



## UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

### How to anchor reactions

*Interactional common ground, preference structure and (im)politeness in Roman comedy*

Risselada, R.

#### Publication date

2021

#### Document Version

Submitted manuscript

#### Published in

Linguisticae Dissertationes

[Link to publication](#)

#### Citation for published version (APA):

Risselada, R. (2021). How to anchor reactions: Interactional common ground, preference structure and (im)politeness in Roman comedy. In A. Martin Rodriguez (Ed.), *Linguisticae Dissertationes: Current Perspectives on Latin Grammar, Lexicon and Pragmatics. Selected Papers from the 20th International Colloquium on Latin Linguistics* (pp. 717-732). Ediciones Clásicas.

#### General rights

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

#### Disclaimer/Complaints regulations

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

## How to anchor reactions:

### Interactional common ground, preference structure and (im)politeness in Roman comedy

RODIE RISSELADA

University of Amsterdam (The Netherlands)

[r.risselada@uva.nl](mailto:r.risselada@uva.nl)

#### abstract

#### 1. Introduction

Studies of communicative anchoring and common ground, as well as those of politeness, are in essential ways oriented on the process of interaction and on the relationship between interlocutors. Thus e.g. Clark (1996), in his fundamental study on *Using language*, analyses conversations as ‘joint projects’: together, interlocutors are involved in and responsible for managing the interaction and maintaining common ground.<sup>1</sup> Each interlocutor ‘anchors’ his or her subsequent contribution in the ongoing interaction, which has been jointly created up to that moment – or maybe we should say: in the cognitive representation of the ongoing interaction that each of them has formed separately, but which we may reasonably assume to overlap and to contain a shared ‘common ground’. Furthermore, speakers shape their contributions with their addressees in mind. This was observed already in the sixties of the preceding century by Harvey Sacks, in his ground-breaking *Lectures on Conversation*,<sup>2</sup> when he discussed what he called the fundamental principle of *recipient design*, paraphrased more recently by Pomerantz & Heritage in the *Handbook of Conversation Analysis* as follows:

- (1) One of the most fundamental principles for speakers’ production of talk is recipient design, namely that speakers should orient to the recipients, in whatever ways are relevant for the matter at hand, in producing their talk and actions. (Pomerantz & Heritage, 2013: 211)

However, each new contribution is not only anchored in the (representation of the) preceding interaction and tailored towards its recipient, but it also makes changes to the interaction itself, in the sense of adding to it or changing its direction, its topic, and its tone. Moreover, each contribution creates new expectations and interactional obligations with regard to possible reactions by the interlocutor(s), and in doing so, one could say, it ‘anchors’ the sequel. It is this ‘forward oriented’ aspect of communicative anchoring and the interactional common ground on which it is based that I will focus on in my paper.

---

<sup>1</sup> Clark (1996), cf. esp. parts IV-VI.

<sup>2</sup> Sacks (1992). The two volumes of lectures were published posthumously by Gail Jefferson in 1992, but the lectures themselves were given in the period between 1964 and 1972 at the campuses of the University of California in Los Angeles and Irvine.

Both Sacks' principle of recipient design and Clark's view of conversation as a joint project are formulated primarily from the perspective of the speaker, and from a production perspective. The reaction of the recipient is only relevant in as far as it is anticipated or forestalled in the 'design' of the speaker's contribution in order to create common ground.<sup>3</sup> But if we want to investigate the common ground between interlocutors, which co-determines subsequent contributions, the perspectives of both (or all) interlocutors should be included. Reactions must be analysed not only in as far as they shape the first speaker's contribution by the principle of *recipient design*, but also in their own right, to analyse the underlying assumptions and expectations shared by interlocutors in their joint interactional process.

The approach which I will apply to this type of interactional common ground in Roman comedy is based on principles of conversational structure and preference, as developed within Conversation Analysis by, among others, Sacks and Schegloff.<sup>4</sup> First, I will briefly discuss in section 2 how Conversation Analysis deals with the relations between subsequent contributions in so-called adjacency pairs. In section 3, I will apply this type of analysis to various cooperative and less cooperative interactions in Plautus' *Menaechmi*, in order to illustrate how principles of sequencing, adjacency and preference co-determine the structure of interaction and the shape of individual reactions in specific interactions. I will conclude my paper with a few brief remarks about the various way in which preference structure could be connected to (im)politeness in future research (section 4).

