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How to assess politeness in response to impoliteness: some examples from Latin comedy

Abstract: This chapter aims to contribute to the historical pragmatic research in Latin through a study of conflictual communication in im/politeness perspective. More specifically, it focuses on impolite and overpolite expressions in confrontations, as two different but related linguistic resources displayed in conflict.

The corpus used consists of the comedies of Plautus and Terence, and Donatus' commentaries as source for metapragmatic comments, in order to elucidate ancient evaluation on im/polite phenomena. The results show how power is reflected in speakers' choices, when they are involved in face-attack interactions.

Keywords: Latin linguistics, pragmatic, politeness, impoliteness, overpoliteness, mock politeness, Latin comedy

1 Introduction

This chapter offers a pragmalinguistic analysis of impolite, mock polite and overpolite expressions in Roman confrontations;¹ more specifically, it aims to show how certain expressions may be employed and perceived by the speakers depending on the specific communicative context. Relying on the scholarly

¹ Throughout the chapter I will use the term 'confrontation' – along with 'conflictual communication' – to define a talk with at least one of the speakers involved enacting aggressive behaviour (face-attack). This broad definition covers several kinds of communicative situations, as, e.g., scoldings and quarrels.

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debate over linguistic im/politeness, it tackles one aspect, namely how to account for overpolite behaviour in conflicts: why is it present at all? Is there any pattern in its use and distribution among the speakers?

The theoretical approach here adopted is to be framed in the realm of im/politeness theories,² and especially the analysis of impoliteness as conducted by Jonathan Culpeper (1996, 2008, 2011, 2016), as it proved to be useful to account for the different expressions to be found in conflictual communications. The analysis of the linguistic form and of its use is situated in the communication as a whole, paying attention to actions and reactions, and it is related to the status of the speakers in terms of age, gender, social class and role in the communication, to mention just the most relevant factors. As politeness and impoliteness are best defined not as inherent properties of (linguistic) expressions, but rather as interlocutors' construals of the ongoing interaction (see, e.g., Culpeper 2011: 117–153), identifying speakers' evaluation is crucial for the analyst.³ It may be found in speakers' reactions to their interlocutors' acts, and/or in metapragmatic comments, which spell out how a certain behaviour is perceived (Culpeper and Kádár 2010: 17–19; Kádár and Haugh 2013: 186–187). While many studies have been devoted to impoliteness forms,⁴ less attention has been paid to overpoliteness, whose boundaries appear to be quite blurred: it has been described mainly as being related to mismatch in respect of expectations (Kienpointner 1997: 257), and with inappropriateness due to the insistent repetition of expected polite behaviour (Culpeper 2011: 100–103 with references). If it is a matter of perception, speakers' evaluation should be a deciding factor in understanding how overpoliteness was conceived in ancient Rome.

When dealing with historical languages, speakers' evaluations, in the form of metapragmatic comments, are mainly to be found in the literary representations of dialogues.⁵ The corpus studied here includes the comedies of Plautus and Terence, the tragedies of Seneca and the novels of Petronius and Apuleius, but only Comedy shows cases of confrontations where impolite and overpolite

² On three main research trends on politeness, see for the maxims-based approach Brown Levinson (1987² [1978]); for a discursive, post-modern approach, see e.g. Watts (2003); for a frame-based approach see, e.g. Terkourafi (2001).

³ Underlying this remark, what is intended is the differentiation between im/politeness₁ – the lay perspective – and im/politeness₂ – the researchers's perspective: on this difference see Watts, Ide and Ehlich (2005² [1992]: 3); Eelen (2001: 76–78); Watts (2003); Terkourafi (2011); Haugh (2012), among others. Specifically on Latin see Unceta Gómez (forthcoming b).

⁴ See the list provided in Culpeper (1996, 2016), and the extensive account, along with many related issues, in Culpeper (2011).

⁵ As it is the case also in contemporary literary dialogues: on metapragmatic comments revealing impoliteness and overpoliteness see Paternoster (2012).

expressions are at play. Such features, which could theoretically be situated on the opposite poles of a spectrum (impoliteness – unmarked behaviour – politeness – overpoliteness),⁶ are to be found, as will be shown, either in confrontations where one of the speakers is mocked by the other, or when one aims to manipulate the other: two kinds of situations which turned out to be less frequent if compared to conflictual communications, which do appear throughout the whole corpus. Plautus and Terence offer six examples:⁷ they are presented and discussed in Section 2. In Section 3 some provisional conclusions are drawn and further paths of research are suggested.

