

Matthias Müller

“Phrasing Politeness in the Coptic Letters of the Papas Archive and Beyond”

Abstract

Politeness studies have gained some traction over the last decade for modern languages (Culpeper 2011; Leech 2014, Brown 2017). For ancient languages, things are obviously more difficult since we lack the cultural background knowledge to decode certain utterances but even here studies in pragmatics have come to the fore (Dickey 2001; 2012, 2016; Sanders & Johncock 2016; Bentein 2017, etc.). Despite such problems, the present paper will attempt to analyse two speech events that should be more easily accessible: *apologies* and *requests*. The model developed in Leech (2014) will serve as starting point for this by examining strategies of Coptic letter writers to express an apology for something or a request.

As the Coptic material from the Papas-archive does not supply examples of these in abundance, this paper’s scope will be wider incorporating earlier corpora such as the 4th century Kellis (Gardner, Alcock & Funk 1999 and 2014) and Apa Johannes letters (Crum 1909; Choat 2017: 37–40) and the early 7th century Frange archive (Boud’hors & Heurtel 2010).

- Bentein, Klaas 2017. “Politeness in Pronouns. Third-person Reference in Byzantine Documentary Papyri,” *Philologus* 161, 256–67.
- Brown, Penelope 2017. “Politeness and Impoliteness,” in: Yan Huang (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Pragmatics*, Oxford Handbooks in Linguistics, Oxford, 383–99.
- Boud’hors, Anne & Chantal Heurtel. 2010. *Les ostraca coptes de la TT 29. Autour du moine Frangé* (2 vols.), Études d’archéologie thébaine 3; Bruxelles, 2010.
- Choat, Malcolm. 2017. “Monastic Letters on Papyrus from Late Antique Egypt,” in: Malcolm Choat and Maria Chiara Giorda (eds.), *Writing and Communication in Early Egyptian Monasticism*, Leiden & Boston, 17–72.
- Crum, Walter Ewing. 1909. *Catalogue of the Coptic Manuscripts in the Collection of the John Rylands Library Manchester*, Manchester & London.
- Culpeper 2011. “Politeness and Impoliteness,” in: Karin Aijmer & Gisle Andersen (eds.), *Sociopragmatics*, Handbooks of Pragmatics V, Berlin, 391–436.
- Dickey, Eleanor 2001. “Κύριε, δέσποτα, domine. Greek Politeness in the Roman Empire,” *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 121, 1–11.
- 2012. “The Rules of Politeness and Latin Request Formulae,” in Philomen Probert & Andreas Willi (eds.), *Laws and Rules in Indo-european*, Oxford, 313–28.
- 2016. “Emotional Language and Formulae of Persuasion in Greek Papyrus Letters,” in Sanders & Johncock 2016: 237–62.
- Gardner, Iain, Anthony Alcock, and Wolf-Peter Funk. 1999. *Coptic Documentary Texts from Kellis I P. Kell. V (P. Kell. Copt. 10–52; O. Kell. Copt. 1–2)*, Dakhleh Oasis Project: Monograph 9, Oxford.
- 2014. *Coptic Documentary Texts from Kellis II P. Kell. VII (P. Kell. Copt. 57–131)*, Dakhleh Oasis Project: Monograph 16, Oxford.
- Leech, Geoffrey 2014. *The Pragmatics of Politeness*, Oxford Studies in Sociolinguistics, Oxford.
- Sanders, Ed & Matthew Johncock. 2016. *Emotion and Persuasion in Classical Antiquity*, Stuttgart.