PAPERS FOR DISCUSSION

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Introduction

This third volume of "Papers for Discussion" presents lectures given at the second symposion on "Sin, Punishment and Forgiveness in Ancient Egypt", held on June 5th to 6th 1997 in Leipzig. The symposion was held in the framework of the Jerusalem/Leipzig project on "Sin, Punishment and Forgiveness in Ancient Egypt" which ran from 1995 to 1997 under the auspices of the German-Israeli Foundation for Scientific Research.

Prof.Elke Blumenthal and Dr.Angela Onasch (Ägyptologisches Institut/Ägyptisches Museum, Universität Leipzig) as well as myself and Prof.Irene Shirun-Grumach (Department of Egyptology, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem) were Principal Investigators, resp.Co-Operating Principal Investigators of the project. Dr.Reinhard Grieshammer and (Dr.) Georg Meurer from Germany as well as Dr.Deborah Sweeney (now Tel Aviv), cand.phil.Shlomit Israeli and later (Dr.)Galit Dayan were Fellows. A first meeting between the participants had been held in Jerusalem in May 1996 (see I.Shirun-Grumach , ed., *Jerusalem Studies in Egyptology,* ÄAT 40, Wiesbaden 1998).

We thank Prof.Blumenthal, Dr.Onasch and their partners for their generous hospitality in Leipzig and for their committed engagement in the project throughout. The members of the Leipzig Institute and the students were most warm and helpful. The symposion deepened the *keruv levavot*, the bringing nearer of hearts, which had grown throughout the joint enterprise, and was fruitful and lively. In addition to the Egyptian, Demotic and Coptic material, themes from Old Testament and Babylonian studies were included, thus widening our horizon.

In conclusion, thanks go to the German-Israeli Foundation and their Jerusalem director, Dr.Amnon Barak , for enabling us to undertake the project, and for their help. We thank Dr.Deborah Sweeney for reading through the English manuscripts, and all the participants in this volume for their engagement and their patience in awaiting the publication.

Jerusalem , February 2003   Sarah Groll   Irene Shirun-Grumach

How to avoid misbehavior in everyday communication:
aspects of politeness in Old Babylonian letters from Mesopotamia

Walther Sallaberger (Leipzig)

The point of departure: the role of politeness in verbal communication[1]

Our approach to the topic "Sin, Punishment, and Forgiveness" starts from the notion that we are dealing with a sequence of acts: the sin being the initial act, the usual subsequent act will be punishment, and only rarely the sinner will be forgiven. Any competent member of a given society will avoid such acts of wrongdoing because he is aware of the bad consequences he has to expect. Here, I am not only thinking of crimes as murder, adultery, and theft, but also of all the rules one has to observe in everyday communication, so that the basic conventional agreements of the society are preserved.

One means to avoid potential 'sins' in verbal communication is politeness. The social concept of politeness is aptly described in the following way: "The modification of verbal and nonverbal behaviour to avoid conflicts is an important communicative activity in all cultures. The inevitability of misunderstandings in conversation compels people to express themselves tactfully if they wish to maintain a positive frame of communication with their partners. In an atmosphere of empathy and respect partners are able to view misunderstandings as temporary breakdowns in communication rather than having to interpret them as threats to face. Thus, in any culture, being tactful is an important means of maintaining the sense of cooperation and supportiveness necessary for successful interaction."" (Janney/Arndt 1992, 21).

Politeness can thus be seen as a central means in verbal communication of maintaining the social system. Some basic principles of politeness can be recognized in every culture or speech community, but specific norms and conventions may vary more profoundly (as those of us who have learned a foreign language can testify).

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[1]This paper relies on some data and results of my *Habilitationsschrift* (Sallaberger 1998). For the documentation and a short discussion of the theoretical background the reader is referred to this work, a publication of which is envisaged. – I am very much indebted to Jim Witt, Leipzig, for correcting my English. [The *Habilitationsschrift* has meanwhile been published by Styx, Groningen, in 1999 as Cuneiform Monographs vol. 16.]

Politeness is first of all situated within spoken discourse, a source lost to us researchers of ancient, of dead civilizations. Nevertheless, there is one group of sources preserved which belongs to the sphere of everyday verbal interaction, namely letters. Here, we should not look for reflexes of spoken everyday language within the letters, because written texts always follow their own regularities and traditions. But in any case we are dealing with everyday texts written by one concrete historical individual to another, both of them identified in the letter. The sender of a letter has to observe the social rules of communication in dealing with the addressee, therefore politeness finds its appropriate place in letters.

