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SOPHOCLES IN THE LIGHT OF FACE-THREAT POLITENESS THEORY

Kamerbeek does not on the whole have much to say about politeness in Sophocles, but he makes some perceptive comments on the divine voice which summons Oedipus to his final resting-place (*OC* 1627–8):

ὦ οὗτος οὗτος, Οἰδίπους, τί μέλλομεν
χωρεῖν; πάλαι δὴ τὰ πὸ σοῦ βραδύνεται.

You there, Oedipus, why do we wait to go? There has been too
much delay on your part.¹

Kamerbeek points out that the god would have been less polite if he had said τί μέλλεις ('why do you wait?') and πάλαι δὴ σὺ βραδύνεις ('you have delayed too long'). This is plausible, and it is worth considering exactly why Kamerbeek's alternatives would have been less polite. The matter is complicated by the god's opening words ὦ οὗτος οὗτος ('you there'). LSJ (s.v. οὗτος C.I.5) think that this idiomatic use of οὗτος (lit. 'this man') 'mostly implies anger, impatience, or scorn'. Eleanor Dickey, by contrast, argues that it is 'extremely informal' rather than offensive.² Here are two very different views of the god's words, and there have been others. The tone of this divine summons expresses the god's attitude to Oedipus at an intensely significant moment, and will thus do much to determine our understanding of the whole play.

¹ Texts and translations from Sophocles are taken, slightly adapted, from the Loeb edition of H. Lloyd-Jones (1994).

² Dickey (1996: 154–6); cf. Stevens (1976: 37–8).

Face-threat politeness theory

Politeness has been helpfully analysed as a universal human phenomenon by Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson (1987). Their theory has been applied not only to contemporary societies but also to works of literature (e.g. Brown and Gilman 1989; Sifianou 1992). The first basic concept in Brown and Levinson's theory is 'face'. The term 'face' is familiar in English from such expressions as 'saving face' and 'losing face', but it is used in politeness theory in a somewhat specialized sense (derived from Goffman 1967). There are two kinds of face. The first, termed 'positive face', is the want to be approved of or admired. This want is assumed to be universal. The positive face of the hearer in a talk exchange would be threatened (e.g.) by criticism or abuse. The positive face of the speaker would be threatened (e.g.) by an apology or a confession. The second kind of face, termed 'negative face', is the want not to be imposed upon or impeded. This, too, is assumed to be universal. The negative face of the hearer would be threatened (e.g.) by a request or a threat. The negative face of the speaker would be threatened (e.g.) by expressing thanks or accepting an offer.³

The other basic concept in Brown and Levinson's theory is the bald-on-record utterance, the most direct and efficient mode of communication. This is defined according to Grice's maxims of conversation (Grice 1975). Grice proposed four maxims which specify the principles governing maximally efficient communication. The maxims are: relevance (be relevant), quantity (say no more or less than is required), quality (be truthful, sincere), and manner (be perspicuous, avoid ambiguity and obscurity). A bald-on-record utterance would frequently be face-threatening, and Brown and Levinson define politeness as deviation from bald-on-record communication in order to reduce the face threat. A distinctive feature of their theory is the argument that every act of politeness is oriented to a face-threatening act ('FTA'). They treat politeness in terms of the rational choices of individuals, rather than in terms of obedience to rules. The cultural specifications of politeness may vary, but the deep structure is universal.

³Brown & Levinson (1987: 43–4) observe that they borrow the distinction between positive and negative politeness from Durkheim's distinction between positive and negative rites (Durkheim 1915: 299, 326). They give a useful classification of face-threatening acts on pp. 65–8.

Politeness theory distinguishes two completely different types of politeness. Positive politeness offers redress to positive face (e.g. by expressions of interest, approval, sympathy, agreement, or affection). 'Positive-politeness utterances are used as a kind of metaphorical extension of intimacy' (Brown and Levinson 1987: 103). Negative politeness is oriented to negative face, and thus aims to leave the hearer an 'out' (i.e. scope for evading or ignoring the FTA) and to minimize the imposition (e.g. by indirectness, deference, or apologies).

The god's summons at the end of *Oedipus Coloneus* threatens Oedipus' positive face by criticizing him for delaying, and his negative face by giving him an order. Eleanor Dickey (1996: 154–6) rightly observes, against LSJ, that the οἷτος locution does not in itself insult the addressee or express ill-will. It does not, in other words, threaten the addressee's positive face. On the other hand, it obviously does threaten the addressee's negative face, as attention-getting expressions inevitably do. This can be impolite, but is not necessarily so. Dickey's suggestion that the οὔτος locution is 'informal' is refuted by a number of examples in tragedy, and above all by the solemnity of the present one. Her English equivalent, 'hey!', seems to belong to a lower register than that required here.

