

# POLITENESS AND INTERACTION IN ANCIENT GREEK: PREVENTING AND AVOIDING DISPREFERRED REACTIONS IN THE DIALOGUES OF PLATO\*

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**ABSTRACT:** Following the descriptive and methodological framework of Conversation Analysis, this paper analyzes the linguistic strategies employed in order to avoid or prevent dispreferred reactions in interaction, and examines their implications in terms of positive and negative face. It focuses especially on the treatment of possible rejections to requests and offers, and on the avoidance of direct disagreement in talk-in-interaction. This is a corpus study based on the dialogues of Plato.

**KEYWORDS:** conversation analysis, politeness, dialogue; Plato; interaction; preference.

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## 1. POLITENESS AND INTERACTION

In the last decades, a great number of phenomena pertaining to ancient Greek texts has been reexamined and reassessed in light of the contributions of Politeness Theory<sup>1</sup>. These studies have focused especially on the linguistic strategies employed in order to avoid (positive and negative) face-threatening acts, as they appear in literary genres that reproduce interpersonal interaction, such as theatre or philosophical dialogue<sup>2</sup>. Even if interaction is the context in which politeness-oriented strategies appear more frequently, most of the linguistic phenomena attended thus far from this perspective occur within the restricted scope of the utterance. Much less attention has been devoted to the treatment of positive and negative faces through the dynamics of talk-in-interaction<sup>3</sup>.

The fact is that much of the analysis of such dynamics in ancient Greek literary texts remains unfinished. Whereas other branches of pragmatics or discourse-oriented disciplines have been thoroughly explored, Conversation Analysis has only been recently applied to classical languages<sup>4</sup>. This methodological framework approaches conversation as something more than a mere succession of turns: it studies it as a highly organized activity performed by a series of participants who have specific goals and make use of different methods in order to see them successfully accomplished<sup>5</sup>. Although Conversation Analysis relies on an inductive methodology based on the description of recordings of naturally-occurring talk in modern languages, the study of literary dialogue as talk-in-interaction can help to provide a better understanding of the mechanics of the conversational activity enacted in classical texts, providing an overview of the strategies and patterns described by the different turns as the characters engage one another in the imagined conversations.

This paper combines both perspectives and explores the relation between politeness and interaction in the dialogues of Plato. It aims to show how the management of conversation can result in different outputs in terms of (im)politeness or, in other words, how speakers can be (im)polite through their ways of interacting. In particular, it will focus on a number of phenomena related to the organization of preference as it appears in the different turns-at-talk that make up such dialogues<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Brown & Levinson 1987 is the milestone of the literature on Politeness Theory. Culpeper & Kádár 2010 laid the groundwork for the study of politeness from a historical perspective. Research on politeness in ancient languages has been a fruitful field in the last years, as evidenced by the special issues appeared in the *Journal of Politeness Research* (Ridealgh 2016) and in the *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* (Ridealgh 2019), among other monographs and collective volumes.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Poccetti 2014 for an overview. Linguistic politeness has been also studied in non-literary texts (see Dickey 2011, on private papyrus letters). For an approach to politeness in ancient Greek culture with a wider scope than that of language, see Mari 2021.

<sup>3</sup> With remarkable exceptions: Mari 2016, Sorrentino forth., Van Emde Boas forth.

<sup>4</sup> Pace Person 1995. The methodology of Conversation Analysis has been applied to ancient Greek language and literature by Minchin 2011, Sorrentino 2012, Schuren 2014, Drummen 2016, Person 2017, Van Emde Boas 2017a, and Verano 2021. In Latin, it is worth mentioning the contributions by Berger 2016, 2018, 2020a, 2020b and Risselada forth.

<sup>5</sup> For a complete overview on Conversation Analysis, see Sidnell & Stivers 2013. The seminal papers of the discipline are those by Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson 1974 and Schegloff, Jefferson & Sacks 1977, together with the lectures delivered by Harvey Sacks in the 1960's and 1970's, collected in Sacks 1992.

<sup>6</sup> Illustrative examples provided throughout this study come from all the *corpus platonicum*. The Greek text quoted is that of Burnet 1900-1907 and the English translations are those published in the Loeb Classical Library.

## 2. METHODOLOGICAL FRAME

### 2.1. *The organization of preference in talk-in-interaction*

A central idea to Conversation Analysis is that talk-in-interaction is organized through successive minimal sequences, the so-called adjacency pairs. Such pairs are made of two turns tied together, the first of which —uttered by a first speaker— precedes and determines the content of the second —uttered by a second speaker. These minimal pairs can be expanded in different ways and replicated in various forms, building up to larger chains of sequences of which conversations are ultimately made. An example of a short conversational exchange composed of basic adjacency pairs is presented below:

A: Hello.

B: Hello.

A: Can I have three apples?

B: Of course.

A: I will also take two oranges.

B: Very good.

This minimal extract can be analyzed as containing three different sequences, each consisting of a single adjacency pair. A complete account of the sequential organization of talk-in-interaction is beyond the scope of this study<sup>7</sup>. What is interesting for the purpose of our study is the fact that the actions performed by the first pair part (in the sample text, those of A) constrain the range of possible reactions of its respective second part (those of B), narrowing them down to those deemed to exhibit relevant responses<sup>8</sup>. For instance, after the verbal greeting ‘hello’ in the first part of the first adjacency pair in the sample text, one can only expect to find a reciprocal greeting in the second part. A different behavior should be interpreted as some kind of deviation unless the text provides contextual evidence of the contrary. In the second pair, the action performed in the first part —a question— needs to be followed by an answer, namely a positive or negative answer since it is a polar question. In the third pair, a statement in the first part is presumed to be followed by an agreement or disagreement token.

