VARIATION AND CHANGE
IN GREEK AND LATIN

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Martti Leiwo, Hilla Halla-aho & Marja Vierros

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How to Say No in Latin: Negative Turns, Politeness and Pragmatic Variation

Rolando Ferri

Introduction

Latin speakers, like most speakers of modern living languages, often found themselves in the situation of wanting or having to say no to their interlocutors. This paper is about contradiction in Latin, and the strategies employed by Latin speakers, if and when they chose, to mitigate expressions of denial and refusal. I shall not therefore concentrate on the history and evolution of Latin negative adverbials,[1] but on the discursive strategies employed by Latin speakers, when we can reconstruct them, to minimize the offence of a no-reply.

The theoretical framework in which Latin speakers' linguistic strategies of refusal and denial are analysed is that of the well-known monograph of P. Brown and S.C. Levinson, *Politeness. Some Universals in Language Usage* (Cambridge 1987). Brown and Levinson define politeness as the effort to maintain face, that is an individual's reputation and respect, in a social context. Requests undermine an interlocutor's face, potentially involving a social threat which speakers try to go round in various ways, when they choose to adapt to conventions of politeness. In the same way, negative answers to requests, too, potentially wound an interlocutor's social pride: to say "no" requires a degree of diplomacy, at least if we aim at maintaining cordial terms, or if our interlocutor is socially superior to us.

This situation is neatly captured in (1), where a slave is too timid to say simply *no* to his master, when a positive answer was expected, for fear to displease him.

> 1) Pomp. *gramm. GLK* V.311.12 *charientismos est, quotiens e contrario dicimus. habemus etiam apud auctores hoc: ecce habemus in Afranio, interrogat servum adulescens 'numquis me quaesivit?' et ille servus respondet 'bona fortuna', id est nullus; quasi rem duram dictu mitius dixit.*
>
> We have *charientismos* when we use the contrary expression. We find this even in classical authors, for example we have that in Afranius, where the young man asks the servant 'did anyone look for me', and the servant answers 'only Lady Luck', that is no one, thereby glossing over something unpleasant.

In a similar vein, Donatus, *In Ter. Eun.* 341, shows that the straightforward answer *nihil* was too direct, in an "urbane" context (that is, in polite conversation), and was replaced by *recte*:

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[1] For a general outline of these adverbials cf. Hofmann and Szantyr 1965, 452; Hofmann 1985, 111–113; Thesleff 1960, passim.

2) Don. *In Ter. Eun.* 341 ʀᴏɢᴏ ɴᴠᴍǫᴠɪᴅ ᴠᴇʟɪᴛ *hoc est: significo me abire; nam abituri, ne id dure facerent, 'numquid vis' dicebant his quibuscum constitissent.* ʀᴇᴄᴛᴇ ɪɴǫᴠɪᴛ *pro eo quod est 'nihil' moraliter* ἀϲτειϲμῷ.

'Anything else I can do for you?, I asked' – that is: I made him understand I intended to go; for people, when leaving, used to say *numquid vis* to those with whom they had happened to be, in order not to appear rude. He answered 'I'm fine' – a phrase meaning 'nothing', but used by people of good manners.

Neither Brown and Levinson nor the numerous subsequent contributions elaborated in the same theoretical framework devote much attention to the Classical languages, mostly because politeness tends to be observed in colloquial exchanges of living languages. However, a few studies have appeared in recent years in which some use is made of the Brown and Levinson politeness theory.[2]

The present paper has no claim to advance the theory; I chose this subject because Latin is generally absent or misrepresented in outlines of the Brown and Levinson theory; yet much can be gained for our understanding of spoken and informal Latin, especially, from paying closer attention to the politeness strategies of Latin speakers.

Firstly, attention to politeness issues is useful to clarify the literal meaning of some passages. Secondly, the study of polite language enhances our understanding of characterization, in dramatic and narrative texts. Thirdly, politeness is important to determine register variation in Latin, that is the need to adapt one's language and style of expression in response to contextual variants, typically social (addressing a superior), but also pragmatic (the urgency of one's request, the degree of intimacy with the interlocutor, the speaker's involvement, the benefit envisaged for either the speaker or the addressee, the intrinsic importance and relevance of the object of the debate).

I therefore discuss here a number of cases of contradiction, which can be read in social and, more often, in pragmatic terms. I'll endeavour to survey various different lexical and grammatical means of introducing politeness elements in a phrase, from zero or minimal politeness investment to the more elaborate attempts to minimize or hide the force of a denial.

The following evidence derives mostly from Roman comedy, Cicero (the letters, but also the orations and the dialogues) and Roman grammatical writers: special attention is paid to cases in which there is some metalinguistic commentary on the impact of a "no reply" phrase, and on the different strategies of redressive action for minimizing the effect of refusal. Of course, when assessing the linguistic realism of this documentation, some allowance must be made for the literary agendas of the sources: the representation of dialogue, counterintuitive as this may seem, is more characteristic of literary texts than of subliterary documents, such as the letters of Claudius Terentianus or the Vindolanda tablets. Moreover, the great majority of politeness phrases in real-life conversation consists of phatic moves, especially short and inarticulate responses signifying assent

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[2] No attempt is made here to provide updates on the theory from the sociolinguistic point of view, as the number of publications in the wake of the Brown and Levinson monograph, first published in 1978, is very considerable. References to current issues in the politeness debate can be found in Watts 2003; Hickey and Stewart 2005. Recent applications of the theory to Greek and Latin texts can be found in Risselada 1993; De Melo 2007; Ferri 2008a; Ferri 2008b; Hall 2009; Lloyd 2005 and Lloyd 2009; Dickey 2010.

and cooperation, which ancient literary, and generally written, texts tend to ignore – with the partial exception of comedy.[3]

Straightforward no: *non*, *immo*, *nolo* vs. *non oportet*, *non opus est*

3) *CIL* IV 3494 ‘ʜᴏᴄ’ ‘ɴᴏɴ, ᴍɪᴀ ᴇsᴛ’.

Example (3) is taken from a wall painting in a Pompeii taberna, a pub in which customers went for their happy hour, and felt free to behave with not much inhibition with the barmaid taking orders. In this case two patrons are competing for the barmaid's attentions, the left-hand side one saying "here", the right-hand side saying "no, she's mine", with vulgar Latin vowel reduction in hiatus. That example is a simple straightforward *no* instance of no particular relevance, included mainly for the icastic nature of the scene. The girl's answer is not easily legible, but she basically says, true to her type: "who wants to take, let him take", presumably leaving it on purpose ambiguous whether wine or woman is meant.

4) Hor. *sat.* 1.5.12–14 *tum pueri nautis, pueris convicia nautae / ingerere: 'huc appelle!' 'trecentos inseris!' 'ohe, / iam satis est!'*

   Then the bargemen started to yell at the slaves, the slaves to the bargemen: 'Close up here'. 'You're loading three hundred.' 'Oy, that's enough.'

Example (4) is from Horace's famous satire 5, at a point when travellers and their animals are being embarked on the barge to carry on with their journey down the Pomptine marshes. A traveller's slave complains that too many people are being embarked, the barge is brim full "You're loading three hundred", "Oy, that's enough." In this case the interjection and the phrase *satis est* convey more expressively the denial form.