The god redresses this face threat by both positive and negative politeness. The inclusive 1st-person plural μέλλομεν (*OC* 1627) is a positive politeness gambit, of a kind which is common in Greek and other languages.⁴ The indirect τὰπὸ σοῦ βραδύνεται (*OC* 1628) is a negative politeness gambit.⁵ The summons thus has polite features, but its overall politeness will depend on two further factors: the relative weighting of the face threat and the redress, and the relationship between the speaker and the hearer.

⁴ E.g. *H. Il.* 18.273 (εἰ δ' ἄν ἐμοῖς ἐπέεσσι πιθώμεθα is a polite way of saying 'if you follow my advice'); *H. Od.* 4.138, 632 (ἴδμεν; is polite for 'do *you* know?'); *Pl. Resp.* 562e (πῶς τὸ τοιοῦτον λέγομεν; is polite for 'what do *you* mean?'); *S. Phil.* 836 (πρὸς τί μενοῦμεν πράσσειν; is polite for 'why do *you* delay?'). Cf. Wackernagel (1926: i. 43); Lammermann (1935: 78–80); Brown and Levinson (1987: 119–20, 127–8); Martin (1989: 123–4, 140).

⁵ Cf. Poseidon's ἔτοιμ' ἃ βούλη τὰπ' ἐμοῦ (*Tro.* 74), an indirect way of saying 'I am ready to do what you want'. The whole conversation is extremely polite. For τὰπὸ σοῦ, see LSJ s.v. ἀπό III.4.

Face-threat politeness theory takes account of the relative status of speaker and hearer. Oedipus addresses the Theban herdsman as follows (*OT* 1121–2):

οὗτος σύ, πρέσβυ, δεῦρό μοι φώνει βλέπων
ὅσ' ἄν σ' ἐρωτῶ. Λαΐου ποτ' ἦσθα σύ;

You there, old man, look at me and answer my questions! Did
you once belong to Laius?

The οὗτος σύ locution, the unredressed imperative, and the direct question all threaten the herdsman's negative face, but there is nothing particularly offensive about this in view of Oedipus' vastly superior power and status. Unredressed orders are appropriate when addressing inferiors such as slaves (e.g. *El.* 1106; *OT* 144, 945–6, 957, 1069; *OC* 897; οὗτος, βλέπε δεῦρο, *Men. Sam.* 312). It would be a different matter if the hearer did not accept a position of considerable inferiority, and was thus offended by the relationship implied by the whole situation. The Messenger's οὗτος, βλέψ' ὧδε ('You there, look this way!') to Lichas (*Tr.* 402) is more offensive, because the hearer is at least the speaker's equal. There are also circumstances where unredressed orders are acceptable even when addressing social equals or superiors, for example if the situation is urgent (e.g. *Aj.* 803–8; *El.* 1236, 1399; *OT* 952–3; *Tr.* 83–5, 340–1; *Ph.* 201, 576–7, 865; *OC* 36–7). Another mitigating factor is 'task orientation', when speaker and hearer are already engaged in co-operative activity and there is no need for every individual exchange to have politeness markers (e.g. *El.* 1367–71; *Tr.* 598–9; *Ph.* 45–6, 123; *OC* 21, 188, 507–9).⁶ The first two of these factors (superiority of the speaker, and urgency) are relevant both to Oedipus' address to the herdsman and to the god's summons to Oedipus.

Gods in tragedy normally adopt a bald-on-record style when addressing humans, in accordance with their vastly superior status and power (e.g. *S. Aj.* 71–3, 89–90; *E. Hipp.* 1283–4; *Hel.* 1642–5; *Or.* 1625–8; *Ba.* 912–17). The same is true in Homer. Bruno Snell famously cited Athena's polite command to Achilles (*H. Il.* 1.207–14) as an example of courtesy by the gods,⁷ but Homer's gods are not usually polite to mortals

⁶ Cf. Brown and Levinson 1987: 97.

⁷ Snell 1975: 36–7 = Eng. tr. 32.