2 Impoliteness and (over)politeness in confrontations

Speakers involved in a confrontation undergo mutual face-attack. This is to say, they are exposed to a (potential) damage to their face, to which they may react basically either by counter-attacking or by defending themselves. Their reaction may be couched in linguistic acts which are patently impolite – and perceived as such by the addressee – genuinely polite – showing submission, for instance – or seemingly polite, whose intent on the part of the speaker and perception by the addressee reveal, though, a mismatch with this polite appearance.

It is these latter acts which are taken into account here, with the aim of understanding why an overuse of politeness takes place in a conflictive talk.

2.1 Face-attack and intentional impolite acts: mock politeness

Under this heading are listed two examples out of six in my corpus; they are PLAVT. Persa 787–820 and TER. Phorm. 378–440. In neither of these cases are the interlocutors in a tight relationship: in the former case they are a pimp and the slaves who cheated him, and an old man and the parasite who aims to cheat him in the latter. I will deal first with the Plautine excerpt.

⁶ Note that the way this conceptual space may be mapped is controversial – see e.g. Kienpointner (1997: 257–258); Watts (2005: xlii–xlvi); Culpeper (2011: 97–100), who relies on a corpus of collected metalinguistic English labels – appears to be culturally biased, and for Latin it needs to be explored: see a proposal in Unceta Gómez (forthcoming a).

⁷ PLAVT. Amph. 882–955; Cas. 228–278; Persa 787–820; Truc. 515–550; TER. Eun. 81–206; Phorm. 378–440.

The example from *Persa* occurs in a quarrel scene where a pimp is mocked by the slaves who, at this point, have already succeeded in cheating him. They hold him up as an object of ridicule, as explicitly stated.⁸ They start mocking him as soon as he comes back on stage (PLAVT. *Persa* 777), as we can see already in the greeting scene:

- (1) DOR. *o bone uir,*
salueto, et tu, bona liberta. (PLAVT. *Persa* 788–790)
 ‘DOR. Oh my good man, my greetings, and also to you, my good freewoman.’

The pimp greets the slaves who cheated him – and he is aware of it (PLAVT. *Persa* 779–785) – using a standard (Pocchetti 2010: 111–125; Barrios-Lech 2016: 182–185) greeting formula (*salueto*, 788)⁹ and forms of address with the adjective *bonus* (*bone uir*, *bona liberta*, 788–790), often used in ironic contexts (Dickey 2002: 146). Irony is at play also here, as it is to be inferred from previous happenings: the pimp is angry with the slaves (PLAVT. *Persa* 786–787), and there is a clear mismatch between his anger and his greeting. On the part of the slave, we see quite an elaborate greeting:

- (2) TOX. *Dordale, homo lepidissime, salue.*
locus hic tuos est, hic accumbe.
ferte aquam pedibus.
praebe tu puere? (PLAVT. *Persa* 791–792b)
 ‘TOX. Dordalus, most charming chap, my greetings. This is your place, recline here. (*to servants*) Bring water for his feet. (*to Paegnum*) Are you bringing it, boy?’

The form of address is twofold, at first with a proper name, and then with a superlative, recurring in early Latin when flattery is required (Dickey 2002: 141). Toxilus the slave replies to Dordalus’ *o bone uir* with a form of address

⁸ The pimp acknowledges: *ludos me facitis, intellego*. (‘You’re mocking me, I realize’, PLAVT. *Persa* 803), and one of the slaves state: *hunc irridere/lenonem lubido est, quando dignus est*. (‘I’m keen to make fun of this pimp, since he deserves it.’ PLAVT. *Persa* 807–808). The Latin texts and translations are borrowed from the editions by Wolfgang de Melo (Plautus) and John Barsby (Terence) for Loeb Classical Library.