The letters investigated in this paper stem from ancient Mesopotamia, more exactly from the region we call Babylonia, the alluvial plain of the rivers Euphrates and Tigris between Baghdad and the Persian Gulf. Among the rich finds of cuneiform clay tablets from this region, there is especially rich documentation for the Old Babylonian Period, between about 2000 and 1595 B.C. (according to the widely used Middle Chronology). More than three thousand letters have been published until now. They come from different sites of ancient Babylonia, most of them belong to the 18th and 17th centuries. The texts are written in the Old Babylonian dialect of Akkadian. With the correspondents the whole range of society which can make use of writing is represented, the king as well as, for example, a merchant's wife. Old Babylonian letters often belong to institutional contexts, such as administration, agriculture, or trade, but private letters are also not uncommon, and more often there is no distinction possible between these spheres. Intimate letters of friendship or love expressing the writer's emotions are not known.

In this paper I will focus on two different aspects of politeness as found in the everyday letters of Old Babylonian Mesopotamia: 1) terms of address and greetings, and 2) politeness in requests.

Terms of Address

Before discussing terms of address of Old Babylonian letters, I should probably mention that for Mesopotamia no work exists that is comparable to the justly famous monograph of Hermann Grapow (1960[2]). Nowadays, a counterpart for Mesopotamia would hardly be written, as one is well aware of regional and diachronic differences as well as the mutual dependence of style and kinds of texts. Therefore, the system of terms of address as found in the Old Babylonian

letters can neither be taken as descriptive for Mesopotamia as a whole, nor for Akkadian or Babylonian usage.

In this first section I will deal with variations in the address of a letter. An Old Babylonian letter contains a standard address of the following format:

(1)   *ana A qibī-ma, umma S-ma.*
        "Speak (i.e. the messenger) to ADDRESSEE, thus SENDER."

The addressee is usually indicated on the clay envelope which once wrapped up the clay tablet with the message proper. The sender impressed his cylinder seal bearing an inscription of his name into the envelope's soft clay. These envelopes are rarely preserved, mainly because they had to be removed by the addressee in order to read the letter.

In (2) the terms used for the addressee in the address formula are tabulated. The tabulation is based on a sample of 1267 everyday letters (excluding letters from kings) in the British Museum and other collections.[2] It can be taken as representative for letters mostly of the last two centuries of the Old Babylonian period (18th-17th century B.C.), the time to which most of our sources belong. In (2) we indicate the number of references and the percentage of texts with greetings per term of address (see below).

(2) Term of address and greeting

addressee	number of references (1267 = 100%)	letters with greeting per term of address (862 = 68 %)
personal name(s)	767 = 60,5 %	537 = 70 %
title, profession	28 = 2,2 %	19 = 68 %
aḫī/aḫātī "my brother/sister"	18 = 1,4 %	17 = 94 %
abī/ummī "my father/mother"	72 = 5,7 %	68 = 94 %
bēlī "my lord"	57 = 4,5 %	16 = 28 %
bēltī "my mistress"	11 = 0,9 %	7 = 64 %
šāpirī "my master"	39 = 3,1 %	34 = 87 %
awīlum "gentleman"	124 = 9,8 %	122 = 98 %
other terms	8 = 0,6 %	7 = 88 %
letters without address	139 = 11,0 %	35 = 25 %

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[2] AbB I, II (excluding letters from kings and Umma letters 117-129), VI, VII, IX (excluding Lu-igisa-letters from Lagaš), X (excluding texts from the excavations at Kiš and from Lagaba), XI 30-134, XII, XIII 61-200. For comparisons with the data of other more coherent text groups from the earlier Old Babylonian period and from specific sites see Sallaberger (1998).

The addressee is mostly, in about 60 % of all the letters, called by name without filiation and without profession; this is the normal, 'unmarked' form. Besides that, we find the kinship terms "brother" and "sister", "father" and "mother" (the female forms are quite rare). The use of kinship terms is not restricted to real family relationships. The close relation to the sender expressed here is underlined by the possessive suffix -ī "my" (or "our" with two or more senders). The same suffix marks the honorifics *bēlī* "my lord", a traditional term of address also used in letters to the king, and *šāpirī* "my master", an address appearing in the 18th century and becoming more common in the late Old Babylonian period (17th century) indicating an institutional context. Both these terms express the relationship of the partners within society. A polite way of address, being a marked form against the unmarked personal name, but neutral with regard to relationship, are various titles and *awīlum,* a term especially frequent in late Old Babylonian letters, which I have translated as "gentleman" and which may correspond roughly to the formal "Dear Sir" of today's letter writing.

An honorific term of address mostly refers to the relationship between sender and addressee, hardly to the status of the addressee within society. The latter is only the case in the use of some titles, military ranks or titles of the civil administration. Other terms of address, most of these variants of kinship terms, are hardly employed: they amount to less than 1 %.

In the 17th century occasionally a new letter format (Akkadian *ze¥pum*) turns up which is characterized by the missing address and its rare use of greeting formulas.

In the address formula (1) the sender refers to himself by name, but in a few cases an apposition is added. Again, the additional appellative noun does not serve to identify the person but to express the personal relationship to the addressee as intended by the sender.