Therefore, it can be said that second parts of adjacency pairs are conceived and shaped after their corresponding first parts and, given a first pair part performing a certain sort of action, there is a set of possible valid reactions from which the second speaker is expected to make a choice. However, as research in Conversation Analysis has extensively shown, not all the possible reactions from that set are equally *preferred* in a particular talk-in-interaction con-

<sup>7</sup> For a thorough introduction to sequence organization, including the structure of adjacency pairs and the multiple actions that can be performed through them, see Schegloff 2007.

<sup>8</sup> This property is known in Conversation Analysis as “nextness”: “The concept of the adjacency pair begins with the observation of ‘nextness’ and its corol-

lary that each utterance has a reflexive relationship with what comes prior, and with what comes next. The notion of nextness crystalized as the adjacency pair – the idea that with particular actions, social actors impose a normative obligation on co-interactants to perform a type-fitted response at the first possible opportunity” (Stivers 2013, 192).

text<sup>9</sup>. For instance, polar questions generally prefer positive answers over negative ones<sup>10</sup>; petitions and requests prefer compliance; statements and assertions would tend to prefer to be agreed with. These are general rules and conventional patterns that comprise part of the conversational method, of which the co-interactants are fully aware. Naturally, *preferred* does not mean *compulsory*. Speakers do choose to react in a dispreferred way quite often. But such choices usually leave some formal traits that can be traced back in the text. For instance, in the following passage, Socrates' refusal to Hippocrates' request is accompanied by a proper justification:

*Prt.* 310e-311a: “Εἰ γάρ, ἦ δ’ ὅς, “ὦ Ζεῦ καὶ θεοί, ἐν τούτῳ εἶη· ὡς οὔτ’ ἂν τῶν ἐμῶν ἐπιλίπομι οὐδὲν οὔτε τῶν φίλων· ἀλλ’ αὐτὰ ταῦτα καὶ νῦν ἤκω παρὰ σέ, ἵνα ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ διαλεχθῆς αὐτῷ. ἐγὼ γάρ ἅμα μὲν καὶ νεώτερός εἰμι, ἅμα δὲ οὐδὲ εἴωρακα Πρωταγόραν πώποτε οὐδ’ ἀκήκοα οὐδέν· ἔτι γὰρ παῖς ἦ ὅτε τὸ πρότερον ἐπεδήμησε. ἀλλὰ γάρ, ὦ Σώκратες, πάντες τὸν ἄνδρα ἐπαινοῦσιν καὶ φασιν σοφώτατον εἶναι λέγειν· ἀλλὰ τί οὐ βαδίζομεν παρ’ αὐτόν, ἵνα ἔνδον καταλάβωμεν; καταλύει δ’, ὡς ἐγὼ ἤκουσα, παρὰ Καλλιᾶ τῷ Ἴππονίκου· ἀλλ’ ἴωμεν.” Καὶ ἐγὼ εἶπον· “Μήπω, ἀγαθέ, ἐκεῖσε ἴωμεν—πρῶ γὰρ ἐστίν— ἀλλὰ δεῦρο ἐξαναστῶμεν εἰς τὴν αὐλήν, καὶ περιούντες αὐτοῦ διατρίψωμεν ἕως ἂν φῶς γένηται· εἶτα ἴωμεν. καὶ γὰρ τὰ πολλὰ Πρωταγόρας ἔνδον διατρίβει, ὥστε, θάρρει, καταληψόμεθα αὐτόν, ὡς τὸ εἰκός, ἔνδον.” ‘Would to Zeus and all the gods, he exclaimed, only that were needed! I should not spare either my own pocket or those of my friends. But it is on this very account I have come to you now, to see if you will have a talk with him on my behalf: for one thing, I am too young to do it myself; and for another, I have never yet seen Protagoras nor heard him speak a word – I was but a child when he paid us his previous visit. You know, Socrates, how everyone praises the man and tells of his mastery of speech: *let us step over to him at once, to make sure of finding him in; he is staying, so I was told, with Callias, son of Hipponicus. Now, let us be going.* To this I replied: *We had better not go there yet, my good friend, it is so very early: let us rise and turn into the court here, and spend the time strolling there till daylight comes; after that we can go. Protagoras, you see, spends most of his time indoors, so have no fear, we shall find him in all right, most likely.*’

Thanks to the contributions of Conversation Analysis, it is well-known that preferred reactions come straightforwardly, whereas dispreferred ones need to be attenuated. In a certain way, uttering a dispreferred answer can be qualified as a sort of failure in talk-in-interaction. In fact, speakers tend either to avoid dispreferred answers if possible by means of different strategies or prevent them by anticipating their interlocutor's reactions and designing their turns accordingly. That means that participants in interaction are engaged in an uninterrupted exercise of identity construction and presupposition about their addressees based on common ground material, from

<sup>9</sup> “The core idea of preference is that participants follow principles, often implicit, when they act and react in a variety of interactional situations. However, despite the common core, the concept of preference is used to describe different kinds of principles that operate in different domains and involve different orders and types of constraints. Preference principles play a part in the selection and interpretation of referring expressions, the production and interpretation of both initiating and responding actions, repair, turn-taking, and the progression through a sequence of actions” (Pom-

merantz & Heritage 2013, 210). For an overview of the organization of preference, see also Schegloff 2007, 58-96.