(contrast, e.g., *Il.* 3.390–4; 5.124–32, 440–2; 24.460–7; *Od.* 15.10–42). Achilles' unique status is recognized even by the gods (cf. *Il.* 21.293, also with the negatively polite αἶ κε πίθηαι; 24.56–63; *Od.* 24.92). Athena's politeness shows early in the poem the respect which even the gods have for him. For all that, she tells him decisively what to do, and he has no hesitation in complying. Something similar seems to be the case with the god's summons to Oedipus in *Oedipus Coloneus*. It would not be very polite if addressed to an equal, but the element of politeness which it does have is a mark of unusual favour in a command by a god to a mortal.

Positive Politeness

Oedipus appeals to the chorus when he hears of the approach of Creon (*OC* 724–5):

ὦ φίλτατοι γέροντες, ἐξ ὑμῶν ἐμοὶ
φαίνοιτ' ἂν ἤδη τέρμα τῆς σωτηρίας.

Dearest elders, now may you show to me the final goal of
safety!

Oedipus' expression of affection is positive-politeness redress for a substantial FTA, a request to defend him. Friendship terms (φίλε etc.) are often used as redress for FTAs.⁸ Politeness is essentially dynamic, involving tension between an FTA and the redress for it. The relationship between the speaker and the hearer cannot be gauged from the politeness expression alone, without reference to the FTA which it is redressing. The speaker may actually be on good terms with the hearer (as Oedipus is here with the elders

⁸ Cf. *H. Il.* 7.279; *S. El.* 465, 469; *E. Hipp.* 288, 473; *An.* 530, 842; *Hec.* 286, 1114; *Pho.* 158; *Or.* 136–8; Lammermann (1935: 34–5, 42–5). Other forms of positive-politeness redress: compliments (*OT* 300–4; *Ph.* 79–80, 1244; *OC* 237); limited agreement (*Aj.* 1393–9; *Ph.* 86–95, 364–6); pseudo-agreement (*Ph.* 1235–6; cf. Brown and Levinson 1987: 113–15).

of Colonus), but it still needs to be explained why a friendship term is used on a particular occasion, since even friends do not use these terms all the time.

Friendship terms can even be used as positive-politeness redress when speaker and hearer are on bad terms. Socrates addresses hostile characters such as Polus (*Gorgias* 465d4, 466c7, 471a3, 479d) and Meletus (*Apology* 26d6) as φίλε at least as often as he does real friends like Crito. When Socrates uses φίλε or any other friendship term, he is invariably doing an FTA (e.g. refuting someone). Friendship terms can only be used as evidence for the relationship between speaker and hearer when they are weighed against the FTAs which they are redressing. The overall effect may even be offensive if the positive politeness is insufficient to redress the FTA, to which it may actually serve to draw attention. Plato's Socrates is a master of this use of politeness.⁹

Politeness tends to be oriented to a pessimistic estimate of any given offence (the 'virtual offence'), and thus to have an inbuilt element of exaggeration.¹⁰ One may thus say (e.g.) 'I am extremely sorry to bother you' even when the probable inconvenience to the hearer is quite small. The hearer may correspondingly be offended if the apology is oriented to the actual inconvenience rather than to this exaggerated view of it. Oedipus' initial words when Jocasta summons him to hear the Corinthian messenger's report of the death of Polybus may seem remarkably fulsome (*OT* 950–1):

ὦ φίλτατον γυναικὸς Ἰοκάστης κάρα,
τί μ' ἐξεπέμψω δεῦρο τῶνδε δωμάτων;

⁹ Halliwell (1995: 90–4), on the other hand, takes these friendship terms at face value, arguing that they show Socrates including even uncouth individuals like Polus in constructive and amicable dialectic. He needs to treat obvious counterexamples (e.g. *Ap.* 26d6) as ironic. The invaluable discussion by Dickey (1996: 109–27, 274–83) perhaps underestimates the dynamic relationship between friendship terms (FTs) and face-threatening acts (FTAs—the acronyms are inconveniently similar).

¹⁰ Brown & Levinson (1987: 1–2, 33, 51 n. 7) adopt this concept of the 'virtual offence' from Goffman (1971: 108–9).

My dearest wife, Jocasta, why have you summoned me here
from the house?