(3) Self-designation of sender (always given paradigmatically as singular and masculine form) and number of attestations in AbB = 2501 letters

addressee	sender (apposition to name)
personal name	*abūka* "your father" (1), *aḫūka* "your brother" (33), *mārūka* "your son" (8), *bēlka* "your lord" (1), *waradka* "your servant" (2), *ēmiqtaka* "who (fem.) cares for you" (1), *ibirka* "your friend" (1), *rā'imka* "who loves you" (2), others: *mārat* PN/*šarrim* "daughter of PN/the king" (4), title (1)

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addressee (continued)	sender (apposition to name; continued)
aḫī "my brother"	*aḫuka* "your brother" (2), *kāribtaka* "who (fem.) prays for you" (1)
abī "my father"	*māruka* "your son" (8), *kāribtaka* "who (fem.) prays for you" (1), *rā'imka* "who loves you" (1)
ummī "my mother"	*māruki* "your son" (2)
bēlī "my lord"	*waradka/amatka* "your (male/female) servant" (14)
bēltī "my mistress"	*waradki* "your servant" ((1)
šāpirī "my master"	*waradka* "your servant" (1)
awīlum "gentleman"	*māruka* "your son" (2)
rā'im awīlē "philanthropist"	*rā'imka* "who loves you" (1)

In (3) one can find the expected counterparts to the terms of address: to "my father" there is "your son/daughter", to "my lord" there is "your (male/female) servant", etc. Furthermore, we note that the self-designations range from "servant" and "son" to "father" and "lord", but that not all corresponding terms of address are used. The rule of politeness might thus be formulated that an Old Babylonian private letter must not be addressed to *"my son" or *"my servant", but here the neutral personal name will be employed in the address. So a humiliating address is avoided and the (positive) face of the addressee will be maintained. Even with "brother", denoting equal rank, the self-designation is more common than the address (cf. the figures given in (3) and (2)). Looking back at the nouns used as terms of address in (2), this underlines the latter's quality as honorifics.[3]

Forms of address

In addition to the term of address of the formalized letter-head the recipient of the letter is repeatedly addressed in the text proper. As in spoken face-to-face-communication, the sender is referred to by the 1st, the addressee by the 2nd person in the deictic system of a letter. With the sender, always the 1st person is employed in Old Babylonian letters, no indirect deferential expressions occur.

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[3]If we take the traditional address formula (1) literally, the name or appellative noun identifying the addressee there is no "term of address" in the strict sense. But the observable variations prove that the sender can (and must) choose between different terms to satisfy the social obligations of addressing his partner correctly. So from a pragmatic perspective we are indeed dealing with "terms of address".

The usual form of address of a letter written to one addressee is the 2nd person singular with verb, pronominal suffixes and the rare free forms of the pronoun. This represents the neutral unmarked form with respect to politeness.

The aspect of close relationship can be reinforced by a nominal apposition to the pronoun of the 2nd person, thus: *aḫī attā*, "you, my brother", *abī attā*, "you, my father", *bēlī atta*, "you, my lord", to mention just the most prominent ones. The verb is in the 2nd person; pronominal suffixes (dative and accusative) are mostly replaced by this noun-pronoun combination.

The third way of speaking to the addressee is a noun of the type *bēlī* "my lord" combined with a verb in the 3rd person, thus "my lord does" or in a directive "may my lord do". So in Old Babylonian letters the polite form of address, marked by means of a noun, can be further differentiated by the respective use of the 2nd or the 3rd person with the verb. The correlation between term of address and grammatical person shows clearly that this can be termed the intentional choice of a marked polite term: noun of address plus 2nd person occurs most often with *aḫī*, "my brother" (in 55 % of all the letters addressed to *aḫī*), more rarely with *bēlī* "my lord" (31 %), *abī* "my father" (23 %), *šāpirī* "my master" (5 %). On the other side, the 3rd person practically never appears with *aḫī* (once in a greeting, never in a complete text), but more often with *abī* (23 %), *bēlī* (44 %), *šāpirī* (63 %). Obviously, the use of the 3rd person corresponds to a deferential form of politeness also seen in other languages (called V-form after the pronoun *vos*, in contrast to the T-form derived from *tu* since Brown/Gilman 1960). One basic principle of politeness is demonstrated here, namely the avoidance of the direct address and the use of more indirect forms, thus creating distance and saving the face of the addressee (Braun 1988, 54f.).

The basic principles can be summarized as follows: the neutral, unmarked form of address is the personal name in the letter-head and the use of the 2nd person in the text. If the sender of the letter is socially obliged to use a more polite form he emphasizes *positively* the social rank or the personal relationship by using a noun of address. And he can further avoid the direct 2nd person and choose the more indirect 3rd person form, a case of *negative* politeness. The 2nd person is employed when addressing a person of equal rank, quite often also one of higher rank, but it is obligatory towards a person of lower rank. Here we meet a case of asymmetric address behavior, because a person of inferior rank will address his master by using the 3rd person.

