (or one of its variants), 2) the mirroring of the request expressed with a prospective *sḏm.f* to present the response as a promise, or 3) with the expression *mk w*□ *ḥr.s* "see I am on it" (or the variant with the particle □*w*, cf. section 5.2.1.3) to emphasize (s)he is already doing what has been asked). From time to time, scribes play with conventionalized replies to intensify compliance (cf. section 5.2.5).

Speech captions in Old Kingdom elite tombs show that there is room for strategic language use in discernment (see also Kádár & House, this volume). Further, they shed light on the Old Kingdom society, which might not have been as strictly hierarchically organized as in later periods (compare with Ridealgh's work on Ramesside texts, such as Ridealgh, 2013; 2017, Ridealgh & Jucker, 2019, Ridealgh & Unceta Gómez, 2020, and Ridealgh, this volume). The language used in Old Kingdom society embodies both discernment and positive politeness,

striking a balance between maintaining respect and fostering solidarity, depending on the context and relationship.[24]

6. Conclusion

Unlike other languages, such as English, where there is little evidence of politeness in the language of directive and in the use of address terms in Old English—before 1100 BC (cf. Kohnen, 2008a-b; Leech, 2014, p. 285)—Ancient Egyptian displays politeness strategies as early as mid-Old Kingdom (2544–2250 BC), in requests and responses: familiarizers and endearing vocatives, upgraders, grounders as well as compliant replies, which display in itself politeness and may also include one or several of the above-listed strategies. They are evidence of Brown and Levinson's positive politeness, with a preference for solidarity strategies and emphasis on in-group identity markers to establish and reaffirm a solidarity framework. As such, this corpus exemplifies the solidarity politeness as exposed in Scollon and Scollon (1995) and used in Sifianou's work (e.g. 1992, 1997) with several politeness strategies of involvement. Further, it aligns with Almansa-Villatoro (2024, p. 364)'s conclusion about Old Kingdom letters: "(…) language in the Old Kingdom, like politeness, was not used to create distance and distinction. Rather, it was used to emphasize proximity and similarity."

Face-to-face encounters between socially equal individuals in "daily-life" scenes appeared conducive to studying a likely ancient Egyptian "colloquial"-register language through the lens of the dominant view. As Baines (2007, p. 17) summarized, "decorum is one means by which people negotiate relations among themselves, between themselves and the royal, and also between themselves and the divine." This unique corpus of face-to-face encounter depictions offers fruitful material for comparison with other linguacultures, be they ancient (Ancient Greek, Latin, etc.) or present-day (Modern English, Modern Greek, etc.), and paves the way for further research in pragmatics and historical politeness, to test the existing models and theories.

Acknowledgments

I gratefully acknowledge the financial support from the Humboldt Foundation, and I express my gratitude to Dr Devillers, Prof. Kanawati, the Egypt Exploration Society, the Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, and the Petrie Museum for consenting to include Fig. 1-12 in this paper. I am also deeply indebted to Victoria Almansa-Villatoro, Alisée Devillers, Margaret Geoga, Kim Ridealgh, Nathalie Sojic, Monika Zöller Engelhardt, and the anonymous peer-reviewers who helped me improve this paper's quality. Needless to say, any remaining errors or infelicities are solely my responsibility.

[24] Compare with Almansa-Villatoro, 2020; 2024, and Almansa-Villatoro, this volume about letters from that period, authored by more elite individuals, also prioritizing relational closeness over distance, and with Hainline, this volume about personal rituals in Pyramid Texts, in which proximity and minimal distance are raised to stress a shared group identity between the king and the deities, while deference is preferred when the ritual performer addresses the deities assisting the pharaoh in his journey to the afterlife.

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