<sup>10</sup> That is, unless the questions are otherwise oriented, such as in *Prm.* 148e-149a: Οὐκοῦν δύο μὲν ὄν τὸ ἐν ποιήσειεν ἂν ταῦτα καὶ ἐν δυοῖν χώραιν ἅμα γένοιτο· ἕως δ’ ἂν ἦ ἐν, οὐκ ἐθελήσει; { – } Οὐ γὰρ οὖν. (“The one, then, might do this if it were two, and might be in two places at once; but so long as it is one, it will not?” “No, it will not.”). On question-design and preference, see Pommerantz & Heritage 2013, 213-216.

which they infer how to shape their turns —linguistically and otherwise— for the sake of successful communication<sup>11</sup>.

## 2.2. *Dispreferred reactions as face-threatening acts*

The organization of preference is understood by Conversation Analysis as a structural feature of talk-in-interaction. According to this, the fact that some responses are preferred to others relies on the dynamics of the interaction itself, rather than contextual or subjective matters. However, if one must look into the reasons why a particular type of reaction becomes dispreferred, it is necessary to take into account other factors involved in the social activity of communication. In this sense, as it has been pointed out by Brown & Levinson in their foundational work on Politeness Theory, a wide range of phenomena related to preference in interaction are also approachable in terms of face:

«[...] the term ‘preference’ refers to the structural disposition, to the fact that conversational organization conspires to make it easier to use the preferred type of turn, not to participants’ wishes. [...] If one asks what determines which kinds of response are preferred vs. dispreferred, in this structural sense corresponding to unmarked vs. marked in form respectively, a large part of the answer must surely lie in face considerations (Brown & Levinson 1987, 38).»<sup>12</sup>

Certainly, there is an overlap between preference and politeness in interaction that makes the association of both perspectives highly relevant for the analysis. First, it is important to bear in mind that being polite is, above all, a personal decision, and therefore co-participants in communication are free to behave politely or impolitely with one another, depending on how they feel in each and every moment. Therefore, if dispreferred reactions are to be seen as having an impact in face management, that can explain why some speakers may make use of them, devoid of any of the expected hedging and mitigating strategies, and consequently exploit preference settings for the purpose of impoliteness or other intended effects in interaction<sup>13</sup>.

For instance, in the following passage, at the end of his turn, Socrates utters a question that is clearly oriented towards a positive answer to which Hippias replies with a “no” without giving any form of justification for his answer. Both the unexpected answer and the lack of further elaboration befuddle Socrates, who expresses his bewilderment in the next turn and yet again in the following, reproducing extensively documented patterns in similar situations in naturally occurring talk.

*Hp. Ma.* 283a-c. {ΣΩ.} Καλόν γε, ὦ Ἰππία, λέγεις καὶ μέγα τεκμήριον σοφίας τῆς τε σεαυτοῦ καὶ τῶν νῦν ἀνθρώπων πρὸς τοὺς ἀρχαίους ὅσον διαφέρουσι. τῶν γὰρ προτέρων [περὶ

<sup>11</sup> On the concept of common ground, see Clark & Brennan 1991. In Conversation Analysis, the principle by which speakers orient to their addressees in producing their talk is known as ‘recipient design’, and it can be traced back to Harvey Sack’s lectures (see, for instance, Sacks 1992, II, 384-390).

<sup>12</sup> Politeness Theory relies deeply on the concept of (negative and positive) face: «Central to our model is a highly abstract notion of ‘face’ which consists of two specific kinds of desires (‘face-wants’) attributed by interactants to one another: the desire to be unimpeded in

one’s actions (negative face), and the desire (in some respects) to be approved of (positive face). This is the bare bones of a notion of face which (we argue) is universal, but which in any particular society we would expect to be the subject of much cultural elaboration» (Brown & Levinson 1987, 13).

<sup>13</sup> See Bousfield 2008 for a study of the exploitation of the rules of talk-in-interaction for impoliteness, especially 235-258 for preference organization, and Hayashi 1996 for a case study.

Ἀναξαγόρου λέγεται] πολλή ἀμαθία κατὰ τὸν σὸν λόγον. τούναντίον γὰρ Ἀναξαγόρα φασὶ συμβῆναι ἢ ὑμῖν· καταλειφθέντων γὰρ αὐτῷ πολλῶν χρημάτων καταμελῆσαι καὶ ἀπολέσαι πάντα —οὕτως αὐτὸν ἀνόητα σοφίζεσθαι— λέγουσι δὲ καὶ περὶ ἄλλων τῶν παλαιῶν ἕτερα τοιαῦτα. τοῦτο μὲν οὖν μοι δοκεῖς καλὸν τεκμήριον ἀποφαίνειν περὶ σοφίας τῶν νῦν πρὸς τοὺς προτέρους, καὶ πολλοῖς συνδοκεῖ ὅτι τὸν σοφὸν αὐτὸν αὐτῷ μάλιστα δεῖ σοφὸν εἶναι· τούτου δ' ὄρος ἐστὶν ἄρα, ὅς ἂν πλεῖστον ἀργύριον ἐργάσῃται. καὶ ταῦτα μὲν ἱκανῶς ἐχέτω· τόδε δέ μοι εἰπέ, σὺ αὐτὸς πόθεν πλεῖστον ἀργύριον ἠργάσω τῶν πόλεων εἰς ἃς ἀφικνῆ; ἢ δῆλον ὅτι ἐκ Λακεδαιμόνος, οἵπερ καὶ πλειστάκις ἀφίξαι;

{ΠΙ.} Οὐ μὰ τὸν Δία, ὦ Σώκρατες.

{ΣΩ.} Πῶς φῆς; ἀλλ' ἐλάχιστον;

{ΠΙ.} Οὐδὲν μὲν οὖν τὸ παράπαν ἄποτε.