'A very formal address for a man to give his wife, but as at *Ant.* 1 ... we are at a point of much gravity' (Dawe 1982: 193). In the first line of *Antigone*, however, Antigone emphasizes her blood-tie to Ismene as the prelude to an onerous request based on that tie.¹¹ Oedipus' reply to Jocasta does not seem to be such a substantial FTA, and he has no reason as yet to suspect the significance of the moment. Why, then, does he not address her simply $\tilde{\omega}$ γύναι or γύναι, as he does in other grave contexts (642, 1054)?¹² Politeness theory provides an answer. Jocasta's summons inevitably threatens Oedipus' negative face. Any response by Oedipus—even a favourable one—is an FTA in turn, because it puts her FTA on record and thus implies a comment on it. For the same reason, it is paradoxically an FTA even to accept an offer, let alone to reject one.¹³ A favourable response of this kind is obviously not offensive in itself, but in the context the hearer needs to be reassured that no offence was given by the original summons or offer. The lack of such reassurance would in practice be impolite. Oedipus thus orients his reply to the virtual offence, and redresses what may seem rather a small threat to Jocasta's face with positive politeness (cf. *Aj.* 1328–31; *OC* 464–5, 1414–15). James Redfield observes that Oedipus and Jocasta are 'The most contented married couple in all tragedy' (1995: 158). Positive politeness exaggeration may also have the dramatic function of giving scope for an expression of affection which would otherwise hardly be possible within the limits of tragic decorum.

Oedipus showed similar sensitivity to an interlocutor's face-vulnerability when he responded to an offer of advice by the chorus (*OT* 282–3):

Χο. τὰ δεύτερ' ἐκ τῶνδ' ἂν λέγοιμ' ἅμοι δοκεῖ.

¹¹ It may also be relevant that *Ant.* 1 is unusually elaborate because it is the first line of the play. Cf. *El.* 1–2; *Phil.* 3–4; *OC* 1 (but reference to the fathers in all three passages is relevant to the tasks being required of their children). Athena's address to Odysseus (*Aj.* 1) is much less elaborate: her status is greater, and she is not doing an FTA.

¹² The precise function of $\tilde{\omega}$ is still unclear (see Dickey 1996: 199–206).

¹³ Cf. Lloyd 1999: 36–8.

Οἱ. εἰ καὶ τρίτ' ἐστί, μὴ παρῆς τὸ μὴ οὐ φράσαι.

CHORUS: May I say what seems to me the next best thing?

OEDIPUS: If there is even a third best, do not omit to tell it me.

The exaggeration, oriented to the virtual offence, is typical of positive politeness. Oedipus is consistently more polite than Creon in *Antigone*, who favours the bald-on-record τί δ' ἔστι; ('What is it?') in such contexts (*Ant.* 386–7; cf. 991, 997).

There is positive politeness for similar reasons in Achilles' greeting to the ambassadors at *Iliad* 9.197–8:

χαίρετον· ἦ φίλοι ἄνδρες ἰκάνετον· ἦ τι μάλα χρεώ,
οἳ μοι σκυζομένω περ Ἀχαιῶν φίλτατοί ἐστων.

Welcome! You are indeed dear friends who have come—there must indeed be great need—you who even in my anger are the dearest to me of the Achaeans.

'Akhilleus' greeting is effusive. There is small indication elsewhere that the three were particular friends' (Hainsworth 1993: 89). The exaggerated tone of these words is evidence of politeness rather than effusiveness (cf. *H. Il.* 9.96–103; 14.235; *Od.* 13.140–5). Positive politeness by the host is normal, but Achilles immediately realizes that the potential face threat to his visitors is unusually great, and takes correspondingly energetic steps to redress the virtual offence.

Positive politeness is common in thanks, e.g. the formulaic 'bless you!': εὐτυχοίης (*OT* 1478); ὄναιο, ὄναισθε (*OC* 1042; *E. IT* 1078; *IA* 1359); εὐδαιμονοίης (e.g. *E. Alc.* 1137; *El.* 231; *Pho.* 1086; *Ar. Ach.* 446). Athena's καλῶς ἔλεξας (*Aj.* 94; lit. 'you spoke well') is an (ironical) expression of thanks (cf. *E. Med.* 1127; *Hclld.* 726; *Hipp.* 715; *Hec.* 990).

Negative politeness

Initiation of contact is an area where the face of both parties is threatened, and where negative politeness is especially common. Polite behaviour in such contexts can be illustrated by its opposite. Aegisthus adopts an extremely face-threatening approach in his initial address to the chorus and Electra (*El.* 1442–7):

τίς οἶδεν ὑμῶν ποῦ ποθ' οἱ Φωκῆς ξένοι,
 οὔς φασ' Ὀρέστην ἡμῖν ἀγγεῖλαι βίον
 λελοιπόθ' ἵππικοῖσιν ἐν ναυαγίοις;
 σέ τοι, σέ κρίνω, ναὶ σέ, τὴν ἐν τῷ πάρος
 χρόνῳ θρασεῖαν· ὥς μάλιστα σοὶ μέλειν
 οἶμαι, μάλιστα δ' ἂν κατειδυῖαν φράσαι.