## **2. Interactional common ground 1: adjacency pairs and preference structure**

According to Conversation Analysis, the basic sequence unit in conversational structure is the so-called adjacency pair, which consists of two subsequent turns of speaking, produced by different speakers, that are ordered in a non-arbitrary way and make up the first and second part of a specific discourse-functionally coherent pair. Well-known examples are: *greeting – greeting*, *offer – acceptance*, *question – answer*, and *request – compliance*. The 'adjacency' is no absolute requirement in the sense of 'really next to each other', since the second part may be suspended by the insertion of an embedded sequence, which usually serves to clarify an aspect of the first pair

---

<sup>3</sup> Besides, reactions are often used by the analysing linguist as a heuristic or analytic tool, to confirm his or her interpretation of a specific contribution, or to measure the success of strategies used by the preceding speaker.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Sacks (1987) and Schegloff (2007). For overviews of adjacency pairs, sequencing and preference, cf. Levinson (1983, ch. 6), who is critical of the descriptive power of the concept, and Tsui (1991), who defends it against Levinson; see furthermore Clark (1996, part V), and Pomeranz & Heritage (2013) and Stivers (2013) in the *Handbook of Conversation Analysis*. For earlier applications of Conversational Analysis to Latin discourse, see Kienpointner (1998) and, in connection with questions, Risselada (2005). An elaborate application to the comedies of Terence is the study by Müller (1997).

part or prepares for the second part. In a similar way, adjacency pairs as a whole can be expanded by preparatory pre-sequences and/or elaborated in post-sequences.

When a first pair-part is not at all followed by its corresponding second part, this is usually noticed by interlocutors. This implies the existence of certain general conversational norms and obligations that are shared by interlocutors, as was observed by Schlegoff (1968), who introduced the notion of conditional relevance:

(2a) Some items are, so to speak, “officially absent.” It is to address these problems that the notion of conditional relevance is introduced. By conditional relevance of one item on another we mean: given the first, the second is expectable; upon its occurrence it can be seen to be a second item to the first; upon its nonoccurrence it can be seen to be officially absent - all this provided by the occurrence of the first item. (Schegloff, 1968: 1083).

Cf. also Stivers (2013), who quotes this observation by Schlegoff and adds the following paraphrase of the notion of adjacency pair:

(2b) “... adjacency pair - the idea that with particular actions, social actors impose a normative obligation on co-interactants to perform a type-fitted response at the first possible opportunity” (Stivers 2013: 192).

The utterance of a particular contribution to the interaction clearly has ‘forward’ implications for its sequel: although addressees are, in theory, free to react as pleases them (or to react not at all), some reactions are more acceptable than others, not only in view of their specific content and context but also on a generally accepted, partly universal, partly culturally determined basis. We can regard this type of norms as part of a broader interactional common ground, which transcends the specific interactional common ground existing between individual interlocutors involved in a specific interaction. As I will briefly discuss at the end of my paper, these norms also some play a part in the assessment of politeness and impoliteness, and may trigger particular politeness strategies. But first we will turn to preference organisation as developed within Conversation Analysis.

Conversation Analysis not only claims the existence of commonly acknowledged functional pairs of adjacent turns of speaking, but in some adjacency pair the first pair-part can be connected to not one but (at least) two, different types of second parts, which are not equally satisfactory as reactions but can be ranked in terms of preference. Thus, an *invitation* is associated with two different second parts, viz. *acceptance* and *declination*, the former of which is, generally speaking, the preferred reaction, while the latter is the dispreferred reaction; likewise, *compliance* is the

preferred response to a *request* (or other directive, for that matter), while *refusal* is dispreferred.<sup>5</sup> For an overview of a number of preferred and dispreferred second pair-parts, see the table under (3):

(3) *adjacency pairs: first and second pair-parts, both preferred and dispreferred*<sup>6</sup>

first part	second part	dispreferred second part
summons	answer	
greeting	greeting	
statement, assessment	agreement	disagreement
question	informative answer	non-informative response
invitation	acceptance	declination
offer	acceptance	declination
proposal	acceptance	declination
request	compliance	refusal to comply
blame	denial	admission
compliment	thanks	

This asymmetry in preference organization co-determines also how reactions are shaped and uttered. While preferred second parts are usually prompt, to the point, and relatively brief, dispreferred reactions tend to be preceded by hesitation, pauses and sometimes apologies; they are often evasive and indirect, and usually longer than preferred reactions, because they include e.g. reference to circumstances of and motivation for the dispreferred reaction.