{ΣΩ.} Τέρας λέγεις καὶ θαυμαστόν, ὦ Ἴππια. καὶ μοι εἰπέ· πότερον ἢ σοφία ἢ σὴ οὐχ οἷα τοὺς συνόντας αὐτῇ καὶ μανθάνοντας εἰς ἀρετὴν βελτίους ποιεῖν;

'SOCRATES: That's a fine thing you say, Hippias, and strong testimony to your wisdom and that of the men of today and to their great superiority to the ancients. For the earlier sophists of the school of Anaxagoras must have been very ignorant to judge from what is said, according to your view; for they say that what happened to Anaxagoras was the opposite of what happens to you; for though much money was left him, he neglected it and lost it all so senseless was his wisdom. And they tell similar tales about others among the ancients. So this seems to me fine testimony that you adduce for the wisdom of the men of today as compared with the earlier men, and many people agree with me that the wise man must be wise for himself especially; and the test of this is, who makes the most money. Well, so much for that. But tell me this: at which of the cities that you go to did you make the most money? *Or are we to take it that it was at Lacedaemon, where your visits have been most frequent?*

HIPPIAS: *No, by Zeus, it was not, Socrates.*

SOCRATES: *What's that you say? But did you make least there?*

HIPPIAS: *Why, I never made anything at all.*

SOCRATES: That is a prodigious marvel that you tell, Hippias; and say now: is not your wisdom such as to make those who are in contact with it and learn it, better men in respect to virtue?'

Hippias' interactional manners are but a part of his characterization as an arrogant, self-important man who does not care about his interlocutor<sup>14</sup>; however, the organization of preference has more to offer for the conduction of non-polemical communication or, in other words, for the preservation, rather than the threatening of the participants' respective faces. The following pages will provide an overview of the mechanisms involved in such contexts using the methodological tools of Conversation Analysis and Politeness Theory. Thus, by overlapping the concepts of dispreferred reaction and face-threatening acts, on the one hand, we will expand our knowledge of the strategies used in ancient Greek texts to prevent and avoid such acts beyond the scope of the utterance in which they occur; and, on the other, we will learn more about the nuances and values associated to different moves and patterns in interaction. This will ultimately lead us to a better understanding of the quality of the portrayal of human conversation in the dialogues of Plato.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. also *Hp. Ma.* 295a. A similar instance occurs in *Euth.* 273d, when Euthydemus denies Socrates without further justification. On the use of interactional

patterns and politeness for literary characterization, see Van Emde-Boas 2017b and Rodríguez Piedrabuena 2019.



## 3. PREVENTING AND AVOIDING REJECTIONS WITH PRE- AND INSERT-EXPANSIONS

Among the actions that the participants can initiate in communication, the interlocutors' faces are often most sensitive to offers and requests. Especially, requests can be considered in themselves as negative face-threatening acts by default, since compelling the addressees to do something can be received as a violation of their freedom of action<sup>15</sup>; but they also expose the speakers, whose positive faces can be damaged if their requests or offers are not accepted. The pair request/rejection then is potentially threatening in both its initiating and reactive parts. In order to soften the directive force of the requesting turns and, in doing so, their repercussion on their addressees' faces, speakers have a number of resources at their disposal. They can make use of indirect forms of commands or add pragmatic markers and formulae —such as εἰ βούλει or εἰ σοὶ δοκεῖ in ancient Greek— which serve to mitigate the utterance's impact on the negative face<sup>16</sup>.

Looking at the other side of the pair, rejections, as dispreferred reactions and possible face-threatening acts, are to be avoided in talk-in-interaction. Clearly, designing the prior turn with the help of negative politeness substantially favors a successful outcome in communication. However, the sequential organization of talk-in-interaction provides for other strategies that can also be helpful in such cases. As previously mentioned, adjacency pairs can be expanded by adding subordinate pairs before, between, or after the main turns, known respectively as pre-expansions, insert-expansions and post-expansions<sup>17</sup>. For instance, expansions preceding an invitation or an offer may be used to obtain relevant information about the addressee that allows the speaker to anticipate his/her possible response, as in the following sample text:

1. A: Are you free tonight?
2. B: Sure.
3. A: Would you like to go to the movies?
4. B: Of course.

In the preceding dialogue, the first pair of turns (1-2) acts as a pre-expansion of the invitation that takes place in the base pair (3-4). That means that the first question formulated by A is intended as a preparatory move, and so it is interpreted by B, who can easily recognize the question as a pre-expansion and foresee the upcoming invitation. Such expansions that lay the ground for a request can be found in the dialogues of Plato, as in the following passage:

*Phd.* 57a-b. {EX.} Αὐτός, ὃ Φαίδων, παρεγένου Σωκράτει ἐκείνη τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἣ τὸ φάρμακον εἶπεν ἐν τῷ δεσμωτηρίῳ, ἢ ἄλλου του ἤκουσας;

{ΦΑΙΔ.} Αὐτός, ὃ Ἐχέκρατες.

{EX.} Τί οὖν δὴ ἐστὶν ἅττα εἶπεν ὁ ἀνὴρ πρὸ τοῦ θανάτου; καὶ πῶς ἐτελεύτα; ἠδέως γὰρ ἂν ἐγὼ ἀκούσαιμι. καὶ γὰρ οὔτε [τῶν πολιτῶν] Φλειασίων οὐδεὶς πάνυ τι ἐπιχωριάζει τὰ νῦν Ἀθήναζε, οὔτε τις ξένος ἀφίεται χρόνου συχνοῦ ἐκεῖθεν ὅστις ἂν ἡμῖν σαφές τι ἀγγελῆαι οἶός τ' ἦν περὶ τούτων, πλὴν γε δὴ ὅτι φάρμακον πῶν ἀποθάνοι· τῶν δὲ ἄλλων οὐδὲν εἶχεν φράζειν.

