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Addresses

Seminar für Ägyptologie und
Koptologie
Kulturwissenschaftliches
Zentrum
Heinrich-Düker-Weg 14
37073 Göttingen
Germany
Tel: +49(0)551/39-2-4400

Institut für Archäologie:
Ägyptologie und Archäologie
Nordostafrikas
Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin
Unter den Linden 6
10099 Berlin
Germany
Tel: +49(0)30/2093-4750

Ägyptologisches Seminar
der Universität Basel
Petersgraben 51
4051 Basel
Switzerland
Tel: +41(0)61/267-3060
Fax: +41(0)61/267-2341

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Lingua Aegyptia – Studia Monographica

Yes Sir!*

An Analysis of the Superior/Subordinate Relationship in the Late Ramesside Letters

Kim Ridealgh, Changchun (China)

Abstract

In her 1994 article entitled 'Idiolects in the Late Ramesside Letters', Deborah Sweeney hypothesises that all choices made in the construction of personal letters are reflective of individual language variance. Such a statement places the motivation and construction of letters onto the individual, and, although Sweeney did, to a certain extent, further develop her views on politeness in her 2001 monograph, the idea that politeness is representative of individual language variance has not directly been addressed. This study will demonstrate that the Late Ramesside Letters reflect embedded linguistic mechanisms in order to ensure successful communication between interlocutors that is not dependent on personal language variance. The superior social position of the General Piankh at the end of the Twentieth Dynasty will be utilised to demonstrate the benefits of politeness theory in identifying linguistic patterns in the letters, patterns that support and maintain social relationships between superiors and their subordinates. Politeness theory is based on the notion of 'face', and how an individual's public persona must be adhered to in communication in order to reduce the level of imposition; this is especially significant in biased relationships. Predominately this study will focus on the relationship between Piankh and the Scribe of the Necropolis Dhutmose due to the amount of surviving documents between the pair, to view the linguistic manifestation of their superior/subordinate relationship.

1 Introduction

In the study of ancient Egyptian society, letters represent an underutilised genre of literature. Often considered to present only historical data, epistolary texts have had to take a 'back seat' to their didactic and narrative counter-parts. Hence, in the past, very few attempts have been made to engage with the social dynamics in letters and reconstruct the social networks of the communities presented in the letter corpora from Pharaonic Egypt, something that this article will address.¹ New critical frameworks

* I would like to thank Dr Martina Minas-Nerpel for kindly reading and commenting on this article and for her continued support, and I would like to thank Professor Zhang Qiang at the Institute for the History of Ancient Civilizations at Northeast Normal University (Changchun) for his continued support. I would also like to express my thanks to the reviewers of this article for their thought-provoking comments, which greatly improved this article, and especially to Dr Deborah Sweeney for waving her anonymity in order to further help develop my research. This article is based on part of my PhD research entitled *Maintaining the Status Quo: an Examination of the Social Relations in the Late Ramesside Letters*.

1 New research is currently being undertaken to examine the relationship between letter formulae and social hierarchy in the Middle Kingdom letters from el-Lahun, see Brose (2012), and to reconstruct the Third Intermediate Period letters from el-Hibeh (Müller 2009: 251–264). This paper was influenced by the following articles, both within the discipline of Egyptology and within the wider academic world; Fox (1983); Van de Walle (1993); Sweeney (2001); Di Biase-Dyson (2009); Bridge (2010).

developed in the discipline of Applied Linguistics now allow scholars to progress beyond the initial layer of historical and political information, and access the embedded social conventions that underpin the structure of both the letter itself and the language employed. For the purpose of examining social relationships, politeness theory has the most relevance as it allows for the analysis of linguistic mechanisms in the text, mechanisms that display a variety of functions to ensure successful communication between superiors and their subordinates, and *visa-versa*. This is often referred to as ‘face-work’ based on the ground breaking research by Erving Goffman in the 1950 and 60s.² It is through the analysis of the construction of these mechanisms that relationship biases and dynamics can be viewed, and of course, the manner in which these dynamics are maintained.

For this purpose the Late Ramesside Letters, one of the largest corpora of letters from the end of New Kingdom period in Egypt (c. 1099–1069BC), have been selected to study the superior/subordinate relationship dynamic with the assistance of politeness theory. The Late Ramesside Letters form a corpus of over seventy published texts,³ and consist of a collection of personal communications sent between various inhabitants of the Theban west bank.⁴ Many of the letters, written in Late Egyptian hieratic, were sent between two well-known scribes of the necropolis (*sš n pš hr*), Dhutmose and his son Butehamun,⁵ whose family had held the office of scribe of the necropolis since the reign of Ramesses III.⁶ The majority of the corpus was written between Regnal Years 21 and 29 of the reign of Ramesses XI of the Twentieth Dynasty (c. 1078–1070).⁷ This was a rather turbulent period when outside factors, such as civil war, famine,⁸ Libyan incursions,⁹ and economic crisis,¹⁰ were affecting the lives of the individuals recorded in the letters.

Deborah Sweeney is one of the few scholars to have examined the Late Ramesside Letters extensively. In her 1994 article entitled ‘Idiolects in the Late Ramesside Letters’, Sweeney hypothesises that all choices made in the construction of personal letters are reflective of individual language variance.¹¹ In her 2001 monograph examining pragmatic features of letter writing, Sweeney develops this idea further and

2 See Goffman (1955: 213–231; 1969). His work was later expanded by Brown and Levinson (1987) in the mid-1980s, resulting in the modern concept of Politeness Theory.

3 Černý (1939); Wente (1967 & 1990); Janssen (1991); Demarée (2006).

4 Černý (1973); Valbelle (1985); Sweeney (2001).

5 Černý (1973: 357–383); Jansen-Winkel (1994: 35–40); Davies (1997: 49–68 & 1999: 136–140).

6 Bierbrier (2007: 271–274).

7 Wente (1967: 12). This period, also known as the *whm-ms.wt* period, has a different dating system to the Regnal Years of Ramesses XI, but to avoid confusion here, this article will use the Regnal Years of Ramesses XI. For further information on the *whm-ms.wt*, see Kitchen (1996: xiv–ix, 4–6, 248 & 2009); Jansen-Winkel (1992: 22–37); van Dijk (2003: 302); Hornung (2006: 217).

8 For the ‘Year of the Hyenas’, see P. BM EA 10052, *rt*.10.7, 11.8; Kitchen (1996: 247, no. 26); Lull (2006: 334).

9 Kitchen (1996: 177–179 & 1990: 22); Haring (1992: 71–80; 1993: 159–165 & 1997: 271); Jansen-Winkel (1994: 88); Török (1997: 104–106); Barwick (2011: 3).

10 Consider the Tomb Robbery Trials for example, see Peet (1915; 1920 & 1930: 128–175). See also P. BM EA 10375, v.10–11, which may imply state endorsed tomb plundering (Wente 1967: 61 & 1990: 195).

11 Sweeney (1994: 276).

first introduces politeness theory to Egyptology to assess what she calls ‘courtesy’¹² in Late Egyptian letters; at the time this was a brand new approach to the study of social interaction in general academia. Although it is clear that Sweeney expands her understanding of politeness in this publication, she never explicitly confronts her 1994 argument, and so the belief that politeness is reliant on personal language variance (or individual interpretations of ‘courtesy’) has continued to permeate modern Egyptological scholarship. This study will develop the arguments presented by Sweeney to demonstrate that expectations of politeness were deeply embedded in the social practices of the ancient Egyptians living within the microcosm of the Late Ramesside Letters, practices that extend beyond the idea of ‘courtesy’.

On a fundamental level, ancient Egyptian letters demonstrate a fixed etiquette when communicating with individuals who are socially superior or subordinate to the sender of the letter. When writing to one’s subordinate a more dominant letter format is adopted, requiring a short formal introduction, or none at all, and then a higher frequency of imperative commands within the text. An individual who is socially superior will also initiate more request acts and possess the ‘active’ voice. When a subordinate individual writes to his superior, a longer formal introduction is necessary alongside more fawning language,¹³ and someone socially inferior is more likely to perform a higher frequency of information acts or long, drawn out request acts.¹⁴ Sweeney’s work on the various grammatical aspects of the letters highlights an important division in the types of grammatical constructions used between superiors and subordinates as well.¹⁵ This implies that on grammatical and structural levels, patterns can be discerned in the language used in the construction of the letters surrounding the superior/subordinate relationships. Practice letters (*sbʿ.yt šꜥ.t*) have been discovered, such as O. DeM 114,¹⁶ demonstrating that apprentice scribes were taught to compose official messages and dispatches.¹⁷ Koen Donker van Heel and Ben Haring state that “if ostraca were used as drafts on a daily basis, this certainly will have happened where the writing of letters was concerned”.¹⁸ Hence, politeness in language cannot simply be explained (and subsequently dismissed) as personal language variance, but must be considered to be reflective of generations of scribal tradition, which reinforced a notion of linguistic etiquette.