Sacks and Schegloff based their research on extended analyses of real, natural language data, taken from oral or telephone conversations, i.e. interaction types that are, of course, far removed from the (invented, literary) dialogues that we find in Roman comedy. Nevertheless, it is surprising how many of the observations made in Conversation Analysis are reflected in the interactional processes and structures that we find in comedy dialogues.<sup>7</sup> As an illustration I want to examine a number of

---

<sup>5</sup> I will not go into detail into the question whether preference organization should be regarded as an overall principle, irrespective of content and context, or may vary in individual cases. Thus, e.g. Pomerantz & Heritage (2013: 223-226) and Bousfield (2008: 236-240) claim that overall principles are oversimplistic, and that specific contents may lead to other preferences. An example is e.g. *self-criticism*, which, unlike other forms of blame, is preferably followed by *denial*. And while the preferred reaction to an *offer* usually is *acceptance*, some offers are clearly and recognizably made for politeness sake only, and are therefore preferably declined; context and content play a delicate role in assessing *offers*.

<sup>6</sup> The table represents the general views found in Conversation Analysis literature (cf. note #3 and further references in the literature referred to there), although I have adapted some of the labels.

<sup>7</sup> For previous applications of Conversational Analysis to Latin data cf. note #4. An extended study that deserves mention here

sequences in a longer passage from Plautus, *Menaechmi* 387 – 431. We will start with the interaction in verses 422-431 (which make up lines 31-44 in my representation of the passage as a whole).<sup>8</sup>

### 3. Interactional common ground in Plautus *Menaechmi* 387 – 431

Plautus *Menaechmi* is a comedy about twin brothers, both named Menaechmus, who have lost sight of each other in Sicily when they were very young. One of them, Menaechmus II, is searching the whole Mediterranean to find his twin brother and arrives at the city of Epidamnum, where Menaechmus I lives. This Menaechmus I has a lunch date with his mistress Erotium; when Menaechmus II, unknowingly and by accident, arrives at her door, she is, of course, mistaken and invites him in, thinking he is her real lover, Menaechmus I. After some initial amazement and misunderstandings (taking place in lines 1 – 29, which we will discuss below, under (7)), Menaechmus II decides to go along with the situation and have his fun, and at that point a new stretch of interaction starts at line 31 (*Menaechmi* 422):

(4) Plautus, *Menaechmi* 422-431 (ER = Erotium, MEN = Menaechmus II)

31. MEN (...) nunc, quando uis, eamus intro.  
32. ER etiam parasitum manes?  
33. MEN neque ego illum maneo nec flocci facio nec, si uenerit, eum uolo intro mitti.  
34. ER ecastor haud inuita fecero.  
35. sed scin quid te amabo ut facias?  
36. MEN impera quid uis modo.  
37. ER pallam illam quam dudum dederas, ad phrygionem ut deferas,  
38. ut reconcinnetur atque una opera addantur quae uolo.  
39. MEN hercle qui tu recte dicis :  
40. eadem <ea> ignorabitur, ne uxor cognoscat te habere, si in uia conspexerit..  
41. ER ergo mox auferto tecum, quando abibis.  
42. MEN maxume.  
43. ER eamus intro.  
44. MEN. lam sequar te. hunc uolo etiam conloqui
31. MEN (...) Now when you wish, let's go inside.  
32. ER Won't you wait for your hanger-on?  
33. MEN No, I'm not waiting for him and I don't care for him at all,

---

<sup>8</sup> Latin text and English translation (with a few minor adaptations) are taken from the Loeb edition by De Melo (2011). For my present purposes, however, the graphical representation below does not follow the verse structure of the comedy, but individual turns of speaking and, within these, individual pair-parts have been assigned separate lines, which are numbered consecutively, starting from 1 (= *Menaechmi* 387), cf. (7) below.

- and if he comes, I don't want him to be let in.
34. ER Honestly, I'll do so happily.
35. But do you know what I'd love you to do?
36. MEN Just command me whatever you want.
37. ER Take that mantle you gave me earlier to the embroiderer so that it can be repaired
38. and so that at the same time the additions that I want can be made.
39. MEN How right you are! That way it'll also become unrecognizable,
40. ER so that my wife won't realize that you have it if she spots you in the street.
41. MEN Then take it away with you soon, when you go.
42. ER Certainly.
43. MEN Let's go inside.
44. I'll follow you in a moment. I still want to speak to this chap.

This passage contains, first of all, a number of clear and uninterrupted adjacency pairs, in which the initiating first pair-part is immediately followed by its preferred second, viz.:

32-33 *question – (informative) answer*

35-36 *request – compliance*

41-42 *request – compliance*

Furthermore, the first pair-part in line 31 by Menaechmus (*nunc, quando vis, eamus intro*) and the compliant repetition by Erotium in 43 (*eamus intro*) do also form a coherent adjacency pair of *proposal – acceptance*, but they are not directly adjacent. They are interrupted by several inserted sequences: First there is the inserted *question – answer* pair in 32-34 (already mentioned above), in which Erotium checks a potential hindrance to accepting Menaechmus' proposal (and expresses here approval of the reaction in 35);<sup>9</sup> then, in lines 35-43 a second, more complex (and more independent) sequence in 35-42 is inserted, which results in Erotium's *request* (in 41), followed by Menaechmus 'preferred' *compliance* in 42 (*maxime*) .