<sup>15</sup> See Brown & Levinson 1987, 68-69 for an overview on face-threatening acts and the strategies to deal with them. On the pragmatics of directive expressions in ancient Greek and their relation to politeness, see Denizot 2011.

<sup>16</sup> Such strategies have been thoroughly studied in ancient Greek discourse. See Denizot 2011, 400-491 for a complete account on indirect forms for orders and related speech acts.

<sup>17</sup> See Schegloff 2007 for a definition of such expansions with many illustrative cases.

ECHECRATES: *Were you with Socrates yourself, Phaedo, on the day when he drank the poison in prison, or did you hear about it from someone else?*

‘PHAEDO: I was there myself, Echecrates.

ECHECRATES: Then what did he say before his death? and how did he die? I should like to hear, for nowadays none of the Phliasians go to Athens at all, and no stranger has come from there for a long time, who could tell us anything definite about this matter, except that he drank poison and died, so we could learn no further details.’

Before asking Phaedo directly to give an account of Socrates’ last hours, Echecrates prepares his request by asking an introductory question that can be recognized as such by the addressee<sup>18</sup>. From a common ground perspective, that first enquiry serves to confirm the addressee’s presuppositions, and so helps to elude the possibility of asking him to do something that he will not. A very specific type of pre-expansion preceding requests documented in the dialogues of Plato is shown in the following passage:

*Tht.* 242a-b. {ΞΕ.} Τρίτον τοίνυν ἔτι σε μικρόν τι παραιτήσομαι.

{ΘΕΑΙ.} Λέγε μόνον.

{ΞΕ.} Εἶπόν που νυνδὴ λέγων ὡς πρὸς τὸν περὶ ταῦτ’ ἔλεγχον αἰεὶ τε ἀπειρηκῶς ἐγὼ τυγχάνω καὶ δὴ καὶ τὰ νῦν.

{ΘΕΑΙ.} Εἶπες.

{ΞΕ.} Φοβοῦμαι δὴ τὰ εἰρημένα, μὴ ποτε διὰ ταῦτά σοι μανικὸς εἶναι δόξω παρὰ πόδα μεταβαλὼν ἑμαυτὸν ἄνω καὶ κάτω. σὴν γὰρ δὴ χάριν ἐλέγγειν τὸν λόγον ἐπιθησόμεθα, εἴανπερ ἐλέγχωμεν.

{ΘΕΑΙ.} Ὡς τοίνυν ἔμοιγε μηδαμῆ δόξων μηδὲν πλημμελεῖν, ἂν ἐπὶ τὸν ἔλεγχον τοῦτον καὶ τὴν ἀπόδειξιν ἴης, θαρρῶν ἴθι τούτου γε ἕνεκα.

‘STRANGER: *Then I have a third little request to make of you.*

THEAETETUS: You have only to utter it.

Stranger: I said a while ago that I always have been too faint-hearted for the refutation of this theory, and so I am now.

THEAETETUS: Yes, so you did.

STRANGER: I am afraid that on account of what I have said you will think I am mad because I have at once reversed my position. You see it is for your sake that I am going to undertake the refutation, if I succeed in it.

THEAETETUS: I certainly shall not think you are doing anything improper if you proceed to your refutation and proof; so go ahead boldly, so far as that is concerned.’

<sup>18</sup> An interesting parallel passage occurs at the beginning of *Banquet*, where the same question comes after the request: *Smp.*172a-b: Καὶ ὅς, “Ἀπολλόδορε,” ἔφη, “καὶ μὴν καὶ ἔναγχός σε ἐζήτουν βουλόμενος διαπυθέσθαι τὴν Ἀγάθωνος συνουσίαν καὶ Σωκράτους καὶ Ἀλκιβιάδου καὶ τῶν ἄλλων τῶν τότε ἐν τῷ συνδείπνῳ παραγενομένων, περὶ τῶν ἐρωτικῶν λόγων τίνες ἦσαν· ἄλλος γάρ τις μοι διηγείτο ἀκηκοῶς Φοίνικος τοῦ Φιλίππου, ἔφη δὲ καὶ σὲ εἶδέναι. ἀλλὰ γὰρ οὐδὲν εἶχε σαφὲς λέγειν. σὺ οὖν μοι διήγησαι· δικαιοτάτος γὰρ εἶ τοὺς τοῦ ἐταίρου λόγους ἀπαγγέλλειν. πρότερον δέ μοι,” ἦ δ’ ὅς, “εἰπέ, σὺ αὐτὸς παρεγένου τῇ συνουσίᾳ ταύτῃ ἢ οὐ;” (Then, “Apollo-

dorus,” he said, “do you know, I have just been looking for you, as I want to hear all about the banquet that brought together Agathon and Socrates and Alcibiades and the rest of that party, and what were the speeches they delivered upon love. For somebody else was relating to me the account he had from Phoenix, son of Philip, and he mentioned that you knew it too. But he could not tell it at all clearly so you must give me the whole story, for you are the most proper reporter of your dear friend’s discourses. *But first tell me this,*” he went on; “*were you at that party yourself, or not?*”). The repetition of the pattern points at a sort of formularity that fits very well in the definition of a pre-expansion.



Such pre-expansions project the actions to be performed in the base pairs by referring to them explicitly<sup>19</sup>. They create a space for negotiation, involving the addressee in the design of the upcoming conversation, and in this way, they strengthen cooperation in interaction. Since they seek for the addressees to grant their permission to proceed with the planned request, they can contribute to restraining the commanding force of the main pairs to which they are subordinate. However, they are part of well-known patterns that can be recognized as such, meaning that the directive charge of the utterance to come impregnates the structure as a whole, and makes it necessary to introduce marks of negative politeness, such as the diminutive expression *σμικρὸν τι*, qualifying the request as “a little thing”, intending to attenuate the utterance and, ultimately, preventing a dispreferred reaction from the addressee<sup>20</sup>.