This study will utilise the superior social position of the General Piankh at the end of the Twentieth Dynasty to demonstrate the benefits of politeness theory in identifying linguistic patterns in portraying social statuses,¹⁹ the linguistic mechanisms in place to support perceived social differences, and the effect these patterns and

12 Sweeney’s study comes from a strong pragmatic foundation. She prefers, however, to refer to politeness in terms of ‘courtesy’ and suggests three possible variables for the consideration of letter construction: status, cost and benefit, and connection (2001: 233).

13 Sweeney (2001: 234).

14 Ridealgh (2012). Similar patterns are found in Hebrew Biblical narrative, Bridge (2010: 524–547).

15 Sweeney (2001: 53).

16 Černý (1973: 72).

17 Donker van Heel & Haring (2003: 113).

18 Donker van Heel & Haring (2003: 30).

19 For historical information on Piankh, see Jansen-Winkeln (1992: 22–37); Kitchen (1996: 253); van Dijk (2003: 302); Lull (2006: 61, 69–79).

mechanisms have on the understanding of social networks.²⁰ The General Piankh is the most socially superior individual to appear in the Late Ramesside Letters. Piankh asserts his own social status in the letters themselves, in P. Berlin 10487, v.1, he asks “as for Pharaoh, LPH, whose superior is he anyway?”²¹ Thus, the social position of Piankh can be used as a gauge to see how he interacts with his subordinates, and, subsequently, how his subordinates structure their communication with him.

2 Main Principles of Politeness Theory

For the purpose of this study focus is placed on the assessment of linguistic patterns in written utterances to determine social distance between the sender and the recipient of the document. At its simplest, the notion of ‘status’ relates simply to one’s position in society.²² However, social status is far more complex than this, reflecting the level of which any given society will endeavour to protect and project the collection of (social and professional) rights and duties of an individual.²³ Yet why do individuals accept these restrictions placed on them by society’s social rules? As Richard Hudson stresses, an influential and attractive theory is the concept of ‘face’, better translated as ‘self-respect’, or the need to maintain one’s public image.²⁴ This fundamental issue provides the foundation for politeness theory, which represents the social and communal aspects of language.

In polite conversation certain expectations are desired between the speaker and hearer in order to maintain their social relationship with each other.²⁵ Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson call these ‘positive-face’ acts and ‘negative-face’ acts. ‘Positive-face’ acts reflect the aspiration that the wants of every member are desirable to (at least some) others. ‘Positive-face’ acts also refer to the desire for appreciation and approval from others for the kind of moral individual we are, for our behaviour, for our values and so on (‘I respect you for...’). Conversely, ‘negative-face’ acts concern the desire by every ‘competent adult member’ that their actions be unimpeded by others.²⁶ This consists of a ‘negative’ agreement not to interfere, such as standing back to let someone pass by (‘I respect your right to...’). Hudson complains that these two terms are confusing; after all, the term ‘negative’ in ‘negative-face’ acts merely refers to its opposition to ‘positive-face’ acts, not determining any negative qualities to the ‘face’ act.²⁷

An individual’s public ‘face’ is essentially fragile and social actions are orchestrated in order to prevent damage to one’s public persona, but ‘face’ can be damaged if one of the main respect elements in social interaction is ignored or forgotten.²⁸

20 Beyond the work of Sweeney and the author, only one other study has been published in Egyptology that *directly* examines ‘politeness’ by Michael Fox (1983: 12–15); this study only utilises didactic literature examining the *idealised* version of Egyptian politeness.

21 Wentz (1990: 183).

22 Turner (1988: 2).

23 Palmier (1969: 10).

24 Hudson (1996: 113).

25 Yule (1996: 60–61).

26 Brown & Levinson (1987: 62).

27 Hudson (1996: 114).

28 Grice (1975: 45); Lakoff (1973: 298); Van de Walle (1993: 49).

These elements were theorised by Paul Grice in the 1970s through what he called the cooperative principle; this consists of four maxims that any individual in an interaction will subscribe to, on condition that both parties in the conversation recognise the purpose for which they are communicating in the first place.²⁹ If any of these maxims are ignored, forgotten,³⁰ or deliberately rejected or manipulated then the result is a ‘face-threatening’ act that can cause damage to an individual’s public ‘face’.³¹ As Brown and Levinson maintain:

“it is not generally required that an actor fully satisfy another’s ‘face’ wants, ‘face’ can be, and routinely is, ignored, not just in cases of social breakdown (affrontery) but also in cases of urgent cooperation, or in the interests of efficiency.”³²

A ‘face-threatening’ act, commonly abbreviated as ‘FTA’, to the hearer’s ‘positive-face’ wants occurs when the speaker does not care about the hearer’s feelings, wants, or desires. This can arise through criticisms, expressions of disapproval, reprimands, insults, contradictions or challenges, violent emotions, or blatant non-cooperation. A ‘face-threatening’ act to the hearer’s ‘negative-face’ wants can be caused by the speaker indicating that they do not intend to avoid impeding the hearer’s freedom of action. This can occur when the speaker places pressure upon the hearer to refrain from an act via orders, requests, suggestions, reminders, threats or warnings, offers, promises, or complaints.³³

All these actions can damage an individual’s public ‘face’, causing embarrassment and frequently aggression between the interlocutors in conversation. Often, the maintenance of the public ‘face’ of both the speaker and hearer in a social context reduces the risk of possible aggression in a conversation. In order to avoid imposition in discourse, and subsequent aggression, interlocutors apply culturally specific linguistic mechanisms to reduce the impingement and maintain effective conversation. This is especially important when asking something of someone who is perceived to be socially superior to the individual performing the speech act, in which

29 Maxims include: (1) quantity maxim, which encompasses the idea of common knowledge, and the act of not providing more, or less, information than is necessary in conversation; (2) quality maxim, which requires speakers to perform truthful utterances; (3) relation maxim, which concerns relevant conversation; (4) manner maxim, which relies on clear utterances in order to avoid ambiguity or obscurity (Grice 1991: 26–31; Widdowson 2007: 50–62). Brown and Levinson (1987: 5) call these maxims “background presumptions” and the cooperative principle, “a robust principle that is hard to undermine”.

30 Grice (1975: 47) comments that other such maxims do exist in language, commenting that “there are of course, all sorts of other maxims (aesthetic, social, or moral in character), such as “be polite”, that are normally observed by participants in talk exchanges, and these may also generate non-conventional implicatures”. Lakoff (1979) also stresses the need for the creation of four stylistic strategies: clarity (impersonal), distance (formal politeness), deference (do not impose, provide options), and camaraderie (show sympathy). But Van de Walle (1993: 52) argues that these strategies are too vague to be useful and do not allow for combining strategies, which she highlights are not always mutually exclusive in everyday language.

31 Yule (1996: 61–62).

32 Brown & Levinson (1987: 62).

33 Brown & Levinson (1987: 65–84); Yule (1996: 61).

case the socially subordinate individual must meet the expectations of the superior individual to maintain successful communication.³⁴

3 Differences in Superior/Subordinate Relationships

Social hierarchy is clearly present in the letters, and social dominance or subservience is reinforced through a stark contrast in styles as discussed in the introduction. Here, Piankh becomes the gauge at which to examine these relationships, since he is, in social definitions, the highest-ranked individual in the Late Ramesside Letters. This section will use Piankh's social position to define other individuals in regards to him, examining the general's role in his wider community, and the social actions expected of him by this community (and *vice-versa*). In the letters sent by Piankh, he generally does not include a formal introduction, with the exception of two letters. The first is P. Berlin 10489, which contains a short formal introduction principally due to the status of the recipient and her relationship to the general. Nedjemet, the recipient of the letter, was likely the general's wife,³⁵ and this close intimate relationship is highlighted by the emotional overtones in the final line of the introduction. This emotional link characterises the relationship dynamics between Piankh and Nedjemet, as no other letters sent by Piankh have survived that include this emotional overtone:

P. Berlin 10489:

r-nty tw=j dd ntr nb ntr.t nb(.t) (3) r-nty tw=j znj hr hr=w jmj 'nh=t jmj snb=t jmj.tw ptr<=j> <tw> (4) jw=j.jy.t mtw<=j> mh jr.tj <m> ptr<=t> r^c nb zp-2

“As follows: every day I speak to every god and every goddess (3) whom I pass by to let you live and be healthy,³⁶ and to allow me to see <you> (4) when I return and <I> may fill (my) two eyes³⁷ with the sight of you!”³⁸

The second letter to contain a formal introduction is P. BM EA 75019, in which the names of the sender and recipient are now lost in lacunae, but Robert Demarée suggests that, through the restoration of the titles, the sender must have been the General Piankh.³⁹ Although the formal introduction included in the letter is short, it is still present, and represents an uncharacteristic aspect of the format style used by the general:

34 Goffman (1969: 213).

35 Taylor (1998: 1146); Ridealgh (2011: 126–128); *contra*: Jansen-Winkel (1995: 59–60), who suggests she may have been Piankh's daughter.