Nota that the inserted *request – compliance* sequence in 41-42 is itself preceded by two pre-sequences to ensure compliance, the first one a relative formulaic, so-called pre-request, that checks Menaechmus willingness and interest (35-36); the second one (in lines 37-40) is also preparative in dealing with motivation for the request that finally comes in 41; both first parts elicit the preferred second pair-parts. The reason why this whole, complex *request*-sequence (35-41) is inserted here by Erotium before she finally reacts to Menaechmus' original *proposal* in 31 could be that she presents it as a sort of condition for complying with Menaechmus' *proposal* in 31, thus securing his preferred reaction of *compliance* – but this is a mere guess.

---

<sup>9</sup> For reasons of space and time I will not go into the status of such 'third pair-parts' within Conversation Analysis.

As a whole, the passage in lines 31 – 44 illustrates the complex nature of a sequence with embedded insertions and pre-sequences, which nevertheless in the end turns out to ‘run’ smoothly, and in line with the principles laid out by Conversation Analysis. It also illustrates that the kind of conversation-structural principles applied belong to the general interactional common ground, on the basis of which Erotium and Menaechmus can anchor their contributions in the ongoing interaction that they are jointly constructing. Apparently, this shared knowledge of, and adhering to, general principles of interactional coherence is so strong that the utterance *eamus intro* in 43 is not taken as an independent new unit in the discourse, but can be anchored as a second pair-part in the interaction without further problems, although it is separated from its anchor point (the first pair-part in 31) by some eight intervening turns of speaking. This, in turn, also illustrates how first pair-parts determine the expectations of follow up. And they seem to do so in such a way that the interlocutors, apparently (there are no questions or signs of surprise or annoyance that would indicate the contrary), can without difficulty accommodate and interpret intervening and embedded sequences, without losing the thread of their expectations.

For a clear example of annoyance at a turn of speaking that does not fit the sequencing expectations raised within the common interactional ground, consider example (5) below, which is taken from Terence’s *Phormio*. The *senex* Demea, who is very angry about the behaviour of his own son Antipho, meets his young nephew Phaedria. After a brief exchange of *greetings* in lines 1-2, he immediately starts a new adjacency pair in 3, by asking a *question*. When Phaedria does not react with the expected second part (either a preferred *informative answer* or a dispreferred *non-informative answer*, such as “I don’t know”) but continues the interaction (in line 4) by elaborating on the preceding *greeting* sequence by means of a *welcome wish*, Demea interrupts him in 5 with a brief, dismissive uptake (*credo*), and reminds him, at a meta-communicative level, by means of *hoc responde mihi* of the interactional expectation (or obligation) to answer the question in line 3.<sup>10</sup>

(5) Terentius *Phormio* 253-256 (PHAE = Phaedria, DEM = Demea, his uncle)

1. PHAE mi patre, salve.
  2. DEM salve.
  3. sed ubi est Antipho?
  4. PHAE salvom venire —
  5. DEM credo. hoc responde mihi.
  6. PHAE valet, hic est (...)
- 
1. PHAE Good day, uncle.

---

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Risselada (1993: 44-45) for this use of what I there called ‘metadirectives’, i.e. directives by means of which a speaker explicitly orders the addressee to perform the preferred second pair-part of an adjacency pair.

2. DEM Good day.
3. PHAE But where's Antipho
4. PHAE Your safe return ... —
5. DEM I'm sure. But answer my question.
6. PHAE He's fine, he's here.

In the *Menaechmi*-passage which we discussed above the interaction follows a smooth path and contains only preferred reactions to the various first parts. Moreover, the interlocutors are very cooperative, in line with Clark's optimistic view of interaction as a 'joint project'. The *Phormio*-example under (5), however, illustrates that this need not always be the case. As Tsui (1991) remarks, in her defence of the descriptive power of adjacency pairs:

- (6) It is important not to confuse what *actually occurs* after a particular utterance, with what is *expected to occur*. A sequencing rule that states that a *question* expects an answer does not mean that a *question* will invariably be followed by *answer*, but rather that what actually occurs will be interpreted in the light of what is expected to occur. (Tsui 1991: 115).