Despite such pre-emptive activities, as addressees become speakers, sometimes they have to face producing dispreferred reactions. But even in those cases, there is a tendency to avoid explicit formulations by using indirect or euphemistic expressions from which the actual response is to be inferred. A second possibility is to delay as much as possible the rejection, putting off the utterance of the second pair part by introducing insert-expansions, that is, subsidiary insert-sequences located between the first and second parts of a base sequence, to defer the formulation of the second part. Such insert-expansions usually take the form of other-initiated repair or repair-like sequences, that is, they may point out a misunderstanding or miscommunication problem<sup>21</sup>; or, in other instances, they can simply be questions about any particulars referred to in the previous turn. In the following passage, for instance, Socrates avoids answering Hippothales’ invitation by means of an insert-expansion:

*Ly.* 204a-b. Βούλει οὖν ἔπεσθαι, ἔφη, ἵνα καὶ ἴδῃς τοὺς ὄντας αὐτόθι [αὐτοῦ];

*Πρῶτον ἡδέως ἀκούσαιμ’ ἂν ἐπὶ τῷ καὶ εἴσειμι καὶ τίς ὁ καλός.*

Ἄλλος, ἔφη, ἄλλῳ ἡμῶν δοκεῖ, ὦ Σώκρατες.

Σοὶ δὲ δὴ τίς, ὦ Ἴππόθαλες; τοῦτό μοι εἰπέ.

‘Then will you please come in with us, he said, so as to see for yourself the company we have there?’

*I should be glad to hear first on what terms I am to enter, and which is the handsome one.*

Each of us, he replied, has a different fancy, Socrates.

Well, and which is yours, Hippothales? Tell me that.’

Such insert-expansions can create discontinuities in sequence organization, and it is not completely unusual for the base sequence to remain incomplete, especially when the first speaker understands well enough that the second speaker is not willing to comply with the request. Thus, by managing sequence organization one can avoid uttering an explicit rejection, both protecting

<sup>19</sup> These pre-sequences are called ‘pre-pre’s’ in Conversation Analysis. For instance, asking “can I ask you a question?” before a question, or “can I ask you a favor” before making the request are good examples of pre-pre’s. See Schegloff 2007, 44-48.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. also *Sph.* 262e: ἔτι δὴ σμικρὸν τόδε (“Now there is another little point”). On the attenuative value of diminutives in ancient Greek, see Pascucci 1965. A full account of the values of diminutive formations in the light of recent Politeness Theory in ancient Greek remains to be completed.

<sup>21</sup> The domain of repair in conversation can be defined as “the set of practices whereby a co-interactant interrupts the ongoing course of action to attend to possible trouble in speaking, hearing or understanding the talk” (Kitzinger 2013, 229). The concept was first shaped in Schegloff, Jefferson & Sacks (1977). Repair moves can be self-initiated, when a speaker decides to rephrase, clarify, or reformulate his/her own words, or other-initiated, when it is a second speaker who asks his/her interlocutor about his/her talk. Other-initiated repair sequences usually assume the form of insert-expansions.

his/her own image and that of the interlocutor, who can decide to withdraw —or, at least, not to claim again— his/her primitive request. That is not the case in the previous passage from *Lysis*, for Hippothales' persistence leads him to repeat his request to Socrates up to three times until he finally obtains a positive answer<sup>22</sup>.

Other passages from the dialogues of Plato show instances in which such expansions not only seem to play a role in preference management, but also serve other conversational projects<sup>23</sup>. In the following lines, Socrates avoids responding to Lysimachus' request by uttering an insert-expansion by means of which he can, at the same time, alter the course of the conversation:

La.184d-e. {ΛΥ.} Ἀλλὰ δέομαι ἔγωγε, ὦ Σώκρατες· καὶ γὰρ ὡς περ τοῦ ἐπιδιακρινούντος δοκεῖ μοι δεῖν ἡμῖν ἢ βουλή. εἰ μὲν γὰρ συνεφερέσθην τῷδε, ἦττον ἂν τοῦ τοιοῦτου ἔδει· νῦν δὲ τὴν ἐναντίαν γάρ, ὡς ὀρᾷς, Λάχης Νικία ἔθετο, εὖ δὴ ἔχει ἀκοῦσαι καὶ σοῦ ποτέρῳ τοῖν ἀνδροῖν σύμμηφος εἶ.

{ΣΩ.} Τί δέ, ὦ Λυσίμαχε; ὁπότερ' ἂν οἱ πλείους ἐπαινῶσιν ἡμῶν, τούτοις μέλλεις χρῆσθαι;

{ΛΥ.} Τί γὰρ ἂν τις καὶ ποιοῖ, ὦ Σώκρατες;

{ΣΩ.} Ἡ καὶ σύ, ὦ Μελησία, οὕτως ἂν ποιοῖς; ἴκᾶν εἴ τις περὶ ἀγωνίας τοῦ ὑέος σοι βουλή εἴη τί χρὴ ἀσκεῖν, ἄρα τοῖς πλείοσιν ἂν ἡμῶν πείθοιο, ἢ 'κείνῳ ὅστις τυγχάνει ὑπὸ παιδοτρίβῃ ἀγαθῷ πεπαιδευμένος καὶ ἡσκηκῶς;

{ΜΕ.} Ἐκείνῳ εἰκός γε, ὦ Σώκρατες.