36 See discussion of this translation by Junge (2005: 217).

37 Wente (1967: 183) translates it as “fill my eye”, but the dual form is reconstructed by Černý (1939: 54a, line 8).

38 Černý (1939: 54); Wente (1967: 69 & 1990: 183). Unless stated the translations are the author's own. For author's own translations only transliteration has been provided.

39 Demarée (2006: 15).

P. BM EA 75019:

“[...] Royal Scribe, General [...] (2) [...] I speak to Pre-Horakhti, (when he rises and sets, to give to you a long life time), (3) a great old age and to give to you [...].”⁴⁰

The main text of P. BM EA 75019 is purely task-orientated in which Piankh issues a series of commands to the recipient. Although this is similar to P. Berlin 10489, which includes a series of commands to Nedjemet, the exclusion of emotional overtones in the formal introduction and polite concluding formula suggest that she was not the (main) recipient of this particular letter. Yet the inclusion of the formal introduction does suggest that Piankh may have had a kin relationship with the recipient of P. BM EA 75019; its presence denotes that their relationship was not so clear-cut as superior/subordinate. The context of the letter would also support this relationship status, as Piankh places the recipient in a position of responsibility, perhaps even as his deputy, issuing an extensive series of commands. In the first request act the recipient has failed to fulfil a previous request act made to him, and Piankh reinforces his annoyance through the repetitive use of the exclamatory substantive *zp-2*.⁴¹ Although often reinforcers such as *zp-2* can be used to express joy or excitement (see example P. Berlin 10489, *rt.4*, above), Sweeney comments that in this particular context they are used “to focus their subordinate’s energy on the task in hand”.⁴² In the example here, Demarée argues that the sequential past tenses used in the following extract imply that “the sender assumes that the recipient took measures to meet the requests immediately on the arrival of the messenger”,⁴³ demonstrating a bias towards the sender in the social relationship shared between the two individuals:

P. BM EA 75019:

“(4) As follows, (I have) sent to you this messenger of mine, I have caused to come to you another messenger (5) of mine at the end of summer, and you did not cause him to come (back) quickly! When my (6) letter reaches you, you shall dispatch the messenger of mine quickly here, do not let him wait (7) at all, after he has reached the place where you are, you shall cause to be brought to me all which I have written to you.”⁴⁴

The final request act in the letter is perhaps one of the most significant request acts contained in the entire corpus concerning wider political arrangements. It discusses not only the Libyan *Meshwesh* tribe,⁴⁵ and the military aid they provided for the general’s campaign south into Nubia,⁴⁶ but also the possibility that the king or/and his

40 Translation by Demarée (2006: 14).

41 The *zp-2* feature, used to emphasise imperative commands, is common in the Late Ramesside Letters and may represent more of an oral feature than a written one (*Wb* 3, 437.1–8; *TLA* Lemma number 70011).

42 Sweeney (2001: 59–60, 236).

43 Demarée (2006: 15).

44 Translation by Demarée (2006: 15).

45 Kitchen (1990); Haring (1992: 71).

46 Haring (1992: 77).

representative (regularly) met with chiefs of this tribal group.⁴⁷ The recipient is requested to care for the needs of one of these chiefs:

P. BM EA 75019:

“(v.9) You know the saying that the great ones of the *Meshwesh* are guarding me (v.10) daily. And you shall cause to be filled a big *djeperet*-jar with sweet oil. And you shall cause it to be brought (v.11) to me. After they caused to say to you my message, saying that it was [...] who caused to go to him. (v.12) Look after the condition of the Chief Imtawy, after coming into the company of the Pharaoh, LPH, with one hundred (v.13) chariots [...] (v.14) [...] (v.15) [...] to the fortress/stronghold [...] (v.16) [...] watch [...]”⁴⁸

The use of the short formal introduction and the level of responsibility expected in P. BM EA 75019 suggest that the relationship between the sender and recipient of the letter is not easily definable, but two assertions can be made. Firstly, the lack of emotional overtones rules out the possibility of the recipient being Nedjemet, and, secondly, the expectation of the sender that all request acts he makes will immediately be completed upon the letter being received, confirm that the recipient was the socially subordinate individual in the relationship. Demarée acknowledges this and argues that it is difficult to determine who the general is communicating with here, either a junior close relative or a subordinate. He decides on the latter, stating:

“I suggest that the most likely candidate is the Scribe of the Necropolis Dhutmose, whose special position as a highly trusted associate of Piankh is well documented by several of the letters. If he were the intended recipient, this would also explain the presence of this letter among a group of documents, many of which are clearly connected to him. However, these are no more than plausible possibilities, and the letter itself contains no certain evidence/indication.”⁴⁹

The possibility that the recipient may have been a junior relative of Piankh, perhaps a son, fits far better with the established intimacy levels presented in the text. As will be examined now in the following section, letters sent by Piankh to Dhutmose only ever include a formal address, never any formal introduction, and as such, it is probably unlikely that the intended recipient of P. BM EA 75019 was the Scribe of the Necropolis Dhutmose. It certainly appears to be the case that Dhutmose was a trusted member of the general’s administration team, but by employing the modern term ‘associate’ to define the relationship between the general and his scribe implies a far higher degree of equality between the two men than may have existed in a traditional superior/subordinate relationship.

3.1 The Relationship between Piankh and Dhutmose

Due to the high frequency of letters that have survived written by the Scribe Dhutmose, a rare insight into the relationship he shared with his direct superior

47 Demarée (2006: 18).

48 Translation by Demarée (2006: 18–19).

49 Demarée (2006: 18).

Piankh can be explored. All the letters analysed in this section were written around Regnal Year 29 of Ramesses XI when Dhutmose was situated in southern Egypt, travelling between Thebes, Elephantine, and Nubia. The first group of letters to be examined are those written by Dhutmose to his family back in Thebes in order to inform them about his situation whilst absent from his home. In P. Turin Cat. 1972, Dhutmose describes his journey south and his relationship with the general:

P. Turin Cat. 1972:

*r-nty tw=j spr=k r p3y=j hry j3 j,jr=j gmj (5) jw dj=f jwj w^c tzm r t3y=j jw=w gmj=j <m>-t3-
mtr n (6) Db3 jw=j ph=f r dmj 3bw jw=f dd n=j r-dd ky zp bn jw=k jy (7) j.n=f n=j jw=f dj.t
n=j q.w hnk.t m p3y=j shr.w-n-hr-h3.t jw=f dd n=j hsj (8) Mnt.w*

“As follows: I have reached my superior. Oh, I discovered that (5) he had sent⁵⁰ a *tsm-boat*⁵¹ to collect me when they found me in the middle of (6) Edfu and then I met him in the town of Elephantine, where he said to me, ‘Another time and you would not have had to come’⁵² (7), so he said to me. Then he gave to me bread and beer according to my⁵³ previous custom,⁵⁴ and he said to me ‘Praise to (8) Montu⁵⁵,’⁵⁶

In the above information act utilised by Dhutmose to notify his family of his safe arrival in Elephantine, he describes his journey, which perhaps involved him arriving at Edfu on his own accord and then the general supplying a boat for the remainder of the way south. The use of the phrase ‘Then he gave to me bread and beer according to my previous custom,’ denotes a regular meeting between the two men. This idea is then reinforced in the phrase by the inclusion of *shr.w-n-hr-h3.t*, ‘previous custom’, and perhaps the two men even shared this meal together before praising the Theban warrior god Montu. The act of sharing food is highly intimate,⁵⁷ and if it is indeed the case that the two men shared a meal together on a regular basis, then it certainly

50 Note the difference in translation by Wente (1990: 185) “I have found that he has made to send a *tsm-boat*”; this is due to the preterite circumstantial followed by a subjunctive, discussed by Junge (2005: 219).

51 Porten et al. (1996: 61) comment that this type of boat is unknown from other sources.

52 Porten et al. (1996: 61, no. 9) state “does this mean that the ‘superior’ comforts Thutmose in reassuring him that he will not employ him for another warlike enterprise in the future?”. Perhaps this is the case, but the authors do not consider why this phrase is included. Černý, Groll & Eyre (1978: 270, ex. 738) translate this as a question, “Will you not come another time?”.

53 Wente (1990: 185) translates “our”, which alters the meaning significantly.

54 Porten et al. (1996: 61, no. 10) claim that this bread and beer are the same as the provisions given to Dhutmose in P. BM EA 10326 (rt.11–12), yet this seems doubtful since more than one letter discusses Dhutmose receiving provisions, as discussed below in main text. This is the only occurrence of food and a blessing in the Late Ramesside Letters, strongly suggesting that they ate the food after they blessed it.