Which of you knows where are the Phocian strangers who they say have announced that Orestes has lost his life in the wreck of a chariot? You, it is you I ask, yes you, so insolent in former times, for I think you have it most at heart, and can tell me best from knowledge!

Aegisthus compounds the FTA of initiating contact with the further FTA of asking a direct question. Second-person singular pronouns threaten negative face by leaving the hearer no 'out', no option (however formal) of interpreting the utterance as referring to someone else. This is a plausible explanation of the widespread use of second-person plural pronouns to refer politely to a single addressee.¹⁴ Greek did not employ a 'T/V system' of this kind (as in the *tu / vous* distinction in French), but the impoliteness of (singular) 'you' as an address form is nonetheless evident. Direct questions also threaten negative face by demanding an immediate response from the hearer.

Negative-face threat is typical of tyrants and other authoritarian figures in Sophocles (cf. *Aj.* 1047–8, 1226–8). It is not necessarily impolite to disregard the

¹⁴For discussion, with references to studies of various languages, see Brown and Levinson 1987: 198–204,

negative face of the addressee (cf. the discussion above of *OT* 1121–2 and *OC* 1627–8), but such behaviour is clearly offensive when it is accompanied by positive-face threat (i.e. expressions of ill-will), especially when the speaker's claim to superior status is open to question. Creon shows this in his first words to Antigone (*Ant.* 441–2):

σὲ δὴ, σὲ τὴν νεύουσας ἐς πέδον κάρα,
 φῆς, ἢ καταρνῇ μὴ δεδρακέναι τάδε;
 You there, you that are bowing down your head towards the
 ground, do you admit, or do you deny, that you have done this?

The negative-face threat here resides in Creon's repeated use of the second-person singular pronoun, the definite description, and the direct question. All these features combine to leave Antigone no 'out', by identifying her as someone who is present and of whom an immediate response is being demanded. The style resembles Athena's summons to Ajax (*Aj.* 71–3, 89–90), which is not so impolite because she affects good will and is undeniably superior.

The Paedagogus in *Electra* begins much more politely than Aegisthus (*El.* 660–5):

Πα. ξέναι γυναῖκες, πῶς ἂν εἰδείην σαφῶς
 εἰ τοῦ τυράννου δώματ' Αἰγίσθου τάδε;
 Χο. τάδ' ἐστίν, ὦ ξέν'· αὐτὸς ἤκασας καλῶς.
 Πα. καὶ δάμαρτα τήνδ' ἐπικάζων κυρῶ
 κείνου; πρέπει γὰρ ὥς τύραννος εἰσορᾶν.
 Χο. μάλιστα πάντων· ἦδε σοι κείνη πάρα.

PAEDAGOGUS: Ladies of Mycenae, how can I know for certain if this is the house of the king Aegisthus?

CHORUS: This is it, stranger; your own guess is correct.

PAEDAGOGUS: Should I be right in guessing this lady is his wife? She has the aspect of a queen.

CHORUS: Yes, indeed! Here she is!

The Paedagogus minimizes the imposition by avoiding any explicit second-person reference in his request (cf. *OT* 924–44; *OC* 557 ~ 560, 575), and by expressing his wish indirectly.¹⁵ The 'Am I right in thinking?' gambit (cf. *Ph.* 222–3; *Ar. Pl.* 959–61) similarly transfers the emphasis from second to first person (contrast 'Who do you think that is?'). The chorus responds with the positive-politeness strategy of exaggerating a favourable response. Both parties to the dialogue employ positive politeness in the form of conventionally respectful address terms (cf. Dickey 1996: 146–9). The emphasis of a request can also be transferred from second to third person, as in Oedipus' request to Jocasta to summon the Theban herdsman πῶς ἄν μόλοι δῆθ' ἡμῖν ἐν τάχει πάλιν; (*OT* 765; cf. 1047–50; *OC* 1457–8, corresponding to the more urgent 1475–6). Oedipus' words ('Would, then, that he could return to us without delay!', Jebb) are treated by Jocasta as an order (ἐφίεσαι, 766), and Oedipus later makes this explicit with an imperative (πέμψον, 860).