The reasons why interlocutors may choose not to act according to expectations based on interactional common ground can be quite diverse. As we will see in a moment, unexpected interactional behaviour sometimes arises out of communicative mismatch, or mismatch of knowledge and assumptions. But it may also stem from the workings of preference organization itself. As was mentioned before, dispreferred reactions are uttered usually in hesitant, less direct, or even evasive ways, and that is exactly what happens in example (5). Since Phaedria wants to avoid the difficult topic of his cousin Antipho and does not want to give the information the uncle asks for, but does not dare to refuse giving it by means of a dispreferred reaction either, he tries to gain time. He does so in a seemingly coherent way, by connecting to the previous adjacency pair and post-sequencing on the *greetings* which they just exchanged, thus trying to manoeuvre the interaction away from his uncle's *question* – but without success.

The first 27 lines of the *Menaechmus* passage, quoted under (7), contain some interesting examples of 'failing' interactional expectations that are caused by confusion of a type that we often find in Plautus' comedies of errors, viz. mistaken identity. As a result of the confusion, we find a number of cases in which reactions are neither preferred ones nor dispreferred ones, but challenges of the expectations ensuing from the first pair-parts to which they react. As mentioned above, Erotium mistakes the unknown twin brother Menaechmus II for her lover Menaechmus I, which leads to a number of challenges and rejections of Erotium's presuppositions of common ground at various levels (identity of referents; factivity of actions and situations performed earlier the same day; truth

of certain propositions; commitment ensuing from recent speech acts by Menaechmus). The result is a very interesting series of derailing adjacency pairs.

(7) Plautus, *Menaechmi* 387-421 (ER = Erotium, MEN = Menaechmus II)

1. ER Eamus intro, ut prandeamus.
2. MEN Bene vocas: tam gratias.
3. ER Cur igitur me tibi iussisti coquere dudum prandium?
4. MEN Egon te iussi coquere?
5. ER Certo, tibi et parasito tuo.
6. MEN Cui, malum, parasito? [*aside: certo haec mulier non sanast satis.*]
7. ER Peniculo.
8. MEN Quis iste est Peniculus? qui extergentur baxae?
9. ER Scilicet qui dudum tecum venit, quom pallam mihi
10. detulisti, quam ab uxore tua surrupuisti.
11. MEN Quid est? tibi pallam dedi, quam uxori meae surrupui? sanan es?
12. [*aside, to Messenio: certe haec mulier cantherino ritu astans somniat.*]
13. ER Qui lubet ludibrio habere me atque ire infitias mihi facta quae sunt?
14. MEN Dic quid est id quod negem quod fecerim?
15. ER Pallam te hodie mihi dedisse uxoris.
16. MEN Etiam nunc nego. ego quidem neque umquam uxorem habui neque habeo,
17. neque huc umquam, postquam natus sum, intra portam penetravi pedem.
18. prandi in navi, inde huc sum egressus, te conveni.
19. ER Eccere, perii misera, quam tu mihi nunc navem narras?
20. MEN Ligneam, saepe tritam, saepe fixam, saepe excussam malleo;
21. quasi supellex pellionis, palus palo proxumust.
22. ER lam, amabo, desiste ludos facere atque i hac mecum simul.
23. MEN Nescio quem, mulier, alium hominem, non me quaeritas.
24. ER Non ego te novi Menaechmum, Moscho prognatum patre, qui Syracusis perhibere
25. natus esse in Sicilia, ubi rex Agathocles regnator fuit et iterum Phintia,
26. tertium Liparo, qui in morte regnum Hieroni tradidit, nunc Hiero est?
27. MEN Haud falsa, mulier, praedicas. ....
28. [*aside conversation with his slave Messenio*]....
29. MEN iam dudum, mulier, tibi non imprudens aduorsabar:
30. hunc metuebam ne meae uxori renuntiaret de palla et de prandio.

1. ER Let's go inside to have lunch.
2. MEN Thanks for inviting me, but no thanks.
3. ER Then why did you tell me a while ago to have a lunch cooked for you?
4. MEN I told you to have one cooked?
5. ER Yes, certainly, for you and your hanger-on.