55 Another possible translation of this is given by the *TLA*: “Möge Mont <dich> begünstigen”, as well as Porten et al. (1996: 61), “May Monthu favour (you)”.

56 Černý (1939: 7); Wente (1967: 24 & 1990: 185); Černý, Groll & Eyre (1978: 291, ex. 791, 378, ex. 1061); Porten et al. (1996: 61).

57 Scholliers (2001: 7); Wendrich (2010: 211).

indicates the exalted position of Dhutmose before his superior.⁵⁸ Sharing food also appears in another Late Ramesside Letter, P. BM EA 75020, *rt.10*, in which reference is made to the sender and recipient of the letter being ‘dinner companions’.⁵⁹ Here the act of sharing food is in itself an example of a politeness strategy used to diffuse tension between the two interlocutors after a dispute. In P. BM EA 75020, reference is made to the sender and recipient being ‘dinner companions’ in order to stress the shared, positive history between the two men, and, by implication, the long standing friendship that exists between them. For Dhutmose to regularly share food with his superior indicates that they too shared a far closer relationship than the rigid definition of the superior/subordinate relationship status may initially imply.

It is clear that Piankh as the socially superior individual was expected not only to provide transportation for the scribe but also daily rations of bread and beer; a sentiment reiterated in the next two extracts:

P. BN 199 V–IX+196 V+198 IV:

jw=j spr r p3y=j hry r (5) [...] jw=f šzp n h3.t jw=f jrj.t n=j nfr nb jw=f (6) [...] jy wn jw=j tttt jrm=k hr nfr.w (7) [...] nfr m h3.tj=k jw=k jy jw=f dd n=j jw=k [...] (8) [...] t h(n)q.t m-mn.t jw=f jtj=j r p3y=j (9) [...] c3 m-dj bt3 m-b3h p3y=j hry

“I have reached my superior at (5) [...] he received me upon arrival and did every good thing for me. He (said to me) (6) “[... If you had not⁶⁰] come, then I would have argued with you. Now, good (things?) (7) [...] goodness in your heart and have come”. He said to me, “You shall [...] (8) [...] bread and beer daily”. He took me to my (9) [...] great because of/for an offence before my superior.”⁶¹

P. BM EA 10326:

hr tw=j m-šs zp-2 m-c p3y=j hry bw-jrj=f nnj (11) n=j di=f mjnj n=j w^c mdq.t r-jwd hrw 5⁶² 5 q.w-n-wnm m-mn.t w^c nw jw=f šzp (12) 5 hnw n h(n)q.(t) m-mn.t m p3y=f b3k.w⁶³

“Now, I am all right with my superior! He does not neglect me. (11) He has caused to gift me with one *mdq.t*-vessel every five days,⁶⁴ five ordinary loaves daily, and a *nw*-vessel, which receives (12) five *hin*-measures of beer daily, from his wages.”⁶⁵

58 The *Maxims of Ptahhotep* (P. Prisse, *rt.6.11–7.2*) does provide some guidance on the correct way of eating with one’s superior, although the state of the superior/subordinate relationship is not referred to. I am grateful for the reviewer of this article for pointing out this reference.

59 Demarée (2006: 20). A reference is also made to dinner companions in P. DeM IV, *rt.6–12*: “Am I not your old eating companion? A man is happy when he is with his old eating companion. Possessions are good new, but friends are better old”, see Sweeney (1998: 108, also 111).

60 Reconstructed by Wente (1990: 186).

61 Černý (1939: 5); Wente (1967: 21 & 1990: 186).

62 In *r-jwd hrw 5* note the placement of the ‘5’ after the associated noun, such as is normally found in expressions of time (Gardiner 1957: 194; Černý, Groll & Eyre 1978: 86–87). *Contra TLA*: “5 an jedem Tag”, it seems likely that *m-mn.t* would be used instead to express ‘5 daily’.

63 The *TLA* translates *m-mn.t m p3y=f b3k.w* as “täglich als meinen Lohn”, even though the possessive article is *p3y=f*. For further information on *b3k.w*-payments, see Bleiberg (1988: 168); Janssen (1993: 81–94); Haring (1997: 16); Warburton (1997: 237–239).

64 Translation supported by Černý, Groll & Eyre (1978: 221, ex. 586).

Concerns surrounding the condition of this superior/subordinate relationship are evident in the extracts above. Dhutmose appears to be keen to ensure that the relationship remains within a traditional superior/subordinate equilibrium. Whilst some of the text in P. BN 199 V–IX+196 V+198 IV has lost its *Sitz im Leben* and is partially damaged, it is apparent that Dhutmose is writing to his son stressing the close relationship he shares with his superior, but the exact nature of the great offence, mentioned in line *rt.9*, is not clear. The two extracts demonstrate the importance of public ‘face’ within the relationship of superior and subordinate. From the viewpoint of Dhutmose, the scribe wishes to show the positive side of his relationship with the general and reinforce his elevated position with him, in order to support his social standing among his family and community members. Yet, the extracts also help to reinforce the public ‘face’ of Piankh, as the letters sent by Dhutmose concerning him are never negative or critical towards his superior. This appears to be a mechanism of politeness in the letters, threats or ‘face-threatening’ acts, i.e. negative comments, cannot be issued socially upwards. They can certainly be issued to those socially inferior, as demonstrated by Dhutmose in P. BN 198 III, v.3, when he strongly rebukes the laziness of an official left in charge of the Theban necropolis in his absence.⁶⁶

The perception of the wider community towards the relationship between Piankh and Dhutmose also plays an important role in the maintenance of the public ‘face’ of Dhutmose. In two separate letters sent to Dhutmose, the senders of the letters make reference to this relationship. The first extract is taken from P. BN 198 I, a letter sent to Dhutmose by an unknown official at Medinet Habu:⁶⁷

P. BN 198 I:

hr ptr r mh wd.yt 2 jw=k jrm p3y=k hry (16) jw bw jrj=k h3b n=j c=k tw=j ndnd=k [...] (v.1)
r(m)l nb nty jy jm m-hd mtw=w dd n=j (v.2) tw=k m-šs sw nfr m-b3h p3y=f hry hr=w n=j
 (v.3) *mtr n=j.*

“Now, see, it is the second campaign⁶⁸ that you are with your superior, (16) yet you have not written to me about your condition. I am inquiring about you [...] (v.1) from everyone who comes downstream from there (where you are), and they tell me (v.2) that you are all right. ‘He is good before his superior’, so they tell me, (v.3) confirming (it) to me.”⁶⁹

In the second letter, P. BM EA 10419, *rt.8–v.1*, the Scribe of the Estate of Amun-Ra Hafy also writes to Dhutmose to inform him, “Now, you are all right before the general, there is no harm done to him. Now, no (v.1) man has reported you before him either”.⁷⁰ These two separate statements not only reassure Dhutmose of the continuation of his public reputation and the maintenance of his own self-image within his

65 Černý (1939: 17–18); Wente (1967: 37 & 1990: 191); Černý, Groll & Eyre (1978: 317, ex. 869).

66 Wente (1967: 81–2 & 1990: 172–173.); Ridealgh (2013).

67 Wente (1967: 17, 78).

68 The second campaign is discussed by Thijs (1998: 99–103).

69 Černý (1939: 66); Wente (1967: 78 & 1990: 199); Černý, Groll & Eyre (1978: 323, ex. 889, 443, ex. 1206).

70 Translation by Janssen (1991: 18).

wider community, but also act as a positive politeness strategy. By complementing Dhutmose on his good standing before the general, it reduces the threat to the scribe's 'positive-face',⁷¹ and promotes good relations between the sender and recipient of the letter. This is a strategy present in the Late Ramesside Letters that is only used between men of equal stature or subordinates to their superiors, and generally the two individuals need to be well-acquainted with one another to fully utilise this politeness strategy.

3.2 Letters Sent by Piankh to Dhutmose

The second group of letters under consideration here concern those sent by Piankh to Dhutmose⁷². Predominantly, these letters are task orientated, adhering to the stringent superior/subordinate format, yet subtle praises are apparent in the letters, reinforcing a close professional relationship between the two men:

P. BN 197 III:

p3 h3b j.jrj=k r-dd jry=j r-r wpw.t nb.t shn.w (4) nb<.w> n p3y<=j> nb nty r-jwd=j bn tw=j <hr> nny j.n=k sw (5) m-sš p3 j.jrj=k j.jrj=k m-mj.tt m-dwn zp-2 wnn <t3y=j> šc.t (v.1) spr r=k jw=k r-r wpw.t nb.t shn nb jnk nty (v.2) r-jwd=k mtw=k jrj=w m-dj gmj=j n=k bt3.w [space] (v.3) jh rh=k sw

“As for you having sent word saying ‘I have carried out every task and all the commissions of my lord, which are my responsibility:⁷³ I am not idle’,⁷⁴ so you said. It is (5) all right, what you have done. You should henceforth act the same way!⁷⁵ When my letter (v.1) reaches you, you will carry out every commission and every task of mine, which (v.2) have been given to you and complete them. Do not let me find fault with you. (v.3) Oh! You should know it.”⁷⁶

In this letter, Piankh repeats a previous statement made by the Scribe Dhutmose, and then praises his commitment to quickly fulfil the request acts issued to him. The manner in which Dhutmose formats the initial request, adding the phrase “I am not idle”, counteracts the direct threat made by superiors to their subordinates not to neglect their orders seen in other letters such as P. BM EA 75018, v.7, P. BN 199 I, *rt.4*, P. BN 196 IV, *rt.6*. This type of threat is intended to ‘encourage’ subordinates to

71 As discussed above, ‘positive-face’ acts reflect the aspiration that the wants of every member are desirable to (at least some) others. Conversely, ‘negative-face’ acts concern the desire by every member that their actions be unimpeded by others. The terms ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ are not used to stress that one is good and the other bad, merely that they are polar opposites of each other in terms of human interactional behaviour.