One of the commonest forms of politeness is to give deference, indicating that the particular FTA is not part of any wider strategy to threaten the hearer's face. This can work either by raising the status of the hearer or humbling that of the speaker (cf. Brown and Levinson 1987: 178–87). The former tends more to positive politeness, and the latter to negative politeness. Antigone thus introduces her advice to Oedipus with the negatively polite πάτερ, πιθοῦ μοι, κεί νέα παραινέσω ('Father, let me persuade you, even though I am young to give advice!', *OC* 1181; cf. *Ant.* 719–20; *Tr.* 52–3). Speakers can express 'please' by reinforcing the hearer's freedom of choice and thus reducing negative-face threat, e.g. Neoptolemus' ἔρπ', εἰ θέλεις (lit. 'come, if you want') to Philoctetes (*Ph.* 730; cf. *OT* 649; *OC* 757). Supplicatory language (e.g. πρὸς θεῶν + imperative) is also common in such contexts, although it usually has an element of urgency (e.g. *Aj.* 76; *El.* 1119, 1484; *OT* 326, 697, 1432; *Ph.* 770, 967–8; *OC* 49).¹⁶ The standard polite request reduces negative-face threat by employing second person optative + ἄν instead of imperative: στείχοις ἄν ἤδη (*Tr.* 624); χωροῖς ἄν εἴσω (*Phil.* 674); κλύοις ἄν ἤδη (*El.* 637). An ironical example is Orestes' χωροῖς ἄν εἴσω to

¹⁵ For πῶς ἄν; + optative, see Kühner & Gerth (1898–1904: i. 235).

¹⁶ For ἱκετεύω and ἀντιβόλω = 'please', see Willi (2003: 25). Cf. Bakker (1966: 31–66); Rijksbaron (1990: 32; 2002: 42)

Aegisthus, when he is ordering him into the palace to be killed (*El.* 1491). The (even more polite) pessimistic form can also be used ironically when the speaker is actually impatient: οὐκ οὖν ἂν εἴποις ἦντιν' αἰτίαν προθείς; (*Aj.* 1051); οὐκ ἂν φράσεις ...; (*Ph.* 1222). Creon's σὺ μὲν κομίζεις ἂν σεαυτὸν ἢ θέλεις to the Guard (*Ant.* 444) is treated by Goodwin (1889: §237) as 'a milder expression than κόμιζε σεαυτόν', but it is inconceivable that Creon is being in any way polite to the Guard. The weakening of the command is contemptuous here, signifying indifference to what the Guard does.¹⁷ Contrast Creon's imperative to Antigone σὺ δ' εἰπέ μοι ... (*Ant.* 446), when he really does want a response.

Politeness is often treated as if it were oriented solely to the face of the hearer, as when Andreas Willi writes that 'politeness essentially consists in respecting other people's feelings' (Willi 2003: 166). The face of the speaker is also relevant, and politeness is essentially a negotiation between the face-requirements of both parties. The act of thanking is socially problematic, and thus hedged about in many cultures with devices to mitigate the threat to the speaker's face in accepting a debt. The distancing effect of the 'tragic aorist' serves this purpose in tragedy.¹⁸ A notable example in Sophocles is Ajax's expression of thanks to Tecmessa for keeping their son out of his way while he was mad: ἐπῆνεσ' ἔργον καὶ πρόνοιαν ἦν ἔθου (*S. Aj.* 536). Ajax' tone is stiffly formal, in marked contrast to Tecmessa's more directly emotional language (e.g. 527–9). The aorist (lit. 'I praised') distances him somewhat from his acknowledgement of the face-threatening obligations incurred by his madness. Neoptolemus similarly employs the aorist ἥσθην (lit. 'I was pleased') when he replies to Philoctetes' praise (*S. Phil.* 1314). The acceptance of a compliment potentially threatens the face both of the speaker and of the hearer, and is thus an area where negative politeness is common.

¹⁷ See Moorhouse (1982: 231). But Moorhouse can hardly be right that Orestes is 'pretending unconcern' at *El.* 1491, in view of the following words σὺν τάχει.

¹⁸ Cf. Lloyd 1999: 36–40; Rijksbaron 2002: 29–30.

Off-Record Strategies

Brown and Levinson (1987: 211) identify a third politeness strategy, along with positive and negative politeness, and that is going off-record:

A communicative act is done off record if it is done in such a way that it is not possible to attribute only one clear communicative intention to the act. In other words, the actor leaves himself an 'out' by providing himself with a number of defensible interpretations; he cannot be held to have committed himself to just one particular interpretation of his act.