⁹ On greetings in Roman drama see also Hoffmann (1983); Roesch (2008); Barrios-Lech (2016: 177–193).

which has more elements (*Dordalus, homo lepidissime*). The common greeting formula *salve* is followed by an invitation to take a seat and share their drinking (792). By means of such a welcome, the speaker attests that he is paying attention to his interlocutor, and shows regard for his positive face. Several elements, more than in the pimp's greeting, suggest the occurrence of face-enhancing acts: how to interpret this number of face-enhancing devices in a single speech turn? We are also told that the slaves clapped as the pimp approached them (791). The addressee, however, does not appreciate these acts at all; actually, he responds with a threat (793). Such a reaction shows that he does not perceive the slaves' greeting and applause as face-enhancing acts; and he is right, as their purpose is to ridicule him, as is evident from the metapragmatic comment noted earlier (note 8). As the following lines show (793–857), the pimp cannot harm the slaves; put differently, they do not dread his anger. Rather, they hit and ridicule him (804–818): in such a context, a genuinely polite greeting would be in quite a strong mismatch with the situation, as confirmed by the pimp's reaction, as well as by the following metapragmatic comments (801a–808). The amount of polite forms in the slaves' acts is intended and perceived as mock politeness: a face-attacking, intentional impolite act, couched in polite forms (Culpeper 1996: 356–357; 2011: 165–180).

Terence offers a similar example in *Phormio* 378–440. The old man craves the ending of his son's marriage, which took place while he was away. A parasite took out a lawsuit against the old man's son as the closest relative of a poor orphan, pretending to be a close friend of the girl's father. The young man is forced to marry the girl – as he wished: the whole scene is a trick, there is no kinship between them – but the father does not accept this state of affairs, and he is eager to challenge this alleged kinship.

Here, and extensively below in Section 2.2, I will make use of Donatus' comments, as they prove to be very perceptive about pragmalinguistic observations (Ferri 2016). His metapragmatic comments complement those from the interactants and serve – along with speakers' reactions – to better analyse the communicative situation.

The old man is angry (TER. Phorm. 348–350), and the parasite increases this emotion by means of a carom communication strategy (Ricottilli 2013: 133–140): he is aware that the old man is close enough to hear what he says, but pretends that this is not the case. He aims to feed the other's wrath (TER. Phorm. 351) and he does so by accusing him loudly of *avaritia* 'greed' and *malitia* 'behaving badly' (357–359) – and he succeeds, as the old man's words suggest (360). The old man is now very angry: he approaches the parasite asking for more details in quite an elaborate way, which is at odds with what has just happened:

- (3) *DEM. adulescens, primum abs te hoc bona uenia peto,
si tibi placere potis est, mi ut respondeas.*

*quem amicum tuum ais fuisse istum, explana mihi,
et qui cognatum me sibi esse diceret.* (TER. Phorm. 378–381)

‘DEM Young man, first I request you, with your kind permission, if it pleases you, to answer this question: explain to me who you say this friend of yours was and how he claimed he was related to me.’

The form of address is the standard one for strangers (Dickey 2002: 247–255; Ferri 2008: 19–20) – the old man has never seen the parasite up until this very moment – and it is followed by a request in quite an elaborate form. A request is a potential face threatening act, which may be accompanied by expressions mitigating its degree of imposition (Risselada 1993: 45–49; 248–258); here the request for details is phrased with a performative verb (*peto*; see Unceta Gómez 2009: 114–118), and it is followed by two mitigating expressions, a shorter one (*bona uenia*, 378) and a longer one (*si tibi placere potis est*, 379). Politeness is here at work to an extent that does not seem consistent with the speaker, an angry man of high status who speaks to an inferior who caused him damages and offended him. This strong mismatch, along with the amount of polite elements in the same speech turn, is a hint that this utterance is not to be taken at face value.¹⁰ The *senex* explicitly said that he took offence (348–349),¹¹ and that he is ill-disposed towards the man who attacks his face (360). His expressions are not very likely to convey polite intent, then. Arguably, it is an instance of mock politeness: an impoliteness form which is more consistent with the context, as discussed in regard to *Persa*. That impoliteness characterizes further the whole interaction may be shown by the following lines, where the quarrel escalates (382–440).¹²

In this section it has been shown how speakers’ reactions and metapragmatic comments offer pragmatically motivated reasons for the interpretation of

¹⁰ It is labelled as “sarcasm of excessive politeness” in Martin (1959: 122); “icy show of exaggerated politeness” in Maltby (2012: 163) (note that the term ‘politeness’ occurs in a not theoretically-informed perspective).