72 Dhutmose is often referred to in the letters by a nickname: Tjaroy.

73 Sweeney (2001: 167).

74 Translation for ‘idle’ comes from Sweeney’s interpretation of *nny* (*Wb* 2, 275.2–8; *TLA* Lemma number 84820; meaning to be weary/to be inert/to subside). Note that this is in opposition to Wentz (1990: 184), who translates it as ‘neglectful’, which implies a different connotation. Černý, Groll & Eyre (1978: 305, ex. 827) also translate it as ‘neglectful’.

75 See Sweeney (2001: 167, no. 92).

76 Černý (1939: 34); Wentz (1967: 52 & 1990: 184); Černý, Groll & Eyre (1978: 123, ex. 434); Sweeney (2001: 167).

complete the request act made to them by their social superiors, and appears to be part and parcel of the superior/subordinate relationship, reaffirming the social position between the sender and recipient of the letter. Sweeney states that to a certain extent this threat in this particular context actually functions as an indirect command, influencing the recipient to take a certain course of action.⁷⁷ For Dhutmose to acknowledge this linguistic mechanism in a previous letter to his superior, he demonstrates his obedience: no threat had to be issued for him to complete his tasks. Yet in order to motivate Dhutmose further, and ensure that all request acts issued by Piankh are met, the general issues the subsequent threat “Oh! You should know it”,⁷⁸ the impact of the phrase is heightened by its placement on the papyrus itself, where it appears on a separate line clearly spaced away from the rest of the text, perhaps in order to visually accentuate the request act.⁷⁹ This phrase is used to reinforce the emphasis behind the need to complete the tasks issued in the request act, but the force behind the threat is significantly reduced by implying that Dhutmose already knows these tasks, hence then it may possibly be a linguistic term to reinforce social superiority. The same phrase is present in the extract below in order to reinforce the request act:

P. BN 197 V:

wnn t3y=j š^c.t spr r=k (3) jw=k dj.t jnj.tw nh3j n hbs (4) jz m ^crq.w qn.w jw (v.1) m-dj [...] jw jw jrj=w (v.2) m pry.w r wt r(m)t jm=w tw=k rh (v.3) p3y mš^c nty tw=j m n^cj r jrj=f (v.4) j.3s st n=j m-dj ^ch^c=w gr mntk (v.5) jh rh<=k> sw

“When my letter reaches you, (3) you will organise a lot of old clothes (4) to be brought, consisting of many bundles (v.1). Do not [be idle!].⁸⁰ Then they will be used (v.2) as strips in order to bandage the men with them. You should know (v.3) about this expedition, which I journeying to undertake.⁸¹ (v.4) Quickly send them to me. Also, do not let them wait on your part. (v.5) Oh! You should know of it.”⁸²

P. Berlin 10487 is a highly significant letter, as Piankh not only instructs Dhutmose to aid his wife Nedjemet in the interrogation of two *Medjay*, and then their subsequent execution, but he also makes reference to the pharaoh. Piankh uses this letter to reassure Dhutmose of his conduct, emphasising this reassurance through the inclusion once again of the exclamatory *zp-2*:

77 Sweeney (2001: 158).

78 Sweeney (2001: 167) translates this phrase as “Do take note”.

79 The same phenomenon appears in P. BN 197 V, v.5. Perhaps this is a visual reinforcement of the request act issued by a superior individual?

80 Reconstruction here based on use of *nny* in P. BN 197 III, *rt.4*.

81 Translation supported by Černý, Groll & Eyre (1978: 298–299, ex. 815).

82 Černý (1939: 35); Wente (1967: 52 & 1990: 182).

P. Berlin 10487:

*kt md(w).t jr Pr-ʕ ʕ.w.s (9) j.jrj=f ph pʕy tʕ mj-jh zp-2 jh jr Pr-ʕ ʕ.w.s (v.1) hry njm m-r-ʕ
hr m-dj pʕy 3 ʕbd n hrw (v.2) j.jrj=<=j> dj.t wsh.t jw bw-pw=k dj.t jnj.tw n=j wʕ dbn nbw wʕ
dbn ḥd (v.3) m-mj.t sw m-ʕs zp-2 m-dj hʕ.ty=k <m-sʕ> pʕy jrj=f*

“Another matter: as for Pharaoh, LPH, (9) how will he ever reach this land? Now, as for Pharaoh, LPH, (v.1) whose superior is he anyway?⁸³ Now, as for these 3 full months (v.2) that I sent a barge⁸⁴, you have not sent me one *deben* of gold or one *deben* of silver (v.3) either: it is all right! Do not worry yourself about what he did.”⁸⁵

This extract refers to the pharaoh Ramesses XI, challenging his position as supreme ruler in southern Egypt. Piankh states “Now, as for Pharaoh, LPH, whose superior is he anyway?”, suggesting that Ramesses XI no longer had any real control over the Theban area towards the twilight of his reign (Regnal Year 29 of Ramesses XI).⁸⁶ To make such open comments towards the pharaoh in a letter to a scribe indicates not only a high level of trust between Piankh and his subordinate, but also reinforces the lack of Pharonic power in the Theban area, further demonstrating the instability of the central administration at the end of the New Kingdom.⁸⁷

The letters in this section demonstrate the expectations on both sides of the superior/subordinate relationship, and in some ways the idea of reciprocity is relevant here. Piankh expects a certain level of commitment and professionalism from Dhutmose, whilst in return Piankh is expected to supply Dhutmose with his daily needs and provide the scribe some degree of protection from his status. Reciprocity is, thus, not limited to relationships with the divine or the king,⁸⁸ but appears in lower

83 Sweeney (2001: 145) comments that rhetorical questions are a feature of superior style language. Junge (2005: 168) translates the passage as “And as for pharaoh — whose master still?”, whilst Černý, Groll & Eyre (1978: 36, ex. 86) translate the passage as “As for pharaoh, l.p.h., whose lord is he still?”, but then translate it differently twice later in the book: “But Pharaoh (l.p.h), after all, whose chief is he?” (1978: 139, ex. 478) and “And as for Pharaoh, whose master (is he) still?” (1978: 557, ex. 1596).

84 This follows Sweeney’s (2001: 80) translation, *contra*: Cassonnet (2000: 37–38).

85 Černý (1939: 36); Wente (1967: 53 & 1990: 183); Sweeney (2001: 80, 145).

86 Although it initially appears that the authority of Ramesses XI had very little impact in Thebes during the majority of his reign, it was, however, still present, and incidentally remained present in the documentation during the *whm-ms.wt* period. Documentation suggests that Ramesses XI remained responsible for appointing key positions in Thebes in Regnal Year 17, and members of the tomb robberies tribunals were all functionaries of the king (Lull 2006: 40–42). Ramesses XI continued to appear in documentation after Regnal Year 19, demonstrating that he remained active in Upper Egypt after the introduction of the *whm-ms.wt* period. The king is recorded in P. BM EA 10383, *rt.3.4*, as having been present in Thebes in Year 2 of the *whm-ms.wt* (Regnal Year 21), and the royal court is alluded to in one of the Late Ramesside Letters, which is dated after this period (P. BM EA 10430, *rt.5*). Lull (2006: 60) estimates that Ramesses XI died in Regnal Year 33 or Year 14 of the *whm-ms.wt*. A stele from Regnal Year 27 of his reign at Abydos (CGC 25745) indicates that the period of renewal was not completely institutionalised, as even on his own monuments the regnal years of Ramesses XI were preferred instead of the *whm-ms.wt*.