5) Ter. *Hec.* 725 ᴘʜ. *sed vin adesse me una, dum istam convenis? /* ʟᴀ. *immo hinc abi, aliquam puero nutricem para.* (Don *ad l.* sᴇᴅ ᴠɪɴ ᴀᴅᴇssᴇ ᴍᴇ ᴠɴᴀ ᴅᴠᴍ ɪsᴛᴀᴍ ᴄᴏɴᴠᴇɴɪs *melius pronuntiaueris, si renitente et improbante hoc vultu dicere acceperis Phidippum, quasi non oporteat interesse socerum.*)

   ᴘʜ. Do you want me to be with you when you meet with her? ʟᴀ. Quite the contrary, get away and find a nurse for the new-born baby. (Don. *ad l.* 'Do you want me to be with you when you meet with her?' You'll read this better if you make Phidippus say this, that is the offer to join Laches, with a reluctant and disapproving mean, almost implying that his fellow step-father ought not to approach the courtesan.)

Another very straightforward word for "no" in conversation is *immo*, which corrects a speaker's first statement. I discuss (5) to exemplify the point that politeness is a less important concern when the benefit entailed by request or denial is mutual for the speakers involved. Phidippus and Laches agree that Bacchis, a courtesan, must be responsible for the estrangement between the young married couple, their respective son and daughter, and

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[3] I hope to be able to discuss this topic in a separate contribution.

that Bacchis should be met with and challenged. Phidippus says "Do you want me to be with you when you meet with her?" to which Laches replies "Quite the contrary, get away and find a nurse for the new-born baby." The expressions used by Laches are very direct (*immo, abi*), almost verging on rudeness. This directness and lack of ceremoniousness is strange given the two old men's strong intention to remain on good terms and their high social status. In annotating this passage, Donatus appears to have wondered about this. The answer he seems to have found was that Laches' rudeness is less prominent because deep down Phidippus does not wish to visit Bacchis ("You'll read this better if you make Phidippus say this [that is: to offer to join Laches], with a reluctant and disapproving expression on his face"). Be this as it may, Laches' directness is mitigated and somehow justified by the fact that he is acting in the interest of both.

A number of *no* phrases comes from Plautus' *Mercator*. In this play the young man, Charinus, a scapegrace, and a money waster, is sent abroad by his father, to manage the family business away from pretty girls, and to learn the trade. His father Demipho, as a young man, had the same inclinations as his son: now, however, he is a strict and harsh parent. Charinus does surprisingly well abroad and makes a lot of money; everything could be just as father wanted, except that he's fallen in love again, with a tan slave girl he has brought home and who waits presently in the ship's cabin. Demipho too falls in love with the girl, but attempts to conceal his real motives when he insists that such a beautiful girl is inappropriate as a waiting maid for Charinus' mother – the pretext given by the boy for the girl's presence on board. Demipho tries first to get Charinus out of the way by showing an uncharacteristic concern for the son's well-being: Charinus looks pale and ought to get some rest while Demipho will take care of everything. As discussion goes on, the father's intention to proceed to the ship cannot be opposed successfully by Charinus, who offers to come along. Thus cornered, Demipho resumes his true authoritarian persona to put an end to the discussion, and he just answers: "no".

> 6) Plaut. *Merc.* 462 CHA. *vin me tecum illo ire?* DE. *nolo.* CHA. *non places.*
>
> [Why, I'm going hence at once to the ship; there she shall be sold.]. CHA. Do you wish me to go there with you? DE. I don't. CHA. You are not kind.

Charinus comments *non places,* literally "you displease me", but it is not clear if he is speaking this aside. For a comment on the perception of *nolo* as a rude answer we can turn to the following passage from Donatus:

> 7) Don. *Ter. Ad.* 379 PRIVS NOLO *superbe et pro auctoritate non dixit 'non oportet' sed 'nolo'.*
>
> The tone of the phrase *prius nolo* is high-handed and imperious: (this character) did not say *non oportet* (there is no need to), but *nolo* (I don't want you to).

The speaker here, Syrus, is the slave in charge of the kitchen, and he is addressing his fellow-slaves. Donatus remarks that he has spoken superciliously and in an authoritarian manner. Donatus also adds that a less authoritarian option would have been "there's no need to", not a direct order but a remark about appropriateness, and therefore a more indirect, objective form of imparting orders by appealing to an interlocutor's reason and good sense.

Confirmation of the politeness of *oportet* is implied by (8) from *Phormio*, where the protagonist, speaking to an overcautious servant, bursts out impatiently, requesting direct and explicit orders: "enough with all these *oportet*, I want clear directions".

8) Ter. *Phorm.* 223 *aufer mi 'oportet': quin tu quid faciam impera.*

Stop repeating *oportet* and just give me clear orders.

This parallel places in the appropriate context Horace's *nil opus est* in (9), when Horace is vainly trying to get rid of the chatterbox who cannot be induced to go about his own business. The use of this phrase is one of many linguistic elements capturing Horace as a defenceless character, the ideal victim of the *garrulus*.

9) Hor. *sat.* 1.9.16–17 *nil opus est te / circumagi: quendam volo visere non tibi notum.*

There is no need for you to come by a long detour: I'm going to see someone you don't know.

A case of contradiction expressed by *nolo* in dialogue is reported by Cicero narrating a somewhat tense discussion he has had with Caesar. Caesar and Cicero are trying to resume good terms after Caesar's entry in Rome in 49, and Caesar invites Cicero to come and speak in the Senate "on the peace" – which really means in favour of Caesar's planned military expedition to Spain. Cicero, however, is naturally reluctant to kowtow to Caesar in everything, and describes himself, at least in his post factum resumé to Atticus, as nobly maintaining his stance of impartiality between Caesar and Pompey:

10) Cic. *Att.* 9.18 *cum multa, 'veni igitur et age de pace.' 'meone ' inquam 'arbitratu?' 'an tibi' inquit 'ego praescribam?' 'sic' inquam 'agam, senatui non placere in Hispanias iri nec exercitus   in Graeciam transportari, multaque , inquam 'de Gnaeo deplorabo.' tum ille, 'ego vero ista dici nolo.' 'ita putabam , inquam; 'sed ego eo nolo adesse quod aut sic mihi dicendum est multaque quae nullo modo possem silere si adessem aut non veniendum.' summa fuit, ut ille quasi exitum quaerens, 'ut deliberarem.' non fuit negandum. ita discessimus.*

After a long discussion: 'Come along then and work for peace.' 'At my own discretion?' I asked. 'Naturally' he answered. 'Who am I to lay down rules for you?' 'Well' I said, 'I shall take the line that the Senate does not approve of an expedition to Spain or of the transport of armies into Greece, and' I added, 'I shall have much to say in commiseration of Pompey.' At that he protested that this was not the sort of thing he wanted said. 'So I supposed' I rejoined, 'but that is just why I don't want to be present. Either I must speak in that strain or stay away – and much besides which I could not possibly suppress if I were there.' The upshot was that he asked me to think the matter over, as though seeking a way to end the talk. I could not refuse. On that note we parted.