The emergence of politeness forms in grammar can usually be understood as a result of historical development. The same holds true for the Old Babylonian letters: in late third millennium letters, i.e. before the Old Babylonian period I am dealing with here, either the 2nd or the 3rd person occurs without any

recognizable differentiation. The use of the 3rd person can be explained by Sumerian influence: here the letters are formulated in the mode of an instruction to a messenger, "you, messenger, say him, the addressee, he should do that and that" (Kienast/Volk 1995, 4ff., 11ff.). Akkadian letters of that time already use the 2nd person; the letter is now replacing face-to-face speech. In early Old Babylonian times, in the first half of the 19th century, when Sumerian had died out as a spoken language,[4] all the letters use the 'Akkadian' form of the dialogue, the 2nd person, even if they are addressed to "my lord", *bēlī*. It is only from the beginning of the 18th century on that the 3rd person as form of deference is used. The next step in the differentiation of the address system occurs in the 17th century, when the polite form of close relations, pronoun plus noun (type *aḫī attā*) with 2nd person in the verb, turns up. Whereas the 3rd person observes the high rank of the addressee, this new form allows one to express a close social relationship, and in this respect it concurs with the use of kinship terms as terms of address.

Greeting

From the early 18th century on the letters contain a greeting formula directly after the address. Almost without exception the standard greeting formula runs as follows:

(4)   *Šamaš u Marduk liballiṭūka*
        "May the gods Šamaš and Marduk keep you in good health!"

To this greeting formula letters of late Old Babylonian times (17th century) usually add further formulas (cf. Salonen 1967). No greetings are written at the end of a letter. Here we are not concerned with variations of the formulas or of the gods invoked. The latter depends on local and regional preferences and status of sender and/or addressee. We are interested in the correlation between term of address and greeting: who is greeting whom? Some information on the percentage of greetings with each term of address is given in table (2).

Letters with greeting formulas are more common than those without, amounting to about 70 %; see (2). So we have to consider which letters do *not* use greetings: first of all, greetings are missing in letters from persons of higher rank to inferiors, as seen in letters where the sender characterizes himself as *abūka* "your father" or *bēlka* "your lord", or from letters sent by kings. On the other hand, greetings are

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[4]By "spoken" I mean "mother tongue", because in its appropriate contexts (e.g. in the cult) Sumerian was still spoken, although (probably) by second language speakers only.

avoided in letters written *to* a person of high status; there is, for instance, no letter to a king with greetings.

The sender can insert an additional greeting immediately following the addressee in the first line of the letter-head (1):

(5)   *ana A, ša Marduk uballaṭušu, qibī-ma*
         "Speak to ADDRESSEE, whom god Marduk will keep in good health!"

This additional blessing in the address of a letter, (5), occurs only if a standard greeting formula (4) is written. It is never seen in combination with *bēlī* "my lord" and almost never with *šāpirī* "my master" (1 occurrence), rarely with a personal name (3 % of letters with greetings), sometimes with the kinship terms *abī/ummī* "my father/mother" (19 %) and especially *aḫī/aḫātī* "my brother/sister" (44 %), most often with titles (63 %) and *awīlum* "gentleman" (67 %).[5] An additional greeting formula is thus more appropriate in correspondence with close relations on the one hand (use of kinship terms) and in a more formal, 'official' context on the other hand (titles and *awīlum*), and in both cases usually only if no differences in rank are involved.

System of terms of address in Old Babylonian letters

At the end of this first part let us consider some results of all these numbers and tabulations concerning address behavior in Old Babylonian letters. Again, we do not observe any institutional or family relationship between the partners in 'reality', but rather the intended and explicitly expressed form of address, the relationship as seen by the sender; but it is he who has to follow the established social rules.

Who is greeting whom? A standard greeting formula (2) is *common* with close personal relationship as expressed by kinship terms, also with polite address of great distance, *šāpirī* "my master". A greeting is *obligatory* with *awīlum*, "gentleman". Of these, an additional blessing within the address formula (5) only appears with partners of equal rank.

Concerning *awīlum* "gentleman", the most common term in late Old Babylonian letters, we note the following: it is the only appellative noun without the possessive suffix "my", thus social distance is expressed; with the verb the usual form of address is used, the 2nd person; greetings are obligatory and occur most often also in the address, so no great difference in rank is involved. The honorific
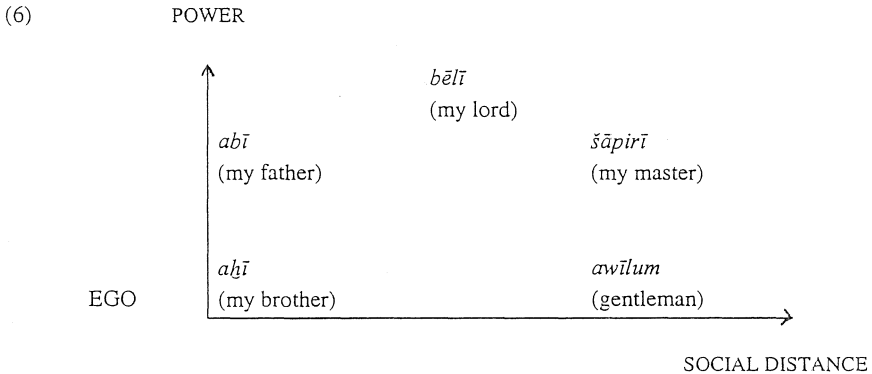
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[5]The percentage figures are derived from the same corpus of letters as in (2) above; see n. 2.