87 Commentary on this passage is provided by Wente (1990: 171); see also, no. 7 above.

88 Lichtheim (1983: 31–34); Assmann (1989: 73 & 1995: 60–69, 111); Janssen (1994: 136); Baines (2001: 16).

levels of the social stratum as well, suggesting that it was an essential aspect to the maintenance of relationships of any nature.⁸⁹

A manifestation of the relationship between Piankh and Dhutmose is found in the letters between the Second Priest of Amun-Ra Hekanefer and Dhutmose. Hekanefer was the second son of the General Piankh,⁹⁰ and appears alongside his father in a graffito found in Luxor temple.⁹¹ As his role of Second Priest, Hekanefer would have been deputy to his father who became High Priest of Amun in Regnal Year 26. Hekanefer appears as the sender of two letters, P. BM EA 10300 and P. Turin 1974, both of which are dated after the appointment of Piankh to the position of High Priest of Amun.⁹² In P. BM EA 10300, Hekanefer writes to Dhutmose⁹³ utilising an introduction full of emotional sentiment:

P. BM EA 10300:

*m ḥn-wd3-snb m ḥs(w).t Jmn-r^c nwt ntr.w tw=j dd n (3) ntr nb ntr.t nb(.t) nty tw=j znj hr
hr=w jmj n=k ḥn-wd3-snb ḥ^c.w q³ (4) j3w.t 3.t ḥs(w).t qn.w-ḥ3 m-b3h Jmn-r^c nswt ntr.w
(5) p3y=k nb r^c nb zp-2*

“In life, prosperity, and health, and in praise of Amun-Ra, king of the gods. Every day I speak to (3) every god and every goddess whom I pass to let you live, prosper, and be healthy, to have a long lifetime, (4) a great and good old age and a vast amount of favour before Amun-Ra, the king of the gods, (5) your lord!”⁹⁴

After the formal introduction, the letter includes a request act for more information on Dhutmose’s health. Health-related request and information acts provide an emotional link between the sender and recipient, reminding both of the expectations each individual shares concerning the other. Yet this positive politeness strategy only appears in letters where the sender and recipient are well acquainted (for example, P. Turin Cat. 1973, *rt*.11–13, sent by Dhutmose to his son); letters sent by superiors to their subordinates, and *vice-versa*, do not include such request or information acts (unless they are related), only retaining the references to health in the formulaic introduction and conclusion of the letter. The request and information acts are used to demonstrate care and familiarity; the structure of the request itself is generally irrelevant, what is more important is that the request is made; hence it is often used in letters between family members. In the same section Hekanefer requests Dhutmose to pray for his safe return, something that is normally more characteristic of the letters sent by Dhutmose to his friends and family:

89 On a similar note, Sweeney (1998: 107) highlights the use of gift-giving between friends (social equals) in surviving texts from Deir el-Medina, in order to reinforce their relationships, but this does not seem to occur in the Late Ramesside Letters.

90 Kees (1953–1958: 167, 318); Černý (1973: 382).

91 Daressy (1893: 32).

92 Lull (2006: 66).

93 In the two letters sent by Hekanefer, P. BM EA 10300 and P. Turin 1974+1945, note the different spellings of Tjaroy, perhaps the two letters were not written by Hekanefer but dictated by him. This relates to a much wider problem concerning authorship of the letters and its implications on written discourse, which falls beyond the present remit of this article.

94 Černý (1939: 38); Wente (1967: 55 & 1990: 181).

P. BM EA 10300:

wnn t3y=j šc.t spr r=k jw=k dd n (6) Jmn-r^c nswt ntr.w Mwt Hnsw Jmn-hnmt-r-nhḥ ntr.w nb.w W3s.t (7) sdj <wj> jnj wj r nwt jw=j ḥnh.kwj mtw=j mh qnj (8) jm=k mtw=k tm rwj=k h3b n=j c=k nfr snb=k

“When my letter reaches you, you shall say to (6) Amun-Ra, king of the gods, Mut, Khonsu, Amun-United-with-Eternity, and all the gods of Thebes, (7) ‘Save me and bring me back to Thebes alive’, and I may fill (my) embrace (8) with you. And do not cease to send word to me about your condition. May your health be good.”⁹⁵

This level of sentiment is continued in the second part of the letter in which Hekanefer requests more information on Dhutmose’s state of being:

P. BM EA 10300:

wnn p3y=j šc.t spr r=k jw=k dd n Jmn jnj <wj> mtw=k tm (v.6) rwj=k h3b n=k c=k nfr snb=k

“When my letter reaches you, you shall speak to Amun to bring me back. And do not (v.6) cease to send word about your condition. May your health be good.”⁹⁶

The letter appeals to the ‘positive-face’⁹⁷ of Dhutmose by creating an emotional link between the sender and recipient through the use of the health-related request act,⁹⁸ this act reminds the recipient of the sender’s emotional connection. The increased intimacy in the superior/subordinate relationship between Piankh and Dhutmose is reinforced by the clear emotional ties between Hekanefer and Dhutmose; the generational divide between the two men reduces the impingement of their social division.

Hekanefer writes again to Dhutmose in P. Turin Cat. 1974+1945. Once more the letter is characterised by an emotional formal introduction. This time, however, after Hekanefer explains that he has been praying for Dhutmose, the context is more family-related discussing a member of Dhutmose’s household, Hemetsheri:

P. Turin Cat. 1974+1945:

r-nty Hm(.t)-šrj.t ḥnh.tw sw m ḥnh-[wd3-snb] (v.4) m-dj 3y h3.tj=k m-s3=st mntk p3 nty jb=st r ptr=k r sdm c=k m-[mn.tt]

“As follows: Hemetsheri is alive, she is alive, [prospering and healthy]. (v.4) Do not worry about her! You are the one whom she desires to see and to hear about daily.”⁹⁹

Both letters suggest, by utilising long emotional formal introductions, domestic request and information acts, and positive politeness mechanisms, that the sender and recipient were well-acquainted. The relationship between the two men resembles the

95 Černý (1939: 38); Wente (1967: 55 & 1990: 181). It is not uncommon in the Late Ramesside Letters to find that the letter was concluded and then reinitiated at a later date before being sent.

96 Černý (1939: 38); Wente (1967: 55 & 1990: 182). The same phrase exists in P. Turin Cat. 1974+1945, v.5.

97 See above, no. 71.

98 Also recognized by Sweeney (2001: 245).

99 Černý (1939: 40); Wente (1967: 56 & 1990: 182).

close professional relationship between Piankh and Dhutmose, but the generational divide allows for a more intimate manifestation of this relationship, expressed within the emotional overtones and domestic request acts concerning family.

3.3 Relationship Maintenance between Piankh and Other Officials of the Late Ramesside Letters

Beyond the close superior/subordinate relationship that exists between the general and Dhutmose, the relationships Piankh experiences with other members of the Late Ramesside Letters are more distant and formal. This section will highlight the concept of linguistic formality found in the Late Ramesside Letters. Formality is in itself a marker for social distance. The more socially removed the sender and recipient of the letter were, the more formal the construction and language of the letter. Hence, formality is not a separate concept to politeness but rather a manifestation of it. Formality is after all the inclination of interlocutors to respect underlying adherences to letter construction in order to ensure successful communication. In P. Berlin 10488, Piankh sends a letter to the administrator Payshuuben concerning the interrogation of two *Medjay*. The letter expresses their overly formal relationship since Piankh includes no polite forms or praises, as he does with Dhutmose, and utilises a succession of direct request acts including the use of professional threats to reiterate the urgency behind the request acts. Piankh is able to behave in such a manner because of his vastly elevated social position:

P. Berlin 10488:

sdm<=>j> md(w).t nb j.h3b=k hr=w p3 dd j.jrj=k (3) t3y md(w).t p3y Md3.y 2 r-dd¹⁰⁰ dd=w n3y md(w).t j.jr w^c (4) jrm Ndm<.t> s3 T3ry m-mj.tt mtw=k h3b mtw=k dj.t jnj.tw (5) p3y Md3.y 2 r pr=j mtw=k jnj ph.wj n3y=w md(w).t m-s3 zp-2 (6) mtw=k hdb mtw=k h3^c.w p3y mw m grh.jw (v.1) m-dj ^cm r(m)t nb p3y t3 <j>m=w

“I have heard every matter that you have sent word about. (As for) the remark you made about (3) this matter of these 2 *Medjay*, saying, ‘They said these words’,¹⁰¹ join up (4) with Nedjemet and the Scribe Tjaroy (Dhutmose) as well, and you shall send word, and have (5) these 2 *Medjay* brought to my house, and you shall get to the bottom of their words properly!¹⁰² (6) And you shall kill them, and throw them [into] the water by night, but (v.1) do not allow anyone to know about them.”¹⁰³

The rigid criteria that support the superior/subordinate dynamic require more adherence the further separated socially the superior and subordinate become. A good example of this is the relationship demonstrated between the general and Butehamun,

100 See the discussion by Sweeney (2001: 172, no. 134) on *r-dd*.

101 Černý, Groll & Eyre (1978: 328, ex. 898) translate this direct speech as “May they speak their case?”.