We may imagine that "after a long discussion" summarizes many compliments exchanged between the two personages to prepare the ground both for the request and for its refusal (what Brown and Levinson would call "positive politeness"). We can pick up thread by thread the brief but cleverly described double-act of politeness: *igitur* (presumably "since we agree on so many things, since we are now such good friends"); *an tibi ego praescribam* ("I am not one to give you orders – you who are such as distinguished public figure"); *sic*

agam ("I'll do it this way," a phatic move, aiming at winning some assent from Caesar). Caution and politeness are in evidence even in Cicero's most factually direct move against Caesar: *senatui non placere in Hispanias iri,* "that the senate is not in favour of marching on Spain." Even when Cicero voices a direct objection against Caesar's plan to attack Pompey's legions in Spain and Greece, he does it as indirectly as he can, omitting a verb of saying before the infinitive, using the understatement *non placere,* and the passive verb *iri* almost as if Caesar were not the target of Cicero's objection and the initiator of that military action. Nor does Caesar forget his manners at that by losing control: this is not what he wants, but he picks up Cicero's passive so as to avoid to mention a direct target for his irritation: *ego vero ista dici nolo.* He does not react with an angry "you shall not say such a thing", but with a more polite "However, I don't want such things to be said." Cicero's reply continues on a polite key, as he concedes that this has to be his interlocutor's position (*ita putabam*, "so I thought"), and that for this reason (ie. not to have to oppose him), he does not want to be present. Caesar too carries on in the same vein, landing on the opt-out conclusion "think about it" (*quasi exitum quaerens*, "seeking a [polite] way of ending the talk"), to which Cicero replies with a similarly polite "I could not refuse" (something like *certe equidem deliberabo ut petis*), which is intended not to force Caesar into a position of open hostility.

Noli as introductor of the negative imperative vs. optative *nolim*

Fruyt and Orlandini (2008, 230) describe *noli* + infinitive as "totally integrated in the verbal paradigm as a polite interdiction at a high level of speech". The polite element would be rooted in the word's etymology, since *noli,* "want not", apparently takes into account the addressee's intention to do or not to do something. Yet the full lexical meaning *want not* appears to have been obliterated from a relatively early date.[4]

> 11) Petron. 58 *ergo aut tace aut meliorem noli molestare, qui te natum non putat*

> Therefore shut up, or don't annoy your betters who don't even think of you as born.

In (11) *noli* is part of a confrontational phrase addressed by a freedman to Giton, whom he believes to be another guest's slave. The fully grammaticalized status of *noli* as an introductor of the negative imperative is also clear in the paraphrases of commentators of school authors such as Horace or Vergil, where it routinely replaces *ne+* imperative in the text.

> 12) Porph. *Hor. Carm.* 1.9.15 *nec dulcis a(mores) s(perne) p(uer): pro: dum puer es, noli spernere.*

> And don't neglect sweet love, my boy – For: while you are a boy, don't neglect.

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[4] Risselada 1993, 296–297 styles it as "non-authoritative, rather than polite".

13) Serv. *Aen.* 12.938 ᴠʟᴛᴇʀɪᴠs ɴᴇ ᴛᴇɴᴅᴇ ᴏᴅɪɪs *noli velle crudelitatem tuam ultra fata protendere*.

'Don't extend your hatred further' – Don't desire to stretch your hatred beyond what is fixed by the fates.

This is clear especially from (13), where *noli* governs **velle** *protendere*, thus showing the full extent of grammaticalization, and the complete obliteration of the *volo* element in *noli*.[5]

As early as in Plautus, retention of the lexical etymological meaning of *noli* appears doubtful. *Noli* (28 occurrences) occurs both in pleading contexts, and/or when the addressees wield greater authority than the speakers, and in orders/injunctions imparted to inferiors or equals and intimates:

14) Plaut. *Asin.* 417 ᴍᴇ. *quaeso hercle noli, Saurea, mea causa hunc verberare*.

Please, really, Saurea, don't punish him on my account.

15) Plaut. *Cas.* 204–205 ᴍʏ. *tace sis stulta et mi ausculta. / noli sis tu illi advorsari*

Will you shut up, you foolish woman, and listen to me. Don't oppose him, listen to me.

16) Plaut. *Persa* 622 ᴅᴏ. *noli flere*

Don't cry.

17) Plaut. *Curc.* 130–131 ᴘᴀ. *etiam mihi quoque stimulo / fodere lubet te.* ᴘʜ. *tace, noli.* ᴘᴀ. *taceo.*

ᴘᴀ. I too feel like giving you such a thrashing... ᴘʜ. Shut up, don't. ᴘᴀ. I will shut up.

Examples (15) and (16) are particularly clear instances of the non polite use of *noli*: in (15) the two women are on very confidential terms, and Myrrhina imparts her advice to Cleostrata without much regard for manners (cf. 204 *stulta*); in (16) Dordalus is perhaps truly moved by the damsel-in-distress charade the girl (Virgo) is putting up, but he does not say "desire not to cry". In (17) the servant Palinurus is about to beat the old drunkard

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[5] The point was originally made in Löfstedt 1966, 74–76, quoting especially Aug. *civ.* 14.8 *locutione vero usitatiore, quam frequentat maxime consuetudo sermonis, non utique diceretur: noli velle mentiri omne mendacium, nisi esset et voluntas mala* ("and the Scripture would not say [as it does using a very frequent manner of expression from current speech] 'don't desire to pronounce lies, unless will could be evil.'"). Löfstedt discusses also *ne velis* as a possible more polite variant (although in several instances it is simply the form used in indirect speech, 78–82), and the long-term debate about the difference between *ne* + present subjunctive and *ne* + perfect subjunctive, and in turn their possible distinction in urgency and politeness from *ne* + imperative (cf. in particular the distinction pointed out by the fourth century grammatical writer Dositheus between *ne fac* and *ne facias*: Dosith. *gramm. CGL* 1.412.12 *sed interest inter hoc (ie. ne facias) et illud quod dicimus ne fac, quod hoc imperamus, superius suademus*. "There is a difference between *ne facias* and the other expression *ne fac,* as the latter is an order, the former a suggestion.").

woman, but his master Phaedromus stops him, and politeness is certainly out of the question here.[6]

As a consequence, the elliptical use of *noli* for "don't" or "no" (with suppression of the infinitive), which occurs in some isolated cases (more frequently in late Latin), seems to have no polite connotations *per se*:

18) Ter. *Ad.* 780–781 SY. *quid agis? quo abis?* DE. *mitte me.* / SY. *noli, inquam.* DE. *non manum abstines mastigia?*

SY. What are you doing? Where are you going? DE. Leave me. SY. Don't, I say. DE. Will you keep your hands off me, you scoundrel?

19) *Vulg. Gen.* 32.10 *'frater mi, sint tua tibi.' dixit Iacob: 'noli ita, obsecro.'*

'Brother, keep your possessions for you.' And Jacob replied: 'No, I pray you.'

In (19) Jacob is being courteous to his brother Esau, to whom he hopes to become reconciled and who is potentially a threat to Jacob's family and servants, but the entreating, pleading element is conveyed by *obsecro,* like *quaeso hercle… noli* in (14).