¹¹ See Donatus’ remarks: *EN VMQVAM en uim habet indignationis post narrata iniuriam* ‘EVER has value of indignation after an offence has been told’ (DON. Ter. Phorm. 348, 3). All Donatus’ excerpts are taken from the Teubner text by Wessner (1902–1905); if not otherwise quoted, Donatus’ translations are my own.

¹² On a comparison between impolite forms as acknowledged by Culpeper – see Section 1 for references – and those that can be recognized in Latin see Roesch (this volume); on impoliteness forms in this quarrel see Iurescia (2019: 99–103).

certain expressions that appear at odds with the context they are in. Such a view is consistent also on the level of the plot, as the previous happenings between the interlocutors do not suggest an interpretation of the polite forms to be taken at face value. In such cases, as Culpeper (2008: 14) puts it “over-politeness (in whatever way ‘over’ is defined) *can* be intentionally used and/or can be perceived to be intentionally used to create a negative effect. In this case it is not referred to as ‘over-politeness’ but as ‘sarcasm’ . . . (or ‘mock-politeness’)” (author’s original emphasis). Speakers’ intentionality seems then to be crucial for the addressee to assess certain expressions as mock polite. Furthermore, the use of mock politeness gives a hint about the power relationships between the interlocutors in the ongoing conversation: note that the utterer of such expressions reveals that he has (the slaves in *Persa*) or is striving to assert (the old man in *Phormio*) power over his interlocutor.¹³

2.2 Face-enhancement and intentional polite acts: overpoliteness

Under this heading are listed four examples out of six in my corpus; they are PLAVT. Amph. 882–955; Cas. 228–278; Truc. 515–550; TER. Eun. 81–206. In all cases the speakers are in a couple relationship: they are spouses (Cas.; Amph.) or lovers (Eun.; Truc.).

In the first Plautine example presented here, Jupiter disguised as Amphitruo has to reconcile with Alcumena, outraged by the accusation of having been unfaithful (PLAVT. Amph. 882–890). He eavesdrops on her monologue and decides to accomplish her expectations (888–892). Hence he begs forgiveness from her, making efforts to quite a large extent: at first he gives explanations for his behaviour (908–917), trying to minimize his faults (920–921), then, as she states how much it had hurt her, he makes use of several performatives:

- (4) *IVP. per dexteram tuam te, Alcumena, oro, opsecro, da mihi hanc ueniam, ignosce, irata ne sies.* (PLAVT. Amph. 923–924)
 ‘JUP I ask, I entreat you by your right hand, Alcumena, give me this pardon, forgive me, don’t be angry.’

¹³ On power struggle in interaction, see Leezenberg (2002).

As she does not change her mind (925–930),¹⁴ he adds corrective actions (931–936); finally, his apologies are accepted (936–945). As we saw, Jupiter employs several implicit and explicit strategies to apologize;¹⁵ this amount of forms of one and the same act hints to an overuse of polite forms.¹⁶ Unfortunately, in this case we do not have any comment from the addressee, presumably because Alcumena is so angry that she does not bother with appreciating such efforts; however, she does accept this elaborate apology.¹⁷ Here we face an issue arising when dealing with speakers' evaluation: sometimes the researcher does not have enough elements to argue strongly for one or other interpretation. What we know, thanks to Jupiter's metapragmatic comment, is that his phrasing was uttered on purpose, in order to achieve the speaker's aims, i.e., reconciliation: *faciundum est mi illud fieri quod illaec postulat, si me illam amantem ad sese studeam recipere*, 'I have to do what she demands to be done, if I want her to receive me as her lover again' (891–892).

Deliberate use of linguistic resources devoted to politeness is even clearer in Plautus' *Casina*, where the old man is in love with a slave girl: he strives to prevent his wife from learning about it, in order to avoid trouble achieving his aim. Their stances are clear from the greeting phase:

- (5) *LYS. tristem astare aspicio. blande haec mi mala res appellanda est.
uxor mea meaque amoenitas,
quid tu agis? CLEO. abi atque apstine manum.
LYS. heia, mea Iuno, non decet
ess' te tam tristem tuo Ioui.* (PLAUT. Cas. 228–230a)

¹⁴ Note also Alcumena's impolite acts: disassociation from Jupiter (899; 903); insult (904–907); threat (926–930).