102 The translation of this phrase is discussed by Sweeney (2001: 173, no. 137). Wentz (1990: 183) translates *m-s3* as “in short order”, but here the translation has followed the one proposed by Sweeney.

103 Černý (1939: 53–54); Wentz (1967: 69 & 1990: 183); Černý, Groll & Eyre (1978: 361, ex. 1024); Sweeney (2001: 172–173).

who, in spite of being the son of Dhutmose, had a far more formal relationship with the general than his father. In P. BM EA 10326 Dhutmose cautions his son to obey Piankh absolutely, even to the extent of excluding himself from the request act issued to Butehamun:

P. BM EA 10326:

hr mdwj=j m-dj Hr-n-Jmn-pn^c=f hr¹⁰⁴ p³ shn n p³y=k hry (v.14) jmj mdwj=f m-dj=k gr mnt¹⁰⁵ jw=tn h³p.t=f r=j jw m-jr mdwj m-b³h ky

“Now, I have spoken with Heramenpenaf concerning the commission¹⁰⁶ of your superior. (v.14) Let him speak with you also himself, then you (pl.) shall keep it secret from me. Do not speak about it in front of another.”¹⁰⁷

P. BM EA 10375, a letter sent by key necropolis officials, including Butehamun, to the general, is one of the best examples of the formality of the superior/subordinate relationship. Such formality can be found in older letter groups. For example, consider the use of fawning language employed in the Middle Egyptian letter P. Hekanakht 3.¹⁰⁸ This letter demonstrates that linguistic conventions employed in the Late Ramesside Letters had their foundation in earlier linguistic tradition. In the text Hekanakht is careful to reduce the imposition to the public ‘face’ of his superior, the Overseer of Lower Egypt Herunefer, by including a suitable formal introduction and linguistic mechanisms that refer to Herunefer’s superior status. The same considerations can be found in P. BM EA 10375, which begins with a very extensive formal introduction (rt.1–9). The concluding line of the formal introduction containing the blessings differs from those found between family members and close friends. Instead of the phrase *mtw=j mh qnj jm=k*, “and I may fill (my) embrace with you”, the phrase *mtw=n mh jr.t¹⁰⁹=t}n m ptr=k*, “and we may fill our eye(s) with the sight of you”, is used.¹¹⁰ This alteration in the address of an individual vastly superior to the senders of the letter reaffirms their social position, as intimacy is closely linked with social status, and, as such, it would be incoherent to the necropolis officials to have intimate contact with their superior. Incidentally, the use of *mtw=n mh jr.t=t}n m ptr=k* is only

104 Junge (2005: 191) adds an ‘n’ here, but the text in Černý (1939: 20) is unclear.

105 Junge (2005: 191) writes this as *mnt=f*.

106 *shn* has no clear plural strokes in the text itself so it has been translated in the singular form here.

107 Černý (1939: 20); Wente (1967: 38 & 1990: 192). Junge (2005: 191) translates the phrase as “Now, I have talked to Harnamanapnaf about the orders of your superior. Make him talk to you himself, (but) keep it secret concerning me without talking in anybody else’s presence”. Where as Wente (1990: 192) translates the section as “And I have spoken with Heramenpenaf concerning the orders of your superior. Let him speak with you, also, (but) you both shall keep it secret from me. And don’t talk in the presence of another”.

108 Wente (1990: 62).

109 It is unclear whether this *jr.t* should be the same as the one in P. Berlin 10489, *rt.4*, but they are written differently in the text, so perhaps they should not be translated in the same way.

110 Černý (1939: 44); Wente (1967: 60 & 1990: 194). Sweeney (2001: 245) highlights this difference, but translates the phrase as “we may fill our gaze with the sight of you”.

used in conjunction with Piankh,¹¹¹ except in P. BM EA 75020, v.3. This may suggest a hierarchical connotation to the term. In contrast, the phrase *mtw=j mh qnj=j jm=k* is only used in letters sent to or by Dhutmose within the scope of the Late Ramesside Letters.¹¹² This adaptation of language to fit such a vast superior/subordinate relationship is also reflected in the opening lines of the main body of text:

P. BM EA 10375:

sdm=n md(w).t nb j.h3b n=n p3y=n nb¹¹³ hr=w p3 h3b j.jrj n=n (11) t3y šc.t m-dr.t Hrj p3 Šrdn p3y šms.w n p3y=n nb jw sš Bw-th-Jmn (12) d3j jw=f šzp st n=f m 3bd I šm.w sw 18¹¹⁴

“We have heard all the matters that our lord has sent to us. (As for) the sending to us of (11) this letter by the hand of Hori, the *Sherden*, this retainer of our lord, the Scribe Butehamun (12) ferried across and receive it from him in the first month of *šm.w*, day 18.”¹¹⁵

Here, the honorific form of ‘our lord’ (*p3y=n nb*) is used to stress the social distance between the necropolis officials and the general; it represents a direct grammatical encoding of the relative social status between the participants involved.¹¹⁶ Normally this honorific form is not included in the phrase ‘I/we have heard all the matters that you sent to me/us’ simply because this phrase is most commonly used between either superiors to their subordinates or between individuals of equal social status. The latter phrase is used to convey the necessary level of politeness when subordinates address their superiors; it is not possible for them to address them in the same manner as a family member or work colleague.

The letter also concludes in a more formal manner. Instead of the more frequently used *nfr snb(=k)*,¹¹⁷ the conclusion formulae generally used between socially equal individuals, here an extended blessing is used, and then details are stated about the intended transport method of the letter:

111 See P. BM EA 10375, *rt.9* and P. Berlin 10489, *rt.4*. P. Berlin 10489 is the letter sent by Piankh to his wife Nedjemet, perhaps he uses this line to reinforce Nedjemet’s higher social status, or perhaps it is a linguistic mechanism to denote their social status.

112 See P. Turin Cat. 1973, *rt.4*; P. Turin Cat. 1972, *rt.3–4*; P. Geneva D 407, *rt.9*, v.13; P. BM EA 10326, *rt.4–5*; P. BN 197 II, *rt.5*; P. Turin Unnumbered I, *rt.5*; P. BM EA 10417, *rt.7*; P. Phillipps, *rt.10*; P. Turin Cat. 1971, *rt.10*; P. Geneva D 192, *rt.6*; P. BM EA 10300, *rt.7*; P. Turin Cat. 1974, *rt.5*; P. BN 198 I, *rt.11*; P. Turin Cat. 2026, *rt.4*; P. BM EA 75020, *rt.5–6*; P. BM EA 75025, *rt.5*; P. BM EA 10411, *rt.6* and *rt.14*.

113 Note the placement of *nb* before the *=n* (Černý 1939: 44, line 16; also appears in 45, line 2; 48, line 3).

114 The *TLA* incorrectly reads the ‘18’ as ‘10’; see Černý (1939: 45, line 3).

115 Černý (1939: 44–45); Wente (1967: 60 & 1990: 194).

116 Brown & Levinson (1987: 276); also noted by Sweeney (2001: 234).

117 Other variants of this form do exist in the Late Ramesside Letters, see P. BM EA 10412, v.11, *nfr snb=l*, for the female form of the phrase, and P. BN 196 II, v.5, *nfr snb=k hsw.t*, “May your health be good, favoured one”.

P. BM EA 10375:

hr jry n=k Jmn-r^c nswt ntr.w nfr nb bn jw=k j3t m nkt jw=j h3b r rdj.t (v.15) 6m p3y=n nb m-dr.t Md3.y Hd-nht n p3 hr m 3bd 1 šm.w sw 29

“Now, may Amun-Ra, king of the gods, do for you every good thing and you shall not suffer in regards to anything. I am writing to inform (v.15) our lord through the hand of the *Medjay* Hadnakht of the necropolis in the first month of *šm.w*, day 29.”¹¹⁸

On a side note, the use of *nfr snb(=k)* in the formal conclusion of the letters demonstrates how embedded health-related concerns were in daily communication, complimenting other references to health found in the formal introductions.¹¹⁹ The concluding phrase *nfr snb(=k)* predominantly appears at the end of a letter or subsection of a letter, and is used in a similar way in closing a letter as the phrase ‘all the best’ is employed in the modern western world within the English language. It acts as a polite conclusion to the communication, or, as some scholars recognise the phrase, as a blessing to the recipient.¹²⁰ Sweeney states that “this blessing tends to be used between friends, rather than in an official context”,¹²¹ but this is not always the case in the Late Ramesside Letters. For example, P. Cairo CG 58061 is clearly an official letter, but between individuals who were likely acquainted, in which the sender of the letter advises the recipient on the direct course of action in a very formal manner.¹²² This suggests that the phrase *nfr snb(=k)* was, by the end of the Twentieth Dynasty, a formal characteristic of letter writing, predominantly used between socially equal individuals, subordinates to their superiors, and by related/acquainted individuals regardless of social status.¹²³

Returning to point, P. BM EA 10375 reflects the higher degree of formality required in the format of letters between subordinates and their direct superior. This is also apparent in the structure of request acts in the letter, an aspect particularly visible in letters attributed to Butehamun.¹²⁴ In her 1994 article, Sweeney argues that “though using a more limited repertoire of linguistic forms for making requests, [Butehamun] puts a great deal of effort into convincing the reader to comply with him”;¹²⁵ in essence, his request acts are far more elaborate. Sweeney argues that this elaborate request format was due to personal variance in language.¹²⁶

In response to Sweeney’s 1994 conclusions, this article demonstrates that whilst personal ‘approach’ may have contributed to the stylistic aspects of the letter by Butehamun, it cannot claim complete responsibility. As already stated, subordinate

118 Černý (1939: 48); Wente (1967: 61 & 1990: 195).