More explicitly polite negative imperative periphrases are formed with *nolim* (followed by accusative and infinitive clauses). In these cases, all restricted to early Latin, the non-authoritative, pleading and polite element seems to be more demonstrable than with *noli*: presumably the relative rarity of the optative construction favoured the retention of the etymological lexical meaning:

20) Plaut. *Capt.* 941–942 *te / nolim suscensere, quod ego iratus ei feci male.*

I hope you will not be angry for the fact that I mistreated him in my anger.

21) Don. *Ter. Ad.* 695 NOLIM CETERARVM RERVM TE SOCORDEM *quam nihil imperiose ac pro auctoritate patria 'nolim te' inquit 'socordem ceterarum rerum esse', non 'ne sis socors'.*

'I wish you did not behave in such a rash manner in the other things, too.' – How different from the usual domineering and authoritative manner of a father: he used *nolim* etc. in the place of *ne sis socors* (don't be foolish).

"I don't mind" / "I don't care"

A variant form of refusal is "I don't mind" / "I don't care". In English, the two phrases have different implications and a different politeness content. "I don't mind" means that something is not important to the speaker, and amounts in fact to a concession to the

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[6] Here we have disagreement about the allocation of the words between the speakers, and Lindsay, followed by the latest editor Lanciotti 2008, assigns *noli* to Palinurus (as a response to a threatening gesture from Phaedromus), but even so *noli* hardly means "don't want to" or "I hope you will not." – it means simply "don't, don't, I will shut up."

interlocutor to act as s/he thinks best with the implication that the speaker does not want to inconvenience the interlocutor ("don't go to great lenghts to help me, it's not so important for me, I can do without"). "I don't care" is often perceived as a rude answer, as it implies lack of interest for what the first speaker has suggested or stated. In the following list of examples I shall try to identify equivalent Latin expressions for both answer types.

22) Plaut. *Merc.* 439–440 CHA. *at illic pollicitust prior.* / DE. *nihili facio.*

CHA. But he was the first bidder. DE. I don't care.

23) Plaut. *Merc.* 453–454 DE. *ego scio velle.* CHA. *at pol ego esse credo aliquem qui non velit.* / DE. *quid id mea refert?*[7]

[He won't agree to sell you the girl.] DE. I know he will. CHA. But truly I know there's someone who won't agree to. DE. What's that to me?

The ruder form of expression is easier to find, and more abundantly evidenced, especially in comedy, as we can see in (22) and (23). The more considerate formula is more difficult to identify, but a possible candidate seems to be *nihil moror*, literally "I don't dwell on" and therefore "I attach no importance to it".[8]

24) Plaut. *Stich.* 713–714 SA. *nimis vellem aliquid pulpamenti.* ST. *si horum, quae adsunt, paenitet, / nihil est. tene aquam.* SA. *melius dicis; nil moror cuppedia.*

SA. How I wish we had a bit of tenderloin. ST. If you aren't satisfied with what's here, it's just too bad. Take some water. SA. You're right. I've got no use for dainties.

Nil moror may also mean "yes", "I make no objections to that": cf. example (25):

25) Plaut. *Persa* 767 LEMN. *tu Sagaristio, accumbe in summo.* SAG. *ego nil moror*

LEMN. You, Sagaristio, take place in the farthest bed. SAG. I don't mind.

Example (24) contains also the interesting answer *nihil est*, translated by Nixon "too bad". *Nihil est* is probably a potentially neutral comment (we should probably supply *ad hanc rem*), but more "it does not matter" than "I don't care". In the context, however,

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[7] For similar expressions in Greek cf. Men. *Epitr.* 409–414 Ον. βούλομαι / αὐτὸς φυλάττειν. Συ. οὐδὲ ἕν μοι διαφέρει. / εἰς ταὐτὸ γὰρ παράγομεν, ὡς ἐμοὶ δοκεῖ, / δεῦρ' ἀμφότεροι. Ον. νυνὶ μὲν οὖν συνάγουσι καὶ / οὐκ ἔστιν εὔκαιρον τὸ μηνύειν ἴσως / αὐτῷ περὶ τούτων, αὔριον δέ. "I'd rather keep it myself" "That does not worry me. We're both bound for one house here, I believe" "They've company, though, now. It may not be the proper time to break this news to him. I'll try tomorrow." (Arnott). In this passage two slaves compete for a ring, crucial for the further denouement of the plot. Syros is the brusquer of the two (οὐδὲ ἕν μοι διαφέρει), whereas Onesimos, who has recognized his master's signet, tries to be more accommodating in the hope of obtaining the ring (he therefore adopts more indirect directive expressions, such as οὐκ ἔστιν εὔκαιρον τὸ μηνύειν ἴσως). Men. *Georg.* 31–32 ΜΥ. βραχὺ /φίλη, μεταστῶμεν. ΦΙ. τί δ᾽ ἡμῖν, εἰπέ μοι, <τούτου> μέλει; ΜΥ. καλόν γ᾽ ἂν εἴη, νὴ Δία. ("Let's move a bit, dear." "Tell me, what concern is he of ours?" "I think it's better if we do it, by Zeus!").

[8] Cf. *OLD* s.v. *moror* 4b ("I don't much care for"), 4c ("I don't mind").

Nixon's *too bad* is probably correct: the passage should be printed with suspension dots or a hyphen, to mark a sudden change of tone, from friendliness to irrision: "if you don't like what we have – matters not!"

The neutral or objective tone of the comment *nihil/nil est* is made more explicit in (26), where Cicero vaguely criticized Atticus for summoning a servant without strong reasons:

26) Cic. *Att.* 13.22.4 *Tullium scribam nihil fuit quod appellares; nam tibi mandassem si fuisset.*

There was no reason to summon Tullius the scribe: I would have asked you if that had been the case.

Politeness is certainly implied in (27), where Periplectomenus is making a caricature of lower-class overly ceremonious guests who make compliments and try unsuccessfully to hide their eagerness for the meal offered to them:

27) Plaut. *Mil.* 753–759 PE. *nam ei solent, quando accubuere, ubi cena adpositast, dicere: 'quid opus fuit hoc, hospes, sumptu tanto nostra gratia? insanivisti hercle, nam idem hoc hominibus sat erat decem.'* [...] *sed eidem homines numquam dicunt, quamquam adpositumst ampliter: / 'iube illud demi: tolle hanc patinam: remove pernam, nil moror'*

PE. For they are in the habit of saying, when they have taken their places, when dinner is put on the table: 'What necessity was there for you to go to this great expense on our account? Surely you were mad, for this same dinner was enough for ten persons.' [...] But these same persons never say, although such an abundance has been provided, 'Do order that to be taken off; do take away this dish; remove this gammon of bacon, I'll have none of it.' (Nixon, Loeb).

Nixon's "I'll have none of it", however, probably does not hit the right note, as the hypothetical speaker is a guest, politely refusing the offer – although here directness too is part of the ritual of politeness, as refusal of the offer will save the host further expenses.

Addition of hedges ("honestly, really, truly, I think, I'm afraid")

I move on to examine more elaborate no reply forms, used in cases in which the interlocutors are trying not to hurt feelings, and see what syntactic and lexical devices they exploit.