6. MEN Damn it, for what hanger-on? [(aside) *This woman is certainly not in her right mind.*]
7. ER For the Brush.
8. MEN What brush is that? The one sandals are cleaned with?
9. ER Of course the one who came with you a while ago when you brought me  
10. the mantle you stole from your wife.
11. MEN What's that? I gave you a mantle I stole from my wife? Are you in your right mind?  
12. [(aside) *This woman is certainly dreaming the way horses do, while standing.*]
13. ER Why do you wish to poke fun at me and to deny what's happened?
14. MEN Tell me what I've done that I'm now denying.
15. ER That you've given me your wife's mantle today.
16. MEN I'm denying it even now. I for one have never had a wife, nor do I have one now,  
17. and I never put my foot here inside the city gate since I was born. I had lunch on  
18. my ship, then I came out here and met you.
19. ER Look! Dear me, I'm ruined! What ship are you telling me about now?
20. MEN A wooden one, often battered, often pierced, often shaken by the mallet;  
21. just like the stage material of Pellio, stake next to stake.
22. ER Please, stop playing the clown now and come with me this way.
23. MEN My good woman, you're looking for some other man, not me.
24. ER Don't I know you, Menaechmus, scion of your father Moschus, you who are said to  
25. have been born in Syracuse in Sicily, where Agathocles was ruler and then Phintias,  
26. thirdly Liparo, who passed the kingdom on to Hiero ..., and now it's Hiero?
27. MEN You aren't telling lies, my good woman (...)  
28. *(aside conversation with Messenio)....*
29. MEN *(returning to Erotium)* My dear woman, a while ago I contradicted you deliberately.  
30. I was afraid that this chap might tell my wife about the mantle and the lunch.

The first adjacency pair is coherent, and in line with regular sequencing rules: Erotium's *invitation* for lunch in line 1 is met by a coherent and regular, albeit dispreferred, reaction of *declination* in line 2 ("Thanks for inviting me, but no thanks."). Menaechmus II introduces his *declination* quite politely with a complimentary uptake and acknowledgement of the *invitation*, which compensates for the face threatening nature of *declinations* of *invitations*.<sup>11</sup> The sequence is followed by a so-

---

<sup>11</sup> For the notions of face threat and face threatening act (FTA) cf. Brown & Levinson'(1978) ground-breaking study on politeness. They define 'face' (a notion taken from sociology), as an individuals positive claim of social values in socializing contact, and involving both the desire that their positive self-image be appreciated and approved of ('positive face') and the desire that their actions be unimpeded by others ('negative face'). Brown and Levison observed that there are many types of speech which inherently threaten either the interlocutors' positive face (e.g. *criticism, refusal, declination* of proposals, etc) or their negative face (notably directive speech acts), and then concluded that the main function of politeness can be somehow connected

called post-sequence, in the first part of which Erotium demands in line 3 (an astonished *question*) an explanation for his *declination*, referring to his earlier *request* for lunch, on the basis of which she could rightfully assume that previously he had been willing to have lunch. Menaechmus reacts with an equally astonished *echo-question*, in which he challenges her description of his own behaviour (“I told you to have lunch cooked?”), thus starting an inserted sequence, which at first view is neatly rounded off by Erotium’s informative answer (*certo*, “Yes, certainly”) in line 5, which constitutes a regular and preferred reaction. However, her extension of this answer, *tibi et parasite tuo* (“for you and your hanger-on”) invites a next challenging inserted sequence, starting with Menaechmus’ *question* for clarification of the identity of the *parasitus* referred to in 5. Erotium’s coherent, informative and hence preferred *answer* (*Peniculo*), leads again to a new inserted sequence – and so on and so further.

So what we see is a series of ever deeper embedded post- and inserted sequences, each challenging aspects of the previous turn. Only some of these sequences are neatly rounded off as adjacency pairs, when Erotium provides the information asked for (as in 5; 7; 9-10). But most of them are left unfinished because they are interrupted by new inserted sequences. When Erotium tries to cut short the interactional chaos in line 22, by *requesting* Menaechmus to stop playing games, and repeats her original *invitation*, now in the form of a request (*Iam, amabo, desiste ludos facere atque i hac mecum simul*, “Please, stop playing the clown now and come with me this way”), a new adjacency pair is opened up. But Menaechmus’ reaction in line 23 is, again, neither a preferred nor a dispreferred second part but, again, a *challenge* of one of Erotium’s assumptions, concerning the identity of the person invited. What follows in 24 is a new post-sequence, in which Erotium challenges Menaechmus’ challenging statement (“Don’t I know you, Menaechmus, son of your father Moschus, you who ..”) and - quite surprisingly - she now gets a preferred and positive reaction. A break follows, in which Menaechmus has an aside conversation with his slave Messenio; this results in his decision to play along with this unknown women, which leads to the smooth interaction in the second half of this passage discussed earlier (under 4 above). Menaechmus briefly explains himself and his previous uncooperative behaviour, and concludes, finally, with a polite proposal (“Now when you wish, let’s go inside.”, line 31), which in fact constitutes a belated, corrected (and preferred) *acceptation* to Erotium’s *invitation* in line 1, as we can conclude from the exact repetition of her words. At the same time it functions as the first part of a new adjacency pair *invitation – acceptance*, discussed earlier, which is rounded off in 43 by yet another verbal repetition of the original *invitation*.