awīlum, a term denoting originally a member of the Old Babylonian elite (Kraus 1973, 118–120), avoids politely the direct, unmarked address by name

The use of the polite form with the verb, the 3rd person, is restricted to those cases which emphasize the high rank of the addressee: with *abī* "my father", *bēlī* "my lord" and *šāpirī* "my master". The polite form of the 3rd person is more often used with the noun *šāpirī* than with the traditional honorific *bēlī* "my lord". Here, we have to take into account that *bēlī* covers more patterns of relationship than *šāpirī*: a letter to the king is directed to *bēlī*, but without greetings and using the deferential 3rd person. A woman will address a man, sometimes probably her husband, *bēlī*, too, but she is greeting him often, as usual within close relations, and, certainly, is speaking to him in the 2nd person.

It is thus possible to show in (6) the various terms of address in Old Babylonian letters as related to the two parameters "power" and "social distance". The address by name and 2nd person is not indicated, which is the only form possible for persons of lower rank.

(6)   POWER

	bēlī (my lord)	
abī (my father)		*šāpirī* (my master)
aḫī (my brother)		*awīlum* (gentleman)

EGO

SOCIAL DISTANCE

In this discussion of terms of address in Old Babylonian letters we have not considered the contents of the letters themselves. One might expect that the contents and function of the letter also condition the formulation of address and greeting. As far as I see, this is not the case, and address and greeting depend on the specific social relationship of sender and addressee only. But, certainly, this relationship also conditions the formulation of a letter.

Asking a favor: polite modifications of requests

The second part of this paper will deal with politeness in a specific kind of letter, in requests. Requests are directives in which the addressee is not obliged to fulfill

the wish of the sender. Here I consider only those requests, which explicitly express some care for the wants of the addressee, where politeness is a means to balance the face threatening force of the request. The concept of 'face' has been developed in research into verbal communication and it designates "the public self-image that every [competent adult] member [of a society] wants to claim for himself" (Brown/Levinson 1987, 61).

A study of aspects of linguistic pragmatics in ancient Near Eastern texts is always hindered by the fact that the context is not sufficiently known and – more seriously – that we are never able to learn or to observe verbal communication in its usage within society. This problem is also relevant here: how can we recognize 'polite' requests, if we do not know the rules and expressions of politeness, if we are not informed about the respective actual context?

The problem of identifying a "polite request" in our corpus becomes all the more difficult if we want to rely on a descriptive analysis of favor asking in a contemporary language, in this case American English (Goldschmidt 1998).[6] All of Goldschmidt's defining features of favor asking have to do with the actual situation: the singularity of the requested act, the effort of the addressee, the missing obligation of the addressee, the notion of reciprocity (ibid. 131-135). Goldschmidt (1998) 'knows' by experience what "favor asking" is and thus describes some of the more prominent features (a more detailed analysis is found in Held 1995).

Our very restricted knowledge about the context of the Old Babylonian letters forces us to restrict ourselves to the level of linguistic expression. In other words, no active experience of the system of politeness in society will influence our investigation. Seen positively, the most severe obstacle to tackling questions like politeness in a dead language and culture can also be seen as a chance for methodological rigour.

Thus our leading principle must read that we deal with linguistic expressions only, not with intentions or 'real feelings'. In the terms of the speech act theory developed by Searle (1969), we are dealing with the illocutionary act of speech, the way linguistic expressions conventionally constitute an action, but we do not consider its perlocutionary aspects, the intended effects of a speech act. Thus, asking a favor will always be considered as a polite request despite the possibly deviating intentions of the respective speaker or writer.

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[6] I do not follow Goldschmidt (1998) in separating "favor asking" from "requests" but take the former as a sub-type of the latter, thus assuming a species-genus relationship between both types.

Usually requests in Old Babylonian letters follow a basic pattern: an information part indicates the object of the request and gives some background information, the initiative to write this letter often leads to the central appeal. Often the request is backed up by argumentation. Excuses might prepare the addressee, especially in the two following formulas:

a) "I have never written you before" (*matīma ul ašpurakkum*) v.s., thus underlining the urgency of the request;

b) a praise of the addressee concerning his care for the sender, thus justifying the request and obliging the addressee at the same time, in expressions like "to whom should I write instead of you, my father?" (*ullânu abīja kâta ana mannim ašappar*, AbB I 17). But these features do not only occur in letters asking a favor.