119 Bakir (1970: 41–54).

120 Bakir (1970: 66); Allam (1985: 23).

121 Sweeney (2001: 245).

122 Černý (1939: 62); Wente (1967: 75–76 & 1990: 202).

123 Demarée (2006: 10). The phrase also appears in other early Ramesside letters; see Sweeney (1998: 104, 106, 108).

124 The letter does acknowledge that there are multiple senders, but it seems likely that Butehamun did write the letter himself, and so it has been classified here as a letter sent by him, since it represents his language usage; see also Sweeney (2001: 100).

125 Sweeney (1994: 316).

126 Sweeney (1994: 316).

letter formats needed the essential element of fawning request acts in order to reduce the level of impingement to the intended superior recipient, and, hence, reduce any possible aggression that may result from the impingement. Butehamun, with his use of long, drawn out request acts, merely adheres to this principle. The level of experimental flamboyance of his communicative acts certainly displays personal language variance, but this cannot claim full responsibility for the manner in which the request act itself is constructed.

It seems that Sweeney to a certain extent later updates this view in her 2001 monograph. She categorise the following request act by Butehamun as an implied request:

P. BM EA 10375:

hr ptr h3b=k (v.10) r-dd wn w^c s.t m n3 s.t h3.wty¹²⁷ mtw=tn s3w t3y=st ht<m> j.jrj.t<=j> (v.11) jy j.n=f p3y=n nb tw=n jry shn.w j.jrj=n dj.t gmj=k sw w3h (v.12) grg.tw p3 nty tw=n rh sw mtw=k wdj s3 T3ry n pr hr r rdj.t jwj=f ptr=f (v.13) n=n w^c hy y3 tw=n dj.t smj jw=n htht jw bw rh=sn s.t rd.wj=n

“Now, see, you have sent word, (v.10) saying, ‘Open a place (tomb?) in the place of the ancestors, and you shall guard its seal until I have (v.11) returned’ so he said, our lord. We will carry out the commissions. We shall enable you to discover it — intact (v.12) and prepared — in the place which we know. And you should send the Scribe of the Necropolis Tjaroy; let him come so that he may look as (v.13) an inspector for us.¹²⁸ Oh, we tried to go but we turned back as we did not know the place to put our feet.”¹²⁹

In regards to this extract, Sweeney comments that “I suspect that the crew are so circumspect in their request (P. BM EA 10375, *rt.20*) because it is clear that Tjaroy went to Nubia at Piankh’s bidding ... Probably the crewmen are phrasing their request so indirectly in order to avoid antagonizing their superior”.¹³⁰ Yet she does not extend her discussion on imposition further, nor does she comment on the manner in which such request acts reflect and manifest wider principles of politeness. Rather the above extract demonstrates the main letter characteristics initiated when a subordinate must issue a request act towards their superior, none of which evolve from personal language usage. Here, Butehamun repeats a previous request made to him by Piankh, which involved securing an unopened royal tomb. This repetition of the original request act provides not only confirmation of the delivery of the request, but also acts as a buffer for the following request act. This is done in order to reduce the level of impingement, and provide an explanation for the request act, in this case the swift return of Dhutmose. The key principles of subordinate/superior letter formatting are adhered to, and once combined with the hierarchical pattern of letter construction,

127 See discussion by Černý, Groll & Eyre (1978: 52, ex. 125).

128 Wente (1990: 195) translates *r rdj.t jwj=f ptr=f n=n w^c hy* as “so that he may look for a marker for us”, but earlier had translated it as “so that he may look for an inspector for us” (1967: 61). *hy* seems to correspond to an actual position rather than a thing, see Černý (1973: 364) and Lesko (1982–1990 II: 98).

129 Černý (1939: 47); Wente (1967: 61 & 1990: 195); Černý, Groll & Eyre (1978: 416, ex. 1144).

130 Sweeney (2001: 57).

clearly demonstrates that these core politeness principles were not subject to personal variance, which only becomes apparent in the manner in which the request is made.

4 Concluding Remarks

It is clear that certain linguistic mechanisms are employed in the letters to support the relationships between the interlocutors.¹³¹ This implies that the construction of the Late Ramesside Letters was not dependent on personal language variance, but adhered to far more traditional scribal conventions, which taught and reaffirmed a notion of politeness with each generation. Thus, the notion of politeness goes far beyond an idea of individual politeness or ‘courtesy’. This study specifically looks at the relationships Piankh shared with his subordinates, revealing variations in the relationship category of superior/subordinate that have not previously been acknowledged. Once again this demonstrates that the phenomenon of politeness in Egyptian written communication is not just an example of personal language variance, but represents embedded social conventions when communicating with others, especially when power is biased in one direction. Dhutmose may have had a closer relationship with Piankh than his son, but it still remained a superior/subordinate relationship. In no way are these two men socially equal, regardless of whether they shared meals together or included more ‘familiar’ forms of linguistic mechanisms in their letter writing. Piankh certainly has a more intimate superior/subordinate relationship with Dhutmose than his son Butehamun, however, who must employ extreme versions of the linguistic mechanisms when communicating with his superior in order to reduce the level of imposition in their communication.¹³²

Not only does the relationship status between the superior and subordinate affect those directly involved, it also has wider implications on the local community and social networks. This notion is manifested in the relationship shared between Piankh and Dhutmose. In the letters sent by Dhutmose concerning Piankh, the scribe writes about his positive relationship with his superior, reinforcing both his professional status and maintaining his presentation of ‘face’ to his community. Additionally, simply by writing about the positive experiences with his superior, he perpetuates the ‘positive-face’ of Piankh himself; he is a good superior who treats Dhutmose well. Others also use this positive relationship as a linguistic mechanism when communi-

131 *Contra*: Sweeney (1994: 276).

132 Although not discussed in this article this does have chronological implications. The closer superior/subordinate relationship Dhutmose shared with Piankh confirms that they were contemporaries: there is no mention of Herihor in the Late Ramesside Letters. Butehamun appears to have had a far more formal superior/subordinate relationship with Piankh, yet seems to be connected with Herihor, as implied by practice letters found written by Butehamun to Herihor (Egberts 1997: 23–25; *contra*: James & Morkot 2010: 241–242), and references to Herihor’s name are found on the docketts on the substitute coffin of Ramesses II (Kitchen 1996: 252). The docketts refer to an unknown ‘Year 6’; Butehamun was involved in the reburials of kings during the early years of Smendes, so perhaps there is a connection. This would then support the notion that Piankh preceded Herihor, see Jansen-Winkel (1992: 22–37; 1997: 49–74 & 2006: 226); Lull (2006: 111–115); *contra*: Kitchen (1990: 23; 1996: 248–252 & 2009: 192–193); James & Morkot (2010: 256). The impact of the Late Ramesside Letters on the chronology of the end of the Twentieth Dynasty requires further study, hence, at this time it is only mentioned in a footnote.

cating with Dhutmose; it is a positive politeness strategy. By complementing Dhutmose on his good standing before the general, it reduces the threat to the scribe's 'positive-face', and promotes good relations between the interlocutors.

In essence, superior/subordinate relationships are built on 'expectations' in communications. The socially superior individual 'expects' to be treated in a certain way, and the socially inferior individual is 'expected' to comply with this to ensure successful communication. This can be seen in P. BM EA 10375, written by Butehamun and other necropolis workers. In order to reduce the imposition to Piankh's public 'face', certain linguistic mechanisms are expected, including fawning request acts, a long introduction, and various linguistic acknowledgments of Piankh's superior position. Yet, the 'expectations' of the superior/subordinate relationship are not limited to linguistic forms, but manifested in statements of reciprocity. This is especially prominent in the relationship between Piankh and Dhutmose, primarily as it is better documented in the surviving texts. Reciprocity is evident in their relationship via statements recording that in exchange for Dhutmose's professional skills as scribe and his loyalty, Piankh supplies Dhutmose with his daily needs and protection via his elevated social position. This study, however, is only representative of one letter corpus, and so a much larger remapping of social networking and relationship dynamics is needed, one that focuses on politeness mechanisms, in order to develop this notion further.

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