Various strategies are available to say no without giving offence. One is to emphasize that ours is only an opinion ("in my view..., my opinion is..., I think...") rather than to phrase contradiction as an absolute statement. This falls under the Brown and Levinson heading of "addition of hedges".[9] Hedges are mitigating devices used to lessen the impact of an utterance (typically adverbs, such as *really, honestly, quite frankly*, but also clauses, for example parenthetical phrases such as *I think, I fear*, which emphasize the effort and painfulness of having to say no. A further category of more polite denial

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[9] Brown and Levinson 1987, 145–172.

formulas is that of pseudo-agreement, whereby a speaker pretends to agree to at least part of an interlocutor's argument.[10] Though I have treated "hedges" and "pseudo-agreement" as two separate sections in my article, the two often co-occur in the same utterance.

Stressing that one's own view is merely a personal opinion, even a matter of taste, when not obviously ironic, is a less assertive argument strategy, emphasizing that the position taken is not necessarily the only possible one, but merely a subjective view. If I say "the film was ugly" on going out of the movie theatre, I impose my view to my interlocutors more crudely than if I say, "I'm not sure I liked the film so much". If I say "the movie was ugly", they are forced either to agree, which most people will do to avoid an argument or an unpleasant discussion, or to counterargue. It all admittedly depends on the roles we choose to play, the degree of intimacy with the interlocutor, the importance of the matter, and so on, but under normal circumstances, among adults, most people will at best ask why, limiting their response to a few essentials, while saying to themselves, "s/he's really rude, bossy, pushy".

In the *Mercator* scene I have already described in some detail, Demipho surprises his son, uncharacteristically, with first inquiring about the young's man's health – "you look pale, perhaps it's the long sea travel, you still have a sea stomach." Basically the old man says that his son is sick and needs to go home and rest, and the old man will take care of everything, so as to have a free hand with the girl, unseen. Charinus resists the old man's offers, adducing concern over the family business and so on. What is crucial is that Son is trying not to irritate Father, and Father is playing out the comedy of the conscientious parent.

> 28) Plaut. *Merc.* 371–372 DE. *per mare ut vectu's, nunc oculi terram mirantur tui.* CHA. *magis opinor.* DE. *id est profecto: verum actutum abscesserit.*
>
> DE. As you've been travelling by sea, your eyes, I suppose, are at present rather unaccustomed to the shore. CHA. Rather, I think. DE. That's what it is, for sure. But it will be going off presently.

Magis opinor in (28) amounts to a "no, I'm not going home", but it is a *no* phrased cautiously: "rather... well, ehm... I think..." Editors who punctuate with suspension dots (Lindsay), *magis opinor...* intend to represent the intonation and uncertainty of the objection. Charinus is inarticulate and stuttering, and hopes that Father will understand the objection, but Demipho cuts in relentlessly: "That's what it is for sure."

In (29), the speaker is Chremes, the father of Philumena. Chremes had agreed, at an earlier time, to marry his daughter to his friend Simo's son. However, the discovery that the young man is in love with a courtesan has caused Chremes to withdraw his offer. Simo maintains that his son will tire of the courtesan, and thus the marriage is still justified. Chremes expresses a contrary opinion:

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[10] Brown and Levinson 1987, 72, 115.

29) Ter. *Andr.* 563–564 CH. *tibi ita hoc videtur; at ego non posse arbitror, / neque illum hanc perpetuo habere neque me perpeti.*

[SI. Once he is tied down by a respectable marriage, he will easily extricate himself from the other situation.] CH. That's what you think, but I don't think he can keep that woman as his wife for ever, nor can I put up with it.

Chremes' reply begins with a seeming concession: *tibi ita hoc videtur* "you say so", which is then countered by the denial phrase governed by *arbitror*. Even if his words are firm, his intention is couched in a rounded and ultimately unaggressive form. His refusal is also softened by the use of *non posse*, "that it will not be possible", glossing over as a state of things which in fact depends on a series of human decisions. In Terence, this language is characteristic of *senes*, and is intended to represent a more sedate, phlegmatic manner of speaking, characteristic of the upper classes, especially when talking to their peers.[11]

The following is a select list of examples illustrating the use of *arbitror* as a hedge in Terence in old men's speeches in polite contexts:

30) Ter. *Ad.* 458 HE. *cave dixeris: / neque faciam neque me satis pie posse arbitror.*

Don't say that: I won't do it, and I don't think it may be done to my adequate satisfaction.

31) Ter. *Hec.* 255–257 *te mi iniuriam facere arbitror, Phidippe, / si metuis satis ut meae domi curetur diligenter.*

I believe you offend me, if you fear she would not receive all appropriate care at my house.

32) Don. *Ter. Hec.* 403 ID VERO NEVTIQVAM HONESTVM ESSE ARBITROR *'neutiquam' non est omnino negativum, sed aliquid assertionis habet; est enim 'neutiquam' non nimis, non valde.*

'In fact, I don't think that is entirely correct' – the word *neutiquam* is not a complete negative, but has an element of assertion, and it means 'not too much, not very much'.

In (33), contradiction is conveyed by a question, and typically with a verb of opinion, "don't you think?". The two old men are surveying various options for giving the protagonist, a pennyless but proud young man, a sum of money, which was entrusted to one of them by the young man's father going abroad. The money is necessary for the young person to marry a suitable girl, but the old men are afraid to wound the young man's sense of pride. One possible solution is to forge a letter from abroad, in which the young man's father instructs his friend in town to pay the money. On reflection, however, one of the two men has doubts about the scheme, but phrases his objection cautiously, with a question: "don't you think the boy will recognize that the signet ring is not his father's?"

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[11] Some interesting observations on the use of language by *senes* can be found in Haffter 1969 and Maltby 1979, though the latter does not discuss politeness as a relevant factor in old men's language.

33) Plaut. *Trin.* 786–90 CAL. *sed epistulas quando opsignatas adferet, / nonne arbitraris tum adulescentem anuli / paterni signum nosse?* ME. *etiam taces?*

CAL. But when he brings those letters all sealed, don't you suppose the lad knows his father's signet ring? ME. Oh, stop fussing.

In (34) Cicero is upset and in exile. He is being comforted by Atticus' hopeful consideration on the likelihood of a reprieval of the exile legislation. But then he gets incensed at Atticus' suggestion to talk to Hortensius, whom Cicero sees as his main opponent behind the scenes. Here Cicero is clearly and vehemently contradicting his friend, and the resentful tone is in line with the plaintive, touchy tone of his exile letters. He starts with *obsecro*, which could also conceivably be translated "for god's sake" to render the emotion, but is a politeness modifier in most contexts, and the use of the vocative with *mi*, is also meant to stress closeness to the addressee and the seriousness of the situation. Briefly put, Cicero means "certainly not, and it's a stupid suggestion to make", but phrases it less aggressively for his friend's sake. *Quaeso* is also used in similar phrases, questioning a suggestion or a response, with no appreciable difference in meaning or tone.[12]

34) Cic. *Att.* 3.9.2 *quae quidem tamen aliquid habebant solaci ante quam eo venisti a Pompeio: 'nunc Hortensium adlice et eius modi viros'. obsecro, mi Pomponi, nondum perspicis quorum opera, quorum insidiis, quorum scelere perierimus?*

I was finding so much comfort in your letter, until you switched from Pompeius to this – 'time now to approach Hortensius and the likes of him'. But excuse me, my dear Pomponius, can't you see yet at whose hands, with whose connivance, for whose fault I was ruined?