A favor asking letter can be determined by an analysis of the last section of the text which contains the request. This request should be modified in a polite way, i.e. it should include something 'additional' expressing the care for the wants and needs of the addressee. In other words, we are looking for letters which are in some way 'marked' in regard to politeness in contrast to 'unmarked' directives (or even marked in opposing ways as orders, threats etc.). Departing from the expressions of our own modern European languages we will look for a) markers like a conventional "please", b) performative verbs and c) modal verbs.

In all three cases the result of the investigation will be negative:

a) The Old Babylonian particle *apputtum*,[7] often translated as "please" (see the dictionaries AHw. and CAD), intensifies the directive force of the request but does not modify it in a polite way.

b) Performative verbs like "I ask you", "I would like to request" etc., are not used at all in requests.

c) Finally, there exist almost no modal verbs in Akkadian and these are only rarely used, so expressions like "can you", "could you", "would you" are not to be expected. A main verb can be modified by coupling it with a second 'auxiliary' verb (Kraus 1987), but also here expressions of politeness are extremely rare: only two examples out of about 2500 letters can be found where the requested action is qualified as being "good" by the verb *dummuqum* "to make good", e.g.: 1 ÁB MU 2 *dummiqamma šūbilam* "Be so kind and send me a two years old cow" (AbB XII 76: 17f.; cf. AbB II 86: 35–37).

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[7] *apputtum* is the conventional transcription of the word written *a-/ap-pu-tum* in Old Babylonian. I have argued in Sallaberger (1998) for *abbūtum*, which seems to be related to *abūbum* "Deluge, flood"; *abbūtum* would thus mean something like "in the way of the flood" just as the corresponding Sumerian *a-ma-ru-kam*.

As the polite modifications so common in our modern European languages are not represented in Old Babylonian Akkadian, it comes without much surprise that even in polite letters the central appeal, i.e. the request the letter is about, is most often expressed as an imperative directed towards the 2nd person, "do X", or as a precative if the sender is obliged to speak to the addressee in the 3rd person: "my lord should do X". The imposition of the central request asking a specific action by the addressee is in a few cases verbally reduced:

a) Indirectness can be obtained by negation of the contrary, e.g. "do not retain the grain to PN" (ŠE*am ana B. ... lā takalla!*, AbB IX 53: 11f.) instead of "give the grain to PN". Here the expense of the addressee to fulfill the requested act is rhetorically minimized. The negation of the contrary is indeed very common in conventional appeals reinforcing the central propositional request of a letter.

b) Both the imperative of the 2nd person and the precative of the 3rd person address the partner directly. There also exists the possibility of deleting the agent of the requested act completely. So one asks for the consequences without directly invoking the labor of the addressee, e.g. "they should receive (the grain) correctly" (*išariš limḫurū*, AbB IX 88: 16), "because of him no one else should write" (*aššumīšu šanûm lā išapparam*, AbB VI 69: 16f.).

c) The imposition of the requested act can be minimized rhetorically, e.g. "the request I am writing to my father will not cost my father one liter of grain" (*ṣibûtum ša ana abīja ašpuram itti abīja 1 qa* ŠE*am ul ubbal*, AbB II 151: 20–22).

d) Sometimes, the sender suggests rhetorically a possibility of choice, e.g. "if you agree", "if it pleases you" (*šumma niṭilka*, lit. "if it is (according to) your view", *šumma īnka maḫrat*, lit. "if it appeals to your eye"). These and similar expressions are common in Old Babylonian letters and not only restricted to polite requests.

In these cases a) to d) the "negative face" of the addressee is respected, the "basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction – i.e. to freedom of action and freedom of imposition" (Brown/Levinson 1987, 61). These rarely employed devices do not occur in favor asking letters only but also in other contexts, especially those in which there is an asymmetric relation between a sender of lower rank and a superior addressee.

Themes of routine formulas in favor asking letters

In Old Babylonian letters requests are conventionally modified in a polite way by the use of routine formulas. Formally, the wording of such phrases is fixed to a

large extent. Routine formulas are furthermore characterized by fulfilling one specific function in verbal communication (cf. Coulmas 1981). The recognition that we deal largely with verbal routines was only achieved at the final stage of analyzing the texts in question, after all the phrases modifying the propositional request in a polite way had been collected. We will consider the themes invoked in these stock phrases, which are conventionally used because they express the intended function most aptly. We assume that fundamental values and norms of the society are dealt with in these polite expressions and that these are in some way typical for the investigated culture.

Religious themes play a nominal role only. Here I can mention only utterances of promised gratitude like "I will pray for you before god NN" (*mahar NN lukrubakkum*, e.g. AbB VII 166, XI 27, XII 62) and in requests the phrase "do god and Šamaš a favor" (*ilam u Šamaš gimil*, e.g. AbB II 87, IX 184): the favor the sender is asking for is treated as a good deed before god, moral behavior is a way of obedience to god (note that the sun-god Šamaš is also the god of justice and law).