What can we conclude from this passage under (7), in which the interaction breaks down, because the turns of speaking are anchored at a content level but disruptive at the interactional level, and common ground seems to be completely lacking? First of all, we should, of course, conclude that this is not ordinary interaction, but miscommunication, based on mistaken identity and wrong

---

with countering the effects of FTAs. For an overview of studies of politeness in Latin texts, see e.g. Unceta (2014) and (2018).

assumptions. However, that it was uncooperative and counterproductive is, in fact, explicitly admitted by Menaechmus in line 29, where he analyses his own interactional behaviour as : *tibi (non imprudens) advorsabar* (“I contradicted you deliberately”). The very fact that interlocutors themselves may describe their interactional behaviour as deviant, is another confirmation of the existence of norms and expectations as part of a broader, cultural interactional common ground.

Nevertheless, this passage also shows that dispreferred and challenging behaviour, whatever its origin and underlying cause, does occur. For various reasons, from time to time, interlocutors do behave uncooperatively, unintended or intentionally. This latter possibility is not acknowledged by e.g. Clark (1996), who throughout his whole study focuses on interaction as cooperative joint action – a view that is, perhaps, too optimistic. It was contradicted by recent studies on impoliteness, with Culpepers (2011) study as an important landmark. Culpeper’s working definition of impoliteness contains, among other things the following elements:

- (8) (...) Situated behaviours are (...) considered ‘impolite’ when they conflict with how one expects them to be, how one wants them to be and/or how one thinks they ought to be. (...) Various factors can exacerbate how offensive an impolite behaviour is taken to be, including for example whether one understands a behaviour to be strongly intentional, or not. (Culpeper 2011, 23)

This definition of impoliteness is based in essential ways on ‘conflicts with expectations’, which in my view should also include interactional expectations. Although Culpeper himself does not deal with interactional aspects of impoliteness, this point was taken up by Bousfield, e.g. in his (2008) book on *Impoliteness in Interaction*. I want to round off my paper by briefly giving some suggestions for future research along the lines of a connection between interactional common ground and politeness.

#### **4. Interactional common ground 2: preference structure and politeness**

Preference structure and (im)politeness are connected in various ways. At the most basic level, (im)politeness is inherently connected with preference structure. Dispreferred reactions are usually interpreted as less polite than dispreferred reactions, which are, for that reason, as discussed in section 2, usually uttered in more indirect and evasive ways. A good example is found in line 2 of the passage under (7), where Menaechmus II begins his turn of speaking with expressing his appreciation for the invitation (*Bene vocas*, “thanks for inviting me”), which is a form of positive politeness, in order to compensate for the impoliteness of his dispreferred reaction.<sup>12</sup> . Another example, from Terence, is (9). Phormio explains what he will do to rescue Geta. The latter starts off

---

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Unceta Gómez (2016) for the expression of thanks and gratitude as a positive politeness strategy to compensate for a face threatening act (FTA), cf. note #11.

his mildly critical, and hence dispreferred evaluation of Phormio's plans by first complimenting him with his brave and loyal behaviour, to compensate for the potential face threat in his dispreferred reaction.

(9) Terentius *Phormio* 321-325 (PHOR = Phormio, GET = Geta)

- |    |      |  |
|----|------|--|
| 1. | PHOR | cedo senem. iam instructa sunt mi in corde consilia omnia.                       |
| 2. | GET  | quid ages?   |
| 3. | PHOR | quid vis, nisi uti maneat Phanium atque ex crimine hoc Antiphonem                |
| 4. |      | eripiam atque in me omnem iram derivem senis?                                    |
| 5. | GET  | o vir fortis atque amicus! verum hoc saepe, Phormio,                             |
| 6. |      | vereor, ne istaec fortitudo in nervom erumpat denique                            |
|    |      |  |
| 1. | PHOR | Bring on the old man. All my plans are now drawn up in my mind.                  |
| 2. | GET  | What are you going to do?  |
| 3. | PHOR | What do you want, other than that Phanium stays, I rescue Antipho                |
| 4. |      | from the charges against him, and I divert all the old man's anger on to myself? |
| 5. | GET  | What a brave man you are and a true friend!                                      |
| 6. |      | But I often worry, Phormio, that this bravery of yours will land you in jail.    |

Besides this type of compensatory politeness in the dispreferred second part itself, we also find signs of irritation after a dispreferred second part in the next turn by the first speaker, as we saw e.g. in (5) and in Menaechmus' challenging reactions in (7), such as *malum* "damn it" in line 6.