In (35), contradiction is hidden or at least mitigated by an initial partial agreement. Moreover, the speaker's thought is introduced by a verb expressing fear, fear to displease the interlocutor by having to express dissent, a very apt frame for expressing regard and therefore minimizing dissent and disagreement: "there are two statements of yours, Crassus, which I fear I cannot admit."

35) Cic. *de orat.* 1.35 *tum Scaevola comiter, ut solebat, 'cetera' inquit 'adsentior Crasso, ne aut de C. Laeli soceri mei aut de huius generi aut arte aut gloria detraham; sed illa duo, Crasse, vereor ut tibi possim concedere: unum, quod ab oratoribus civitates et initio constitutas et saepe conservatas esse dixisti, alterum, foro, contione, iudiciis, senatu statuisti oratorem in omni genere sermonis et humanitatis esse perfectum.'*

Then Scaevola, with his habitual courtesy, said 'In everything else I quite agree with Crassus, having no desire to depreciate either the accomplishments or the reputation of my father-in-law C. Laelius, or of my own son-in-law; but there are two statements of yours, Crassus, which I fear I cannot admit, the one, that orators were originally the founders and often the saviours of our state, the other, that the orator, without limiting him to the various departments of public life, has attained perfection in every subject of discourse and polite learning.'

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[12] Cf. Cic. *Att.* 5.1.3 *quid quaeso istuc erat?*

We are all familiar with this polite circumlocution, mostly from the many English polite phrases starting with "I'm afraid", where the original semantic force of *fear* has weakened so much that you can hear even on the phone, from an impersonal voice, "I'm afraid we've run out of tickets for tonight", while booking a place at the theatre. In an academic context we have all heard "I'm worried by that part of your argument, I'm afraid I don't agree", and so on. Normally, fear is felt when one's life is under threat, or when an unpleasant situation is anticipated. Here, however, fear is used with weakened semantic content, and is a conventional way of representing one's respect for the interlocutor, and the regret for having to inconvenience him or her with a negative response (*vereor* rather than *timeo*, but *metuo* is also used with the same force in polite contexts).

A similar structure occurs later in the same dialogue, when Antonius is criticizing Crassus' claim that orators should possess the virtues of actors while delivering an oration:

36) Cic. *de orat.* 1.258 *illud vero fuit horribile, quod mehercule vereor ne maiorem vim ad deterrendum habuerit quam ad cohortandum*

Then that further claim of yours was terrifying, and upon my word I am afraid that its effect will be to deter rather than encourage.

This Latin idiom must have Greek precedents, and we find very close ways of mitigating both strong and moderate or even superficial disagreement in Plato's dialogues and elsewhere, with formulas introduced by φοβοῦμαι μή:

37) Plat. *Crat.* 428c φοβοῦμαι μέντοι μὴ τούτου πᾶν τοὐναντίον ᾖ

I fear however that the opposite is the case.

38) Plat. *Theaet.* 184a φοβοῦμαι οὖν μή [...] οὗ ἕνεκα ὁ λόγος ὥρμηται, ἐπιστήμης πέρι τί ποτ᾽ ἐστίν, ἄσκεπτον γένηται.

So I am afraid [...] that the question with which we started, about the nature of knowledge, may fail to be investigated.

39) Ach. Tat. *Leuc.* 1.11 'μεγάλα μέν,' ἔφην, 'ἐφόδιά μοι δέδωκας καὶ εὔχομαι τυχεῖν, Κλεινία. φοβοῦμαι δ᾽ ὅμως μὴ κακῶν μοι γένηται τὸ εὐτύχημα μειζόνων ἀρχή.'

'Kleinias,' I said, 'these are helpful directions for my project, and I hope it will be successful. Yet, I'm apprehensive that good luck now will only be the beginning of greater trouble.'

It is probably impossible to establish if linguistic interference should be recognized here: although Cicero's dialogues are strongly indebted to Plato, and this is particularly the case for *De oratore*, the use of a verb of *fear* in politeness contexts is widespread. In Latin, before Cicero, similar idioms occur in Terence, again in texts translated from the Greek:

40) Ter. *Ad.* 683-4 ᴍɪ. *credo hercle: nam ingenium novi tuom / liberale; sed vereor ne indiligens nimium sies.*

I believe that too: indeed I know your generous character – yet I fear you may be acting too negligently.

Let us now move on to illustrate some adverbs used to mitigate contradiction.

A passage from the fifth-century grammarian Pompeius (41) is revealing as to his perception of how *quidem / equidem* is used in cautious, polite language, because *equidem,* basically meaning "on the one hand", paves the way for acceptance of some anticipated contradiction. The person who uses *quidem* knows or suspects that his/her intention will be opposed by his/her interlocutor, and thus phrases his/her suggestion cautiously. This use of *quidem*, a difficult particle in Latin, falls under the heading "contrasting use of *quidem*" in Solodow's crucial study of this word,[13] roughly matching that of Gk. μέν, especially when no δέ follows. The Pompeius passage reads:

41)   Pomp. *gramm. GLK* V.267.4–7 *qui dicit 'volebam videre praefectum', hoc dicit simpliciter, 'volebam videre praefectum'; qui dicit 'equidem volebam videre praefectum', hoc dicit, 'volebam videre praefectum, nisi illud timerem, nisi illud obesset'. nam qui dicit 'equidem volebam videre', hoc significat, 'volebam videre, sed alia res intercedit, quae prohibet'; 'equidem volebam legere, sed illud timeo'.*

He who says 'I wanted to see the prefect,', simply says 'I wanted to see the prefect'; he who says 'in fact I wanted to see the prefect', says actually 'I wanted to see the prefect, except that I fear, except that that stood in the way. He who says 'in fact I wanted to see' conveys this meaning, 'I wanted to see, but something else happened, which made it impossible', 'indeed, I wanted to read, but I am worried that...'.

Pompeius, a grammarian not usually credited with much subtlety and sophistication, proves here to be alive to the pragmatic use of language in real conversation, a rare gift among Roman grammarians: he knows that the phrase beginning with *quidem/equidem* presupposes a more complex thought, an unexpressed second half.[14]

In (42), a passage from Plautus' *Poenulus*, Collybiscus is disguised as a foreign traveller, a soldier in search of some amusement in town. He is in fact one of master Agorastocles's slaves; the plan is that Collybiscus will later be surprised in the brothel-keeper's house by his master. The *leno* will therefore be liable of a heavy penalty for aiding and abetting a runaway slave, or even for abduction of property. Collybiscus, his pockets full of money, is thus shown the way to the brothel by some citizens who are to be later the supporting witnesses for Agorastocles' suit. At this point the citizens proclaim their intention to withdraw, but Collybiscus, speaking like a gentleman, and pretending to fear for his money in the brothel, says "I should have wished you to stay to see when I gave him the money". Collybiscus does not say "no, don't, don't go", but "in fact, I would have preferred you to stay when I gave him the money". The polite tone is conveyed not just by use of the particle *equidem,* but also by the choice of mood and tense, an imperfect

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[13] Solodow 1978, 30–75.