¹⁵ On apologies in Latin comedies see Unceta Gómez (2014a); cf. Kruschwitz and Cleary-Venables (2013) on Terence.

¹⁶ By means of such a strategy, the husband threatens his own positive face, reversing the standard power distribution between husbands and wives in ancient Rome. Of course, besides the comic exploitation of role reversal, in this interaction everything is complicated by Jupiter pretending to be Amphitruo; actually, Jupiter is damaging Amphitruo's face, not his own.

¹⁷ There is no agreement on how to interpret Alcumena's stance here: Traina (2000⁵ [1960]: 60) explains it with her love towards her husband; Oniga (1991) finds it unsatisfactory from a psychological point of view, as does Christenson (2000). Relying on the pragmatic analysis of the interaction, Alcumena's accepting such an apology without further commenting on its form could be a hint that she evaluates it as appropriate to the gravity of the offence. This would tie in nicely with the suggestion that in amorous relationships a man's apologies to his woman are phrased according to how much he offended her – on this see Unceta Gómez (2014a: 93).

'LYS. I can see her standing here, grumpy. I must address this bad bit of stuff coaxingly (*turning to Cleostrata, trying to caress her*) My wife and my pleasure, how are you?

CLEO. Go away and keep your hand off me.

LYS. Goodness, my Juno, you shouldn't be so unfriendly to your Jupiter.'

We are told that the expressions that are to be employed are used on purpose (*blande haec mihi mala res appellanda est*), because the old man saw his wife angry (*tristem astare aspicio*): the terms of address *uxor mea meaque amoenitas* (229); *mea Iuno* (230); *o mi lepos* 'my delight' (235),¹⁸ along with the approach (*CL mitte me. LY mane. CL. non maneo. LY at pol ego te sequar*, 'CL Let go of me. LYS Wait. CL I won't wait. (*turns to go*) LYS But I'll follow you', 231) and the profession of love *quam ted amo* (232) are all parts of this plan. In other words, we have several – verbal and non-verbal – polite forms in few speech turns uttered by a speaker who wishes to flatter his interlocutor: a deliberate use of politeness in attempt to deceive the addressee.¹⁹

In both cases the utterers of several polite forms are male who wish to win their female interlocutor over, as is evident from their metapragmatic comments; more specifically, they are husbands having to mollify their wives. Due to the specific context – they strive to achieve their aims, i.e. to obtain something from their addressee – they have much to lose: it is very likely that it is this fear which leads them to resort to politeness. They choose not to respond to the impoliteness they undergo: this choice is very likely due to their having less power in this specific communicative situation. Furthermore, they make extensive use of these linguistic resources, exposing themselves to a face loss: it is clearer in the case of Lysidamus, who is indeed mocked by his wife.²⁰

A similar strategic use of politeness also occurs in Plautus' *Truculentus*. Here the soldier comes back from the battlefield; the courtesan pretends to have given birth to their son, yet this is a deception: she has never been pregnant. Their meeting after the soldier's return shows how much their behaviours differ; the greetings show straightaway that the courtesan is ill-disposed. She replies with

18 See Dickey (2002: 277–278).

19 This stance has no allure for the angry wife: on impoliteness in her speech turns – and in the following lines as well – see Iurescia (2019: 55–60).

20 PLAVT. Cas. 235–236. In this scene there are further elements which contribute to depicting Lysidamus as ridiculous: a portrait which is in line with his characterization as *senex amator*. On this repulsive role see Bettini (1982: 96–101).

a reproach (518–520) to the soldier’s elaborate phrasing (515–517).²¹ On the contrary, the soldier intersperses his utterances with politeness forms in reply to her aggressive expressions.²² The most used is the form of address with the possessive *meus* and the vocative of her name (once), or, mostly, with terms of endearment (*uoluptas mea* ‘my darling’, *mel meum* ‘my honey’).²³ He tries to mitigate her negative emotions towards him – and he is aware of them²⁴ – also by initiating moves: exaggerated professions of love (527–530) and gifts (530–533):