The presence of an off-record meaning in an utterance is signalled by breaches of Grice's maxims.¹⁹ The maxims are the basic assumptions of any talk exchange, and departures from them are always significant. The hearer initially assumes that the speaker is following the four maxims. If any of the maxims appears to have been violated, then the hearer will try to interpret the utterance as conforming to the maxims at some deeper level. The speaker may thus violate the maxim of relevance by saying something apparently irrelevant, thereby inviting the hearer to search for the real relevance of the utterance. The maxim of quantity would be violated by exaggeration or understatement, the maxim of quality by irony or rhetorical questions, and the maxim of manner by vagueness or ambiguity. Brown and Levinson regard going off record as the most polite of the three politeness strategies, and suggest that it is 'a natural extension of negative politeness' (Brown and Levinson 1987: 21). They recognize, however, that its exact relationship to the other two strategies needs further investigation. The problem seems to be that an off-record strategy conceals the FTA more effectively, and is therefore more polite, but also has fewer overt politeness markers, and is therefore less polite.

There may often in practice be only one viable interpretation of an off-record utterance, but the usefulness of the strategy resides in the degree of formal latitude allowed by an indirect formulation. The speaker can always repudiate the hearer's inference about the off-record significance of an utterance, and take refuge in its literal

¹⁹ Grice 1975; cf. Lloyd 2004.

meaning. An off-record strategy can also serve to give a formal indication of polite intent. Off-record criticism can thus be expressed counterfactually, as in Haemon's words to Creon εἰ μὴ πατὴρ ἦσθ', εἶπον ἄν σ' οὐκ εὖ φρονεῖν ('If you were not my father, I would say you had no sense', *Ant.* 755; cf. 1053; *OT* 1367). Alternatively, criticism can be expressed by a question such as 'Do you really intend...?' (*Ant.* 770; cf. 568, 574). No one could doubt the intended meaning, but polite intent is signalled by the off-record formulation.

Orestes employs a more subtle off-record strategy when he arrives in disguise at the palace (*El.* 1098–1102):

- Ορ. ἄρ', ὦ γυναῖκες, ὀρθά τ' εἰσηκούσαμεν
ὀρθῶς θ' ὁδοιποροῦμεν ἔνθα χρῆζομεν;
Χο. τί δ' ἐξερευνᾷς καὶ τί βουλευθεὶς πάρει;
Ορ. Αἴγισθον ἔνθ' ὥκηκεν ἱστορῶ πάλαι.
Χο. ἄλλ' εὖ θ' ἰκάνεις χῶ φράσας ἀζήμιος.

ORESTES: Ladies, have we heard right instructions, and are we on the right way to where we wish to go?

CHORUS: What are you looking for? and what is the purpose that brings you here?

ORESTES: For a while I have been asking where Aegisthus has made his dwelling.

CHORUS: You have come the right way, and whoever directed you cannot be faulted.

'The opening of the conversation is all the more natural for being illogical. The chorus obviously cannot direct Orestes until they know where he wishes to go' (Kells 1973: 185). Sophocles is not, however, in the habit of writing 'natural' dialogue for the sake of it, especially at crucial moments like this. Initiation of contact threatens the negative face of both parties, and this face threat is regularly redressed by elaborate politeness even in relatively routine cases. This situation is far from routine, even if taken at face value. Orestes, in his fictive persona, is an emissary of Strophius, an ally of Agamemnon and therefore an enemy of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. Orestes is returning to Clytemnestra

the ashes of the man whom Strophius had hitherto been sheltering from her. He is thus constrained not only to impinge on the chorus, thus putting himself in their debt and risking a humiliating rebuff, but also to communicate news which Strophius' enemies may be expected to welcome. The real situation is even more face-threatening than the fictive one, and one would expect Orestes to orient his utterance not only to the face of the addressee but also to his own.

The off-record meaning is signalled here by a breach of Grice's maxim of manner. Orestes' utterance is far from perspicuous, as Kells observes, and this prompts the chorus to consider its real meaning. Orestes' request is oriented to the face of the chorus, with the conventionally polite address ὦ γυναῖκες ('Ladies') and the use of a preliminary question, but it is also oriented to his own face.²⁰ He indirectly communicates that he is a stranger, which is a good reason for the request. Giving reasons is a common positive politeness gambit, including both parties in a co-operative process of practical reasoning and thus oriented to the face of both speaker and hearer (cf. H. *Od.* 7.22–6; Brown and Levinson 1987: 128–9). Orestes also dissociates himself from the FTA by attributing responsibility for his presence to someone else ('have we heard right instructions?'). The chorus correctly interprets his utterance as a request for directions, and asks him what he wants. His actual request is thus expressed as a reply to their question (cf. *El.* 310–16). He could not have distanced himself more effectively from the imposition involved in accosting the chorus. There is an even more elaborate example of this strategy in Euripides' *Alcestis*, where the Servant repeatedly violates the Gricean maxims in the attempt to soften the FTA of telling Heracles that Alcestis is dead, and that he has thus been deceived into behaving in a wholly inappropriate manner (*E. Alc.* 803–25; cf. *Hipp.* 88–99; *Ion* 752–62). His purpose is to communicate this embarrassing news in the form of an answer to a leading question by Heracles, even if the latter cannot be prompted to work it out for himself.