[14] The passage is analysed, but from a different perspective, in Baratin 1989, 121.

subjunctive: Collybiscus' wish is presented as an irreal hypothesis, thus minimizing the expectation or the claim on the citizens' compliance with the request.

> 42) Plaut. *Poen.* 681 COL. *videre equidem vos vellem quom huic aurum darem.*

> Ideally, I had wished to have you here when I gave him the money.

A similar use of *equidem*, the imperfect subjunctive, and a mitigating *vereor* occurs again in the following example:

> 43) Cic. *Att.* 1.16.14 *quod ad me scribis te in Asiam statuisse non ire, equidem mallem ut ires, ac vereor ne quid in ista re minus commode fiat; sed tamen non possum reprehendere consilium tuum, praesertim cum egomet in provinciam non sim profectus.*

> Relevant to what you write about the fact that you decided not to go to Asia, in fact I would have preferred you did go, and I fear some inconvenience may arise from this; however, I cannot blame your decision, especially because I too did not go to my province.

Pseudo- or partial agreement ("yes, well, no"); *nam* "certainly, sure, but..."

A further typical disagreement strategy with a considerable politeness investment is that of pseudo-agreement ("that's certainly true to some extent, but...", "I quite like your point about that; on the other hand I'm not convinced..., or, in its most 'comic' version, "yes, well, no").

Let us start with two straightforward "yes for no" examples from comedy, (44) and (45), from *Mercator*. In (44) Charinus is deliberating with his well-meaning but not very helpful friend Acanthius:

> 44) Plaut. *Merc.* 215–216 ACAN. *non visus est. / quin quicque ut dicebam mihi credebat.* CHA. *verum, ut tibi quidem visus est.*[15] ACAN. *non, sed credebat.*

> [Did he seem to suspect that she was my mistress?] ACAN. He did not. On the contrary, in everything, just as I said it, he believed me. CHA. True; that he seemed to yourself at least. ACAN. Not so; but he really did believe me.

In (45), from the Demipho-Charinus scene we have discussed at some length, Charinus tries to explain why such a beautiful girl is not inappropriate as a gift for his mother, against Demipho's contention that they must get rid of her because she will only attracts loiterers and womanizers around the house:

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[15] *verum* means 'yes' in early Latin.

45) Plaut. *Merc.* 399–400 DEM. *horunc illa nihilum quicquam facere poterit.* CHA. *admodum. / ea causa equidem illam emi, dono quam darem matri meae.*

[We stand in need of no female servant but one who can weave, grind, chop wood, make yarn, sweep out the house, stand a beating, and who can have every day's victuals cooked for the household.] DEM. This one will be able to do not any single one of these things. CHA. Precisely... In fact, I purchased her, to make a present of her to my mother.

In (45), with *admodum*, Charinus pretends to agree with what Demipho has just said – that is that the beautiful new servant won't be able to do the basic house chores they need – but then starts afresh with his earlier point that the girl is a present for his mother, as if Demipho had not even spoken.

   Not too different from the "yes well no" class of denials are another group in which one says "gladly", glossing over entirely the negative element of the answer. (46) is taken from the late-antique bilingual school hand-books, the *Hermeneumata*. In this passage, a guest is being offered more wine (in the large cup), and instead of saying *no* he replies simply "in the small, gladly".

46) GLOSS. III 653 (*Coll. Monac.*) *'misce caldum'. 'in maiorem?' ' in minorem libenter. spero enim et aliam bibere'.*

'Pour hot wine.' 'In the large cup?' 'In the small, gladly. Indeed I hope to drink yet another one (later).'[16]

The class of "partial agreeement" is well illustrated by the following extract from a letter of Pompeius Magnus to his general Domitius who was trying to oppose Caesar's march south. Pompeius had summoned all Senatorial armies towards Brundisium, and Domitius' resistance near Corfinium, brave as it was, was against Pompeius' general strategy: Pompeius, however, begins with partial praise – yet we know from other sources that he was greatly displeased by Domitius' refusal to move south and join the rest of the army:

47) Cic. *Att.* 8.12C *te animo magno et forti istam rem agere existimo, sed diligentius nobis est videndum ne distracti pares esse adversario non possimus.*

(Pompeius to Domitius.) I appreciate your generous and courageous spirit in this matter, but we must be careful to avoid a situation in which we are divided and therefore no match for the enemy.

In (48) an advocate (*patronus*), the knight Minucius, defends one Sopater in an unspecified capital trial in which Verres is presiding judge. Verres has dismissed the majority of the jury, who are to attend another trial, named the Petilius trial. Verres is glad of the opportunity to get rid of them, and counts on the remaining jurors, who are all in his

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[16] For "gladly" introducing a polite refusal to comply with a request cf. the following passage from Heliodorus' *Aethiopica*: cf. Heliod. *Aeth.* 3.7.1 πυνθανομένῳ τί πεπόνθοι, τῆς κεφαλῆς ἄλγημα διοχλεῖν ἔλεγεν ἡδέως τε ἂν ἠρεμεῖν εἴ τις ἐπιτρέποι, "and to her father asking what happened, she blamed a headache and said that she would prefer to have some rest, if that was possible".

pocket. Minucius is invited to pronounce his defence counsellor speech, but he questions the legitimacy of the trial:

> 48) Cic. *Verr.* 2.2.73 *'idoneus es,' inquit, 'sed pervellem adessent ii qui adfuerant antea causamque cognorant.' 'dic,' inquit; 'illi adesse non possunt.' 'nam hercule,' inquit Minucius, 'me quoque Petilius ut sibi in consilio adessem rogavit'.*
>
> ['State your case', said Verres. 'To whom?' 'To me', says Verres, 'if I appear to you of sufficient dignity to try the cause of a Sicilian, a Greek.'] 'Certainly', says he, 'you are of sufficient dignity, but I wish for the presence of those men who were present before, and were acquainted with the case.' 'State your case,' says he; 'they cannot be present.' 'For in truth,' says Quintus Minucius, 'Petilius begged me also to be with him on the bench.'

Minucius does not challenge Verres head-on, and tries first to assuage the praetor's mounting anger with partial agreement (*idoneus es*). When he realizes that Verres won't listen to reason and won't accept that the trial is made invalid by his dismissal of the honest jurors, Minucius announces that Petilius has summoned him, too, thus refusing to act as counsel – not in itself enough to save his client from prosecution, but a desperate move of public censure, whereby he hopes to persuade Verres to give up the trial. Minucius announces his intention to leave with *nam hercule*, literally "indeed, truly" or something similar. Now, the problem with this phrase is that *nam* is a confirmative particle, yet Minucius is not obeying to Verres' summon to speak, to state his case. Minucius's *nam* is a pseudo-agreement device: his *nam* picks up a part of the previous speaker's sentence ("they cannot be present, as they are busy with the Petilius trial"), emphasizing the element of agreement, and thus hiding or underrating the, in fact more important, negative element. He says "no" while pretending to say "yes".