(6) *STRAT. si hercle me ex medio mari
saium petere tuom iubeas, petere hau pigeat [me], mel meum.
id ita esse experta es: nunc experiere, mea Phronesium,
me te amare. adduxi ancillas tibi eccas ex Syria duas,
is te dono. adduce huc tu istas. sed istae reginae domi
suae fuere ambae, uerum <earum> patriam ego excidi manu.
his te dono.* (PLAVT. Truc. 527–533)

‘STRAT. If you told me to come and get a kiss from you from the middle of the sea, I’d gladly get it, my honey. You know by experience that this is the case; now, my dear Phronesium, you’ll learn by experience that I love you. Look, I’ve brought you two slave girls from Syria; I present you with them. (*to his servants*) You, bring them here. (*to Phronesium*) Mind you, they were both queens in their home, but I destroyed their country with my hand. I present you with them.’

²¹ The elaborate soldier’s greeting, stating his care for his lover, is also to be framed in the characterization of the *miles gloriosus*: see Fraenkel (1922: 96). For a similar elaborate greeting from a soldier, a king, coming back after a military campaign and addressing his pregnant wife, see PLAVT. Amph. 676–685. On home-coming scenes in Plautus see Berger (2016).

²² To the courtesan’s reproach (518–520) solace (521–522) with *mea uoluptas* (521); to the reproach couched in rhetorical questions (533–534; 537) gifts (535–537; 538–540) with *mea uoluptas* (536; 540).

²³ Forms of address in order of frequency: *mea uoluptas/uoluptas mea*: 4 (at 521; 536; 540; 546); *mel meum* (528); *mea Phronesium* (529), for a total of six instances in eight speech turns. Note, for the sake of comparison, that she never addresses him, except for the greeting: *salue, qui me interfecisti paene uita et lumine/uimque mihi magni doloris per uoluptatem tuam/condidisti in corpus*, ‘And my greetings to you, who have almost deprived me of life and light, and who, for the sake of your own pleasure, have put an enormous amount of great pain into my body’ (518–520).

²⁴ *hoc quidem hercle ingratum est donum*, ‘This present is unwelcome’ (535); *etiam nihili pendit addi purpuram*, ‘She doesn’t even consider the addition of a purple cloak worth anything’ (539); *ne bonum uerbum quidem unum dixit*. ‘She didn’t even say one single kind word to me’ (543); *uehementer nunc mi est irata, sentio atque intellego*, ‘Now she’s terribly angry with me, I feel and realize it’ (545).

In every speech turn, the soldier resorts to forms of address and speech acts showing that he cares for her, even if his addressee's attitude keeps on being overtly hostile (*ne bonum uerbum quidem unum dixit*, 543). His awareness of his lover's anger suggests that the soldier deliberately chooses to couch his intentions in such terms.

Note that the utterer of the polite forms here is a *miles gloriosus*, a usual target of ridicule in Latin comedy, as it is the case of the *senex amator* in *Casina*. Similar is also the communicative situation: a male speaker who wishes to obtain something from his angry female lover resorts to politeness to a considerable extent. Arguably, the soldier here is the weak party in the pair, as discussed in the case of the Plautine husbands in *Amphitruo* and in *Casina*.

A reversal of the thus far power distribution in conflict communication between the male and female party in a couple is to be found in Terence's *Eunuchus*. Here the courtesan Thais aims to persuade her young lover Phaedria not to get her decision wrong in forbidding him to go and visit her for a couple of days: meanwhile she has to settle a tricky matter with her other lover, a soldier. She invited Phaedria to her place to explain her decision (99–100). As soon as she sees him, she invites him in with the standard form of address to lovers,²⁵ whereas he stands silent, as we learn from her question (88).²⁶ As he reproaches her, she starts to give reasons for her behaviour. At first, she tries to minimize the offence (*missa istaec face*, 'Forget all that', 90);²⁷ as Phaedria rejected it, she turns to endearments in a quite elaborate phrasing:

(7) *THA. ne crucia te, obsecro, anime mi, mi Phaedria.
non pol quo quemquam plus amem aut plus diligam
eo feci; sed ita erat res, faciundum fuit.* (TER. Eun. 95–97)

'THA. Don't torment yourself, I implore you, my darling, my Phaedria. Heaven knows, I didn't do it because I love or care for anyone more than you; but the situation was such, I had to do it.'

²⁵ See Dickey (2002: 221–222); on vocatives with *mi* as marker of female speech see Adams (1984: 68–73); Dutsch (2008: 53–55).