The lexemes *gamālum*, "to do a favor", *gimillum*, "favor", evaluate the requested deed in a positive way. Phrases are e.g. "if you want to do me a favor" (*šumma tagammilanni*, e.g. AbB XIII 149), "do a favor" (*gimlanni*, e.g. AbB X 39), "do this for me as a favor" (*anniam ana gimillim šuknam*, AbB XII 37). Furthermore, these words underline that in society giving is the act of high positive reputation. Therefore, *gimillum* "favor" is sometimes treated rhetorically like a loan, which has to be paid back, e.g. "for this favor I shall be in your debt" (*gimillam šuāti elīja tīšu*, AbB IX 209, translation M. Stol).

The positive evaluation of the deed as *gimillum* "favor" is paralleled by words for "help" (*usātum, šūzubum*), the object is asked for as "present" (*qīštum*) or the requested act can be qualified as "very good act" (*epēšum dummuqum*, AbB VI 220).

The reciprocity of doing a favor is conventionally addressed in phrases promising gratitude ("I will pray for you before god NN", see above) or in vague promises of compensation (e.g. "write me your wish and I will fulfil it for you", *šupramma ṣibûtka lūpušakkum*, AbB I 40).

Instead of "if you want to do me a favor" one finds more often "if you (really) love me" (*šumma (ina kittim) tarammanni*, e.g. AbB II 123, IX 209) directly before the central request or a summarizing general appeal. In both these cases the 'if' (*šumma*) clauses hedge the illocutionary force of the reqest (Brown/Levinson 1987, 162–164): they pretend that the act should be fulfilled under certain conditions only.

The same syntactic scheme is employed in the most common routine phrase, which is especially frequent in early Old Babylonian letters: "if you are (really) my brother/my father/my lord/my son" (*šumma* (*ina kittim/kīnātim*) *aḫī/abī/bēlī/ mārī attā*). Following the request this theme would be formulated as "in this I will see your brotherhood/your fatherhood" (*ina annītim aḫḫūtka/abbūtka lūmur*). Both these routine formulas take up the theme of close social relationship expressed by kinship terms; in this way the addressee is honored and at the same time his social obligation is indicated.

Interestingly, the former phrase ("if you are my brother") is used most often in early letters when the complete system of terms of address was not yet developed. In late Old Babylonian times (17th century), when appellatives as terms of address become widely used (as we have seen above), this formula has died out: the expression of specific, text-internal politeness has shifted to a text-external polite expression of relationship unrelated to the specific function of a letter.

Usually, we translate these speech routines literally and thereby we grasp their original meaning. But as the translated phrase, e.g. "if you are my brother", does not constitute a routine formula in English, the reader of a translation cannot be sure if he is confronted with an argumentative passage, a dramatic cry for help out of a desperate situation, or a conventional phrase (which is the case). By comparison, French "s'il vous plaît" corresponds to a conventional "please!", which nobody would translate literally as "if it pleases you". In collecting phrases performing the same function and comparing them we can get an idea about routine formulas in Old Babylonian letters. And with the phrase "if you are my brother" one can even detect the signs of wear and tear: a reaction against this process is the insertion of an amplifying "really" (*ina kittim/kīnātim*), but this does not stop the replacement of the expression by new, fresh phrases.

The routine formulas briefly characterized above give an impression of some fundamentals of polite communicative behavior in Old Babylonian society. The requested act is evaluated in a positive way, so its fulfilment becomes a moral duty and/or it will be rewarded by compensation; not the praise of the addressee but his obligation is emphasized; and, characteristically, any form of self-deprecation is missing. Finally, by listing all phrases indicating a polite request, we will soon discover which aspects of favor asking conventionally verbalized in modern European languages are not treated at all in Old Babylonian politeness formulas (cf. Held 1995). The most important are: the ability ("can you ..." etc.) and the willingness ("would you like to ..." etc.) of the addressee to fulfil the requested act, his permission ("may I ..." etc.) and the circumstantial possibilities ("is it possible to ...").

So the semantic fields covered by the phrases and routine formulas of favor asking emerge even more clearly, if one can indicate which expected or possible ones are missing. The politeness formulas of the letters thus allow one to detect how the fundamental social theme of the gift, of taking and giving, was treated in the everyday discourse of the Old Babylonian society.

Politeness against improper speech in ancient Mesopotamia

In this paper I have considered two aspects of politeness in letters from ancient Mesopotamia. I have also tried to open some possible ways of detecting politeness even in a dead language. Our starting point has been that politeness serves first of all to fulfil social obligations in verbal interaction and is a means to avoid conflicts or misbehavior.

Therefore, proper, polite and modest speech represents a goal every member of a society should aim to achieve. The proverbs of ancient Mesopotamia, conserving the existing social order (cf. Alster 1997, xxiv ff.), also promulgate the right behavior in verbal communication among other social values. One theme in the Sumerian proverbs, mostly written down in the Old Babylonian period, is the reciprocity of verbal utterances, be it bad or good; e.g. "He who insults is insulted. He who sneers is sneered at" (SP 3.69 = 11.22; cf. also SP 1.78); or on the other hand: "Let kindness be repaid to him who repays a kindness" (SP 14.2; Lambert 1963, 263f. obv. 12–16). The right word will create friendship: "A good word is a friend to numerous men" (SP 3.159).