{LYSIMACHUS: Well, I ask it of you, Socrates: for indeed our members of council, as it were, seem to me to need someone who will decide between them. Had these two agreed, we should not have required this help so much; but as it is —for Laches, you see, has voted on the opposite side to Nicias— it is as well that we should hear your view and see on which side you cast your vote.

{SOCRATES: What, Lysimachus? Are you going to join the side which gets the approval of the majority of us?}

{LYSIMACHUS: Why, what can one do, Socrates?}

{SOCRATES: And you too, Melesias, would do the same? Suppose you had a consultation as to what your son's exercise should be for a coming contest, would you be guided by the majority of us, or by the one who happened to have trained and exercised under a good master?}

{MELESIAS: By the latter, naturally, Socrates.}

Lysimachus' request is formulated in an indirect way, avoiding explicit directive markers and relying on the implicature originating from the expression of desirability (εὖ δὴ ἔχει). Socrates, however, does not respond to the request; instead he introduces a question that has the appearance of an insert-expansion, seeking to obtain more information before agreeing to comply. In fact, such compliance never occurs. The apparent insert-expansion is a strategy of Socrates to take over the formulation of the first pair parts, and thus become the more active interlocutor, able to steer the conversation towards other directions. In fact, he will use this move to lead his interlocutors into the well known cross-examination through question and answer that is the Socratic *elenchus*. This passage has therefore a relevance from a macro textual point of view, as it is through this question introduced by Socrates (Τί δέ, ὦ Λυσίμαχε; ὁπότερ' ἂν οἱ πλείους ἐπαινῶσιν ἡμῶν, τούτοις μέλλεις χρῆσθαι;) that Plato makes the transition from one part of the dialogue to another.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *Ly.* 204a “ἡ δὲ διατριβὴ τὰ πολλὰ ἐν λόγοις, ὧν ἠδέως ἂν σοι μεταδιδόμην” (as a conversational implicature); *Ly.* 204a “Βούλει οὖν ἔπεσθαι, ἔφη, ἵνα καὶ ἴδῃς τοὺς ὄντας αὐτόθι;” and *Ly.* 206c “πολλὴ γὰρ ἂν ἀλογία εἴη. ἀλλὰ διὰ ταῦτα δὴ σοι, ὦ Σώκρατες, ἀνακοινοῦμαι, καὶ εἴ τι ἄλλο ἔχεις, συμβούλευε τίνα

ἂν τις λόγον διαλεγόμενος ἢ τί πράττων προσφιλεῖς παιδικοῖς γένοιτο”.

<sup>23</sup> On the concept of project in Conversation Analysis, as a planned series of actions leading to a particular objective in interaction, see Levinson 2013, 120-122 and Robinson 2013.

## 4. CONCEALING DISAGREEMENTS WITH SEQUENCE CLOSING THIRDS

The preference for agreement in talk-in-interaction has been well established by Conversation Analysis studies. In terms of the dynamics of conversation, whenever a speaker utters a statement, there is a structural pressure for the interlocutor to agree or, at least, to not to disagree as much as possible. Therefore, if speakers actually want to express disagreement with their interlocutors' views and, at the same time, follow the guidelines of preference organization, a very common strategy consists of using an agreement token at the beginning of the turn and then asserting their own ideas as a new, independent statement. This move has been widely documented in studies focusing on naturally occurring talk and is well attested in the dialogues of Plato:

*Prm.* 128b-c: σὺ μὲν γὰρ ἐν τοῖς ποιήμασιν ἐν φῆς εἶναι τὸπᾶν, καὶ τούτων τεκμήρια παρέχῃ καλῶς τε καὶ εὖ: ὁδὲ δὲ αὖ οὐ πολλά φησιν εἶναι, τεκμήρια δὲ καὶ αὐτὸς πάμπολλα καὶ παμμεγέθη παρέχεται. τὸ οὖν τὸν μὲν ἐν φάναι, τὸν δὲ μὴ πολλά, καὶ οὕτως ἐκάτερον λέγειν ὥστε μηδὲν τῶν αὐτῶν εἰρηκέναι δοκεῖν σχεδόν τι λέγοντας ταυτά, ὑπὲρ ἡμᾶς τοὺς ἄλλους φαίνεται ὑμῖν τὰ εἰρημένα εἰρησθαι.

*Naí, φάναι τὸν Ζήνωνα, ὃ Σώκρατες.* σὺ δ' οὖν τὴν ἀλήθειαν τοῦ γράμματος οὐ πανταχοῦ ἥσθησαι. καίτοι ὥσπερ γε αἱ Λάκαιναι σκύλακες εἶ μεταθεῖς τε καὶ ἰχνεύεις τὰ λεχθέντα: ἀλλὰ πρῶτον μὲν σε τοῦτο λανθάνει, ὅτι οὐ παντάπασιν οὕτω σεμνύνεται τὸ γράμμα, ὥστε ἄπερ σὺ λέγεις διανοηθὲν γραφῆναι, τοὺς ἀνθρώπους δὲ ἐπικρυπτόμενον ὥς τι μέγα διαπραττόμενον [...]-

«For you, in your poems, say that the all is one, and you furnish proofs of this in fine and excellent fashion; and he, on the other hand, says it is not many, and he also furnishes very numerous and weighty proofs. That one of you says it is one, and the other that it is not many, and that each of you expresses himself so that although you say much the same you seem not to have said the same things at all, appears to the rest of us a feat of expression quite beyond our power.»

«Yes, Socrates,» said Zeno, «but you have not perceived all aspects of the truth about my writings. You follow the arguments with a scent as keen as a Laconian hound's, but you do not observe that my treatise is not by any means so pretentious that it could have been written with the intention you ascribe to it, of disguising itself as a great performance in the eyes of men.»