²⁶ Phaedria's impolite acts: make the other feel uncomfortable (88; 129); reproach (89–90); insult (152); blame (155–171).

²⁷ See Donatus' remark: *MISSA ISTAEC FACE alia dissimulatio et durior post admonitionem.* (DON. Ter. Eun. 90, 3) The following translation is borrowed from Ferri (2016: 261): 'LEAVE THAT BE. Yet another dissimulation and harder to believe after his words of reproach.' That Thais' stance is hard to take (*durior*) for Phaedria is shown from his reply: *quid missa?* 'How do you mean "forget"?' (91). Repeating the interlocutor's own words is frequent when the speaker is angry, as Donatus says: see DON. Ter. Eun. 818, 2; DON. Ter. Hec. 439, 2.

She explains the reasons for her behaviour first through a directive (*ne crucia te*), a hedge (*obsecro*),²⁸ a twofold term of address (*anime mi*,²⁹ *mi Phaedria*³⁰) at-testing her affection. Then she expresses it more explicitly, as Donatus remarks:

- (8) *NON POL QVO QVEMQVAM PLVS AMEM hoc totum nimis blande et cum contractatione adulescentis dicit meretrix.* (DON. Ter. Eun. 96)
 ‘NOT BY POLLUX BECAUSE I LOVE ANYONE MORE the courtesan says all this too softly, while caressing the young man.’

We have more than one politeness form in the same speech act; Donatus interprets it as an excess (*hoc totum nimis blande*): we see an instance of overpoliteness in Thais’ utterance.

Then she relates the events which led her to make such a decision (108–144), without missing the chance to state again her affection and esteem for Phaedria (125–128). There is a point in remarking on this, says Donatus:

- (9) *sed uide meretricem, quia rem dixit percutientem, quot et qualia blandimenta subiecerit dicendo ‘tute scis postilla quam intimum habeam te’ etc.* (DON. Ter. Eun. 126, 2)
 ‘But notice the courtesan, as she told something striking, how many and which blandishments adds by saying ‘you yourself know how close to me I consider you afterwards.’

Thais has come to speak of Phaedria’s rival, the soldier: as it is a touchy subject, she feels the need to spell out her regard for Phaedria, i.e. to show positive politeness (Brown and Levinson 1987² [1978]: 70). This would help her claim that she is obliged by force of circumstance to avoid seeing him, despite her real affection for him (TER. Eun. 96–97).

Then she sums up her reasons (144–149), phrasing her request as a cry for help (150–152);³¹ at Phaedria’s refusal, she states that she would rather dismiss

28 On *obsecro* as illocutionary parenthetical see Risselada (1989); Unceta Gómez (2009: 68–71); as marker of female speech see Adams (1984: 55–58); Barrios-Lech (2016: 123–127), who discusses it in terms of a politeness device.

29 See Dickey (2002) 157–158, with references on its female distribution.

30 Donatus (DON. Ter. Eun. 95, 2) remarks the frequency of Thais’ use of this term of address for Phaedria: it is frequent and it bespeaks intimacy (*familiariter*).

31 Donatus (DON. Ter. Eun. 151, 1) comments on her skillful phrasing, which avoids hurting Phaedria on the touchy issue of accepting his rival (*blande*).

her aims than lose his affection (171–174);³² such a statement makes the young man gradually³³ capitulate to her requests (175–185): *PHAE. scilicet/faciundumst quod uis. THA. merito te amo, bene facis*. ‘PHAE. Evidently I have to do what you want. TH. No wonder I love you. You’re very kind’ (185–186). Again, here we have two politeness forms – two expressions of gratitude³⁴ – in the same speech act.

We saw a courtesan trying to persuade her young lover, who, despite his upset state of mind at her behaviour, is still deeply in love with her. She resorts to several politeness forms; as in previous cases, she strives to achieve something from her addressee: arguably, she is the speaker who has less power in the ongoing conversation. Furthermore, such forms express a regard towards the addressee to an extent which is perceived as not consistent with the effective state of mind of the speaker (176–177): this was the case also in *Truculentus*, *Casina*, and *Amphitruo*, where metapragmatic comments confirm the addressee’s evaluations. The addressee’s perception of the contradiction between polite expressions and the real intentions of the person who utters them seems then to play a crucial role in regard to the assessment of overpoliteness.