The most common themes of the Akkadian wisdom literature concerning proper speech are recapitulated in a section of the so-called "Counsels of Wisdom", written in the 1st millennium B.C.:
> "Do not utter libel, speak what is of good report.
> Do not say evil things, speak well of people.
> One who utters libel and speaks evil,
> Men will waylay him with his debit account to Šamaš.
> Beware of careless talk, guard your lips;
> Do not utter words in your mind while alone,
> For what you say in a moment will follow you afterwards.
> But exert yourself to restrain your speech"[8] (Lambert 1963, 104f.:127–134; translation after Lambert).

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[8] *ē tākul ka[rṣī q]ibi banīti / lemnēti ē tātame dameqta tisqar / ša ākil karṣī qābû lemutti / ina ribbāti ša Šamaš uqa''û rēssu / ē tumaṣṣi pīka uṣur šaptīka / enimmê kabtatīka ēdiš ē taqbi / surriš tātamû tarašši arkāniš / u ina sanāq atmê tušanna/ ṭēnka.*

While the proverbs and the wisdom literature illustrate the role of correct speech in society, the Old Babylonian letters represent one of the best textual sources for an investigation of the use of polite speech in communication.

The question might arise, if and how impolite speech would have been punished by society. Surely, we do not know if a less polite letter did not achieve its goal because it was written too directly. But there are documented cases of impolite behavior where social stratification was disregarded,[9] and also cases of impolite verbal behavior. It is thus appropriate to end this paper with a letter (AbB XI 60), a polite request from a woman to her "father", asking him to set free a slave.[10] This person "had got defeat of the mouth", i.e. he had uttered insolent words, and therefore he was put in jail. It is not without irony that the request of the "daughter", according to the greeting formula a woman in service of Šamaš of Sippar or Marduk of Babylon, is a perfect example of a polite letter (translation after M. Stol):

ana abīja qibīma, umma Bēlessunu māratkama:	"Speak to my father, thus says Bēlessunu, your daughter.
bēlī u bēltī aššumīja dāriš ūmim liballiṭūka!	May my Lord and my Mistress keep you in good health forever for my sake.
aššum ṭēm 1 wardim, ša ana mār bēlīšu miqit pîm iršûma ina ṣibittim kalû, umma anākuma:	Concerning the report on the one slave who made insolent remarks about his master's son and is being held in jail, thus I thought: 'I will write to my father. Let my father think of a way for them to set him free.'
'ana abī<ja> lušpur. abī liḫassisma lišēṣûniššu.'	
anumma Ašqudānum aṭṭardam. ṣubātam ušābilamma ana ša abī irāmu ul iddinū? awīlam aṭṭardam.	Now I have despatched Ašqudānum (i.e. the messenger); he had brought a garment - did they not give it to the one whom my father loves? Well, I have despatched the man.
abī warkatam liprus!	Let my father decide the matter!
maḫar bēlīja u bēltīja qātāja masiāma aktanarrabakku. abī wardam šuāti kīma qīšti ana jâši liddina!	I pray for you constantly before my Lord and my Mistress with both my hands washed. Let my father give me that slave as a present!" (AbB XI 60)

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[9]An instructive example is § 202 of the Code of Hammurabi (1792-1750): "If a man slaps the face of a man of a higher status, he will be hit in the assembly sixty times with a bullwhip" (*šumma awīlum lēt awīlim, ša elīšu rabû, imtaḫaṣ, ina puḫrim ina qinnāz alpim 1 šūši immaḫḫaṣ*).

[10]The relationship of the slave's master to the woman and the addressee is not indicated in the letter. Therefore, I will not try to speculate about possible connections and identifications.

After address formula and greeting the letter starts with the information section. The report contains already the request which is in a very clever form formulated indirectly as intention of the sender ("thus I thought ..."). She continues with the initiative, thereby linking it with the explicit mention of a gift. It should be given to "the one whom my father loves", probably the lord of the slave or his son who has been insulted by the slave. We note, that Bēlessunu is now using the deferential 3rd person when addressing her father, whereas she had started the latter in the 2nd person. The central request is only vaguely expressed (an example $/e$ of negative politeness): "Let my father decide the matter!" The meaning of this phrase was more clearly formulated in the monologue of Bēlessunu: the father should decide the case in such a way that the slave will be set free and brought back to Bēlessunu, who is apparently asking for him. She concludes the letter with a formula expressing her future gratitude, if the request will be fulfilled, and with a positive evaluation of the requested act as present.

This letter is thus a very *polite* request for a slave, who had acted impolitely; his verbal act was considered as *sin*, so he was *punished*; we hope that the sender of the letter would have also obtained *forgiveness* for the sinner.

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