In the passage, it is clear that Zeno does not agree with Socrates' proposed analysis, but he chooses to initiate his turn with “ναί”, and then proceeds to present his criticism towards his co-interactant's speech. Placing the agreement formula at the opening of the turn is consistent with the principle of nextness mentioned earlier in this paper: thanks to this, argumentative co-orientation favored by preference rules is maintained across turns. The “yes-but” pattern also allows the interlocutor to preserve and protect his/her positive face by avoiding direct disagreement, as noted by Brown & Levinson in their description of the strategies of positive politeness, since lack of agreement in communication is considered a face-threatening act<sup>24</sup>.

The fact that such tokens delay the utterance of the dispreferred reaction is consistent with the use of insert-expansions as described in the previous section. But these cases are not only about the postponement of the formulation. In terms of sequence organization, there is an important gap between the first part of the turn, which hosts the agreement formula, and the remaining turn. The former can be analyzed as a post-expansion, thus linked and tied to the previous sequence from a structural point of view. This specific type of post-expansion is called a *sequence-closing third*, and

<sup>24</sup> See the strategy number 6 described by Brown & Levinson (1987, 113-116). The first part of their pres-

entation is almost entirely based on the data collected by Sacks (1992).

it usually takes the form of a single turn attached to an adjacency-pair as a third member, providing a final assessment that serves as an acknowledgment of receipt and closes the sequence. After that closure, the counter-oriented statement that comes next stands more isolated from the previous turn since it is constructed as the beginning of a new sequence. The following lines show another example from *Ion*:

*Ion*. 536d: {IΩN.} Σὺ μὲν εὖ λέγεις, ὦ Σώκρατες· θαυμάζοιμι μεντὰν εἰ οὕτως εὖ εἴποις, ὥστε με ἀναπεῖσαι ὡς ἐγὼ κατεχόμενος καὶ μαινόμενος Ὅμηρον ἐπαινῶ. οἶμαι δὲ οὐδ' ἂν σοὶ δόξαιμι, εἴ μου ἀκούσαις λέγοντος περὶ Ὀμήρου.

'ION: *Well spoken, I grant you, Socrates; but still I shall be surprised if you can speak well enough to convince me that I am possessed and mad when I praise Homer. Nor can I think you would believe it of me yourself, if you heard me speaking about him.*'

Formulae such as εὖ λέγεις or καλῶς λέγεις appear frequently in sequence-closing post-expansions with the function described above. They are usually quite efficient by themselves but can be part of more elaborated strategies through which the speakers take accountability for their interlocutors' alleged mistakes and so they hold themselves responsible for the dispreferred way they are about to react. As the following passage shows, in those cases it is common to use negative politeness communicative strategies, such as self-deprecation:

*La*.190e: {ΣΩ.} Εὖ μὲν λέγεις, ὦ Λάχης· ἀλλ' ἴσως ἐγὼ αἴτιος, οὐ σαφῶς εἰπὼν, τὸ σὲ ἀποκρίνασθαι μὴ τοῦτο ὃ διανοούμενος ἠρόμην, ἀλλ' ἕτερον.

'SOCRATES: Rightly spoken. Laches; but I fear I am to blame, by not putting it clearly, for your having answered not the intention of my question, but something else.'

In cases such as this, the discourse strategies used to preserve the rules of preference may be relevant in terms of the social status and mutual relationships of the characters, as they are mirrored in their behavior in interaction. In this sense, Politeness Theory can complete the description based on Conversation Analysis, providing a more detailed approach to social factors, such as age, gender or power relations between interlocutors, which influence the management of preference and can favour the choice of certain discursive strategies over others. The example of *Laques* can illustrate how the selection of a specific strategy may have a meaningful reading from this point of view. In the dialogue, Socrates debates with the general Laques, who is an individual of high social status and, as an experienced and successful military man, stands as an expert in the topic under discussion. The use of self-deprecation to hedge dispreferred reaction implies —except in contexts of irony or overpoliteness— an acknowledgment of the inferior status of the speaker compared to that of the addressee, and thus it contributes to establishing the roles of the interlocutors and ultimately to shaping the *mise-en-scène* of the conversation.

## 5. FINAL REMARKS

The previous pages have examined the interrelation between interaction and politeness in the dialogues of Plato, focusing on a number of phenomena related to the organization of preference in conversation. In particular, the analysis of dispreferred reactions as face-threatening acts has proved to be relevant in providing a more complete account of the strategies used to mitigate the effects of such acts through interactional patterns, expanding the focus of research on politeness in ancient Greek beyond the scope of the single utterance.

In the dialogues of Plato, some of these strategies include the use of specific pre-expansions to anticipate requests and invitations and the insertion of expansions to delay rejections or negative responses. By expanding the base pair of the sequence, speakers can prevent or avoid dispreferred reactions, both of which fit best in the dynamics of talk-in-interaction and help to preserve the face of the co-interactants. Another strategy used to soften the effect of dispreference attested in the dialogues is the uttering of polemic or controversial statements, only after an agreement token at the beginning the turn. The disagreeing assertion is formulated after the previous sequence is put to an end, preserving both the addressee's face and the rules of preference.

The overlapping between the discourse phenomena pertaining to the domains of preference and politeness is well acknowledged. This study shows how this mutual relation can also be explored in ancient Greek, thus contributing to increasing our knowledge of the mechanics of linguistic and interactive politeness in this language and culture. More particularly, it points out the relevance of the study of talk-in-interaction patterns for a better understanding of the dialogue technique displayed in Plato's text.

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