²⁰ A common politeness gambit is to divide the FTA into a number of separate stages, e.g. by beginning with a general request for permission to speak (cf. *Aj.* 1328–31; *OC* 464–5, 1414–15; *E. Tro.* 48–66). Orestes' unanswerable introductory question at *E. IT* 658 ('Pylades, do you have the same feeling as I do?') has a similar function (= 'I have something interesting to say, if you want to hear it').

Orestes distances himself from his question (1101) by projecting it into the past. Kells (1973: 185) rightly translates: 'What I have been asking all along ...' (i.e. with *πάλα* referring back only as far as his previous utterance). This seems more pointed than a reference to any enquiries of his before arriving at the palace. At any rate, 'point-of-view distancing' (deixis manipulation) is a common politeness gambit.²¹ It is evidently oriented here to Orestes' face, since for the reasons given above it is face-threatening for him to present himself as a visitor under these circumstances. A further point is his use of the perfect *ᾤκηκεν* ('has made his dwelling'). Campbell (ad loc.) remarks that 'the perfect tense suggests the supposed permanence of Aegisthus' rule', and sees irony in the fact that his rule is soon to be terminated. The parallels suggest rather that Orestes avoids asking a question of the standard type 'is this Aegisthus' house?' (e.g. *S. El.* 660–1; *OT* 924–5; *E. An.* 881–2; *Ar. Pl.* 959–61; *H. Od.* 7.22–3). He does not want to imply that the house belongs to Aegisthus.

Politeness and characterization

Sophocles exploits politeness phenomena for specific dramatic purposes, rather than merely to portray a courtly mode of speech. The Paedagogus' elaborate negative politeness has the dramatic effect of stressing his pose as a friendly stranger (*El.* 660–7). His politeness marks the arrival of something unknown from outside, in contrast to the enclosed female world of the preceding 600 lines (cf. *OT* 924–34).

Sophocles can also use politeness for large-scale characterization. Ajax is startlingly impolite, with little respect for anyone else's face, and with a propensity to issue unredressed commands. Politeness in *Ajax* is mostly associated with Athena and Odysseus. *Oedipus Coloneus* contains very little negative politeness, most of it near the beginning of the play (33–5, 49–50, 70, 724–5), but a great deal of positive politeness. This occurs mainly in Oedipus' effusive supplications and thanks to the Athenians.

²¹ See Brown and Levinson 1987: 118–19, 204; Lloyd 1999: 33 n. 25. The future can also be used for polite point-of-view distancing: see Polynices' *βουλήσομαι* (*OC* 1289; cf. *E. Med.* 259).

Most of the politeness in *Oedipus Tyrannus* is by Oedipus himself (9–13, 85–6, 216–21, 300–15, 765, 950, 1047–50, 1110–16). This partly serves to stress his formal and public role, in contrast to Creon and Jocasta, who are more associated with a domestic role, out of the public eye (as Creon himself remarks, 91–2, 583–602). They are less formal in their conversation with the chorus than Oedipus is. Oedipus' politeness also shows his sensitivity to the face of others, despite his tendency to lose his temper when thwarted.

Creon in *Antigone*, by contrast, is much less polite. He tends to initiate contact bluntly, even when he is not actually trying to be offensive (162, 387, 531, 632–4, 991), and he can be very impolite (244, 280–1, 444–7, 1055). Griffith (1999: 20) remarks on 'his disrespectful habit of referring to people in the third person even when they are present (473–96, 561–2, 726–7, 883–90, 931–6)'. His relatively polite request ἄγοιτ' ἄν ('please take me away', 1339) suggests that politeness may be one of the lessons which he has learned by the end of the play.

Face-threat politeness theory sees politeness as much more than merely decorative or superficial. 'Face' is broadly defined and easily threatened. Deviations from bald-on-record communication in order to redress or minimize face threat are common in all but the most basic forms of dialogue. Sophocles' mastery of dialogue includes a mastery of the varieties of politeness.²²

²² I am most grateful to the editors for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

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