> 49) Cic. *Verr.* 2.1.133 *'tu Verres hic quod moliare nihil habes, nisi forte vis ad perpendiculum columnas exigere'* [...] *'nam mehercule' inquit 'sic agamus; columnae ad perpendiculum exigantur'.*
>
> 'You, O Verres, have nothing which you can do here, unless you like to try the pillars by a plumb-line.' [The man, utterly ignorant of everything, asks what is the meaning of the expression, 'by a plumb-line.' They tell him that there is hardly any pillar which is exactly perpendicular when tried by a plumb-line.] 'By my truth,' says he, 'that is what we must do; let the pillars be tested by a plumb-line.'

In (49) Verres discusses with his underlings how best to exact money from a family of contractors who were in charge of restoring a temple. A committee visits the temple, but they see nothing to report; nothing has been done amiss – except, says someone, if you'd like to try the pillars by a plumb-line. That is a paradoxical suggestion, Cicero explains: pillars are almost never exactly perpendicular to the ground, and therefore the plumb-line test is fated to fail even in the most perfect constructions. But that's exactly what Verres agrees to do – if the plumb-line test fails, Verres will be able to use this as an excuse to fine the contractors for delivering an imperfect job. Verres uses the *nam* phrase to pick up exactly that part of his interlocutor's phrase in which the suggestion to use the plumbline test was advanced: a rough translation would be "exactly", and reminds one of detective

stories in which the inspector astounds his partner, who's just made what he thought was a vacuous comment, with a sudden "exactly, you are a genius, Watson!"

Example (50) reports a fictitious conversation between Verres and one of the farmers whose corn Verres is supposed to buy at a fixed price, four *sestertii* for each *modius*.

> 50) Cic. *Verr.* 2.3.196–8 *venit praetor; 'frumentum, inquit, me abs te emere oportet'. 'optime'. 'modium denario'. 'benigne ac liberaliter; nam ego ternis HS non possum vendere'. 'mihi frumentum non opus est, nummos volo'. 'nam sperabam, inquit arator, me ad denarios perventurum; sed, si ita necesse est, quanti frumentum sit considera'.*
>
> There comes the praetor: 'I must buy some corn of you'. 'Very well'. 'At a *denarius* for a *modius*'. 'I am much obliged to you; you are very liberal, for I cannot sell it at three *sesterces*'. 'But I don't want the corn, I will take the money'. 'Yes... I had hoped', says the cultivator, 'that the price would have hit the *denarii*[17]; but if you must have money, consider what is the price of corn now.'

The farmer first misunderstands Verres' intention, which is not to buy the corn on behalf of the Senate at the price allocated to him. Verres will in fact inflate the price to twelve *sestertii* the *modius*, requisition the corn at a nominal price of four, and exact from the farmers the remaining eight *sestertii*. At this turn in the conversation, the farmer has not been told this surreal conclusion, and his answer is not entirely clear, too: he seems to have understood that Verres will not pay a *denarius* for each *modius*, contrary to his expectation, or that he will not even buy the corn. The manner of his reply, however, is polite, as shown by the use of the past tense – he cannot say "no" to the Roman praetor. The problem is the meaning of *nam*. Translators sometimes omit it altogether:[18] I believe that, as in (48) and (49), *nam* is intended to pick up Verres' earlier and deceptive *modium denario*; another possibility is that the speaker hints tactfully at some unexpressed disappointement: "This is not what I had hoped: indeed I had hoped...".

Excuses

A time-old and in principle non aggressive way of saying no is that of finding some excuse. Excuses, even when incredible, attest to a speaker's at least formal adherence to the ritual of politeness, and in some cases at least are a proof of respect for his interlocutor. Of course excuses are a very broad category, encompassing a large variety of linguistic moves and strategies, and there is no univocal lexical or grammatical construction to signpost them. In the following telling example from Cicero (52), he complains to have received from his former dependant Dionysius worse treatment than that he always has care to reserve to even the most abject of his postulants. Even when Cicero has no intention to take up a defence (presumably when the postulant is too poor or uninteresting), he always leaves some room for hope, so to say, with the words, "if I can, unless some other case makes it impossible":

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[17] One *denarius* was four *sestertii*.

[18] Thus for example Yonge 1930; Fiocchi Vottero 2004, 781 have *veramente*.

51) Cic. *Att.* 8.4.2 *semper enim 'si potero', 'si ante suscepta causa non impediar'; numquam reo cuiquam tam humili, tam sordido, tam nocenti, tam alieno tam praecise negavi quam hic mihi plane <sine> ulla exceptione praecidit.*

One always says 'if one can manage it,' 'if I am not hindered by another case already undertaken.' I have never given any defendant, no matter how humble, how abject, how guilty, how complete a stranger, such a blank refusal as this quite unqualified 'no' I have had from Dionysius.

In the following list of excuses, an apologetic or pleading element is sometimes emphasized (cf. (52) *ignosce, rogo*); in (52) and (53) the asseverative adverbs *mehercules* and *quidem hercle* stress the truthfulness and sincerity of the claims:

52) Sen. *benef.* 5.22 *ignosce; non mehercules scivi hoc te desiderare, alioqui ultro obtulissem; rogo, ne me ingratum existimes; memini, quid mihi praestiteris*

Forgive me: truly I had no idea you wished to have this, otherwise I would have offered that myself. Please do not think me ungrateful – I truly know what services you have given to me in the past.

53) Plaut. *Trin.* 761 *mihi quidem hercle non est quod dem mutuom.*

Really, I have got nothing to lend.

54) Plaut. *Pseud.* 549 ᴄᴀ. *quin rus ut irem † iam heri constitueram.*

I had planned to go to the country, already, since yesterday.

Thanks

Finally, a well-established and codified way of saying no is "thanks". This mannerism has already been studied, for Greek, by Quincey 1966.

55) Plaut. *Pseud.* 714-5 ᴄʜᴀʀ. *quin tu si quid opust, mi audacter imperas?* ᴘs. *tam gratiast. / bene sit tibi, Charine. nolo tibi molestos esse nos.*

ᴄʜᴀʀ. If you need anything, why don't you just confidently instruct me? ᴘs. Many thanks, I'm so grateful, Charinus, I don't want to inconvenience you.

56) Hor. *epist.* 1.7.14-9 *'vescere sodes' 'iam satis est' 'at tu quantumvis tolle' 'benigne'*

'Please help yourself.' 'Thank you, I could not.' 'But do take as much as you wish.' 'No, thanks.'

Conclusion

As I have suggested in Ferri 2008b, it is almost impossible to correlate social class and linguistic choice in terms of politeness, in the Latin evidence. This is so mainly because the nature of the Latin corpora in which dialogue is represented is highly rhetorical and in general speakers tend to be upper class and higher education individuals. Slaves and lower class speakers sometimes figure in comedy, but linguistic realism is not the prime objective of the comic writers and these characters' linguistic behaviour is not subdued or respectful. The most salient and interesting feature of politeness studies in Latin, at least as far as I can see, is pragmatic, that is the possibility to observe and classify the range of variation in pragmatic terms. The more elaborate solutions, such as *vereor, metuo*, or the various pseudo-agreement formulas, appear to be upper class/ high education solutions, but we have no direct evidence that this was so in the everyday of Latin, nor can we state with much detail or certainty what were the distinctive features of upper class and lower class "polite conversation" in Latin.

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