3 Conclusions

Donatus’ comment *hoc totum nimis blande* concerns certain expressions in the play which im/politeness researchers acknowledge as polite forms; furthermore, he remarks on their excess (*nimis*). The use of *nimis* may hint to the matter of

32 See Donatus’ remark: *scit meretrix contentione quadam negari. ergo fingit se uinci, ut adolescentem molliat, et ipsa cedit, ut et ille remittat pertinaciam*. ‘The courtesan knows that after a contrast a refusal may occur. She therefore pretends to be won over, so to mollify the young man, and she herself gives up, so that he ceases with his obstinacy, too’ (DON. Ter. Eun. 173). Note that Thais depicts herself as Phaedria would like her to be: on this function of a courtesan’s *blanditiae* see Dutsch (2008: 58–59).

33 At first he says: *si istuc crederem/sincere dici, quiduis possem perpeti*. ‘If I believed you spoke it sincerely, I could endure anything’ (TER. Eun. 176–177). Note Donatus’ remark: *Bene ergo <ut> mel blandimentum meretricis dulce fatetur, sed negat esse sincerum*, ‘Well then he acknowledges that the courtesan’s blandishment is sweet <like> honey, but denies it is sincere’ (DON. Ter. Eun. 177, 2).

34 See Donatus’ remark: *BENE FACIS in consuetudinem uenit, ‘bene facis’ et ‘bene fecisti’ non iudicantis esse sed gratias agentis* (DON. Ter. Eun. 173). The following translation is borrowed from Ferri (2016: 265): ‘THANK YOU. As it has become common in the spoken language, *bene facis* and *bene fecisti* (‘you do well!’) don’t express judgments, but thanks.’ On expressions of gratitude in Roman Comedy see Unceta Gómez (2010).

expected behaviour and deviations from it: Thais' utterances are perceived as too *blande*. This remark is of great interest inasmuch as female language is usually described with *blandus* and its cognate terms. Many scholars have investigated female language in Latin (ground-breaking work being Adams 1984), and, more specifically, the association between *blandus* and feminine speech (Dutsch 2008: 49–91; Kruschwitz 2012; Barrios-Lech 2016: 118–120). As Barrios-Lech (2016: 120) puts it, *blandus* and its cognates “have at least two main connotations, ‘flattering/manipulative’ or simply ‘polite’. Women employ both kinds most often, but we also find men and the powerful making use of *blanditia* as well.”³⁵ It has indeed been suggested (Kruschwitz 2012; Barrios-Lech 2016) that *blanditia* would be primarily appropriate for powerless characters; in this respect the findings of the present research show the same results. Furthermore, Thais is a courtesan, and courtesans and parasites in Roman Comedy are systematically associated with employing politeness on purpose (Unceta Gómez forthcoming c); even if politeness appears to be the expected behaviour for this very speaker, her utterances are perceived as exceeding the shared norms. Such evaluation of excess is arguably due to the amount of several polite forms in the same speech turn: this very element appears in all cases of my corpus. The factor which differentiates (1), (2) and (3) from remaining cases is intentionality. In Section 2.1 it has been claimed that speakers in (1), (2) and (3) want to attack their interlocutor's face, according to their contextual power in the ongoing conversation. On the contrary, the speakers in (4), (5), (6), (7) intend to enhance their interlocutor's face, as it has been shown in Section 2.2. Finally, it has been pointed out how evaluation of genuine intentionality plays a role in an addressee's perception: if certain utterances are not taken as sincere personal expressions, they are negatively evaluated, as Phaedria and Donatus in Section 2.2 note 33 state.

These results suggest the association between impoliteness and power on one side and overpoliteness and lack of power on the other side; more research is needed to further explore this issue, as well as to systematically take into account the role of emotionality, which occurs throughout my corpus. I hope to have given an overview of the complexity and the potential lying behind the surface of these tentative conclusions. In this respect, this chapter aims to contribute to the increasing field of studies on im/politeness theories applied to Latin Language,³⁶ which have proven to profitably enhance our understanding of Latin texts.

35 On *blanditiae* as means of manipulation – mainly between aristocrats – see Hall (2009) 80–100.

36 For a review of the literature see Unceta Gómez (2014b; 2018).

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