A quite different connection between preference structure and impoliteness, which pertains to the use (or abuse!) of adjacency structure and the interactional obligations ensuing from it in order to express blame or insult, has been discussed by Bousfield:

- (10) "... speakers can support the issuing of intentionally unmitigated or exacerbated face threatening [*and hence: impolite*, RR] utterances through sophisticated usage of (dis)preferred seconds to first pair parts ..." (Bousfield 2008, 235)

He draws special attention to the use of challenging rhetorical and conducive questions in criticising interactions. Instead of expressing blame or criticism themselves, speakers can use rhetorical or conducive questions that force addressees to either meet interactional expectations in a preferred second part and admit their own failures or missteps themselves, or remain silent, which can be equally awkward and self-damaging. An example is given under (10).

(10) Plautus, *Asinaria* 925 – 929 (ART = Artemona, Demaenetus' wife; DEM = Demaenetus)

1. ART. Surge, amator, i domum.
  2. DEM. Iam obsecro, uxor.
  3. ART. Nunc uxorem me esse meministi tuam?
  4. modo, cum dicta in me ingerebas, odium, non uxor eram.
  5. DEM. Totus perii.
  6. ART. Quid tandem? anima fetetne uxoris tuae?
  7. DEM. Murram olet. (...)
- 
1. ART. Get up, lover, go home.
  2. DEM. I beg you now, my dear wife.
  3. ART. Now you remember that I'm your dear wife?
  4. Just before, when you were throwing bad words against me, I was your abomination, not your wife.
  5. DEM. I'm completely dead.
  6. ART. What now? Does your wife's breath stink?
  7. DEM. It smells of myrrh. (...)

The *senex* Demaenetus has been caught by his wife Artemona on the couch of a courtesane. His wife has overheard all the nasty things which he had said about her, like how he hates her, and how her breath stinks, in order to flatter the courtesane by favourably comparing her. His angry wife suddenly appears on the scene, tries to send her unwilling husband home with a repeated *surge amator, i domum* (not all quoted here), and flings some of his nasty remarks back in his face by means of rhetorical, conducive questions (in lines 3-4 and 6). In line 5, Demaenetus more or less refrains from reacting directly, and only comments on his own situation by *totus perii* "I'm dead completely" - which indirectly acknowledges the dangerous and insulting nature of his earlier remarks about his wife. When she goes on to ask him a second, even more conducive question in 6, he neither refrains from reaction nor directly gives the preferred, self-blaming reaction that preference organisation would require; instead he chooses to deny his earlier insulting claim by saying that her breath "smells of myrrh", and so blames himself indirectly for having made a mistake, which he now corrects.

Apparently, much more research is needed on how rhetorical and conducive questions function in relation to preference and impoliteness in Roman comedy, but to my mind Bousfields examples (taken from military training and scolding recruits) may point an interesting direction.

## 5. To conclude

I hope to have shown that it may be useful to look at anchoring and common ground phenomena also at an interactional level, and not restrict ourselves to the perspective of the speaker. First of all, principles of sequencing and adjacency provide additional explanations for the ways in which subsequent contributions of the various interlocutors are anchored in the ongoing interaction;

these forms of interactional anchoring are complementary to anchoring through e.g. reference, tense use and topic management.

Secondly, Conversation Analysis research across different cultures and interactional situations has shown that interlocutors operate on the basis of, and are actually explicitly aware of, shared principles, expectations and obligations that govern interactional sequences. This awareness provides general common interactional ground, above and apart from specific, context bound common ground. Intentional or unintentional infringing on this type of common ground, by flouting interactional expectations, may be interpreted as face threatening and impolite, and triggers either irritation or compensatory politeness or both.

Thirdly, it may be useful to have a further look at interactional impoliteness strategies, since they may help us to better understand strategic uses and functions of rhetorical questions in interaction.

## Bibliography

- BOUSFIELD, D. 2008: *Impolitenes in Interaction*, Amsterdam/Philadelphia, Benjamin.
- BOUSFIELD, D. 2007: "Impoliteness, preference organization, and conducivity", *Multilingua* 26/1, 1-33.
- CLARK, H.H. 1996: *Using Language*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- CULPEPER, J. 2011: *Impoliteness, Using Language to Cause Offence*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- CULPEPER, J. 2011: "Politeness and impoliteness", in G. Andersen & K. Aijmer (eds.), *Pragmatics of society. Handbooks of pragmatics*, vol. 5, Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 393-438.
- KIENPOINTNER, M. 1998: "Speech Act Sequences in Latin Prose: Questions and Answers", *Études Luxembourgeoises d'histoire & de littérature romaines. I. Oratio solute – oratio numerosa*, 65 – 86.
- MÜLLER, R. 1997: *Sprechen und Sprache. Dialoglinguistische Studien zu Terenz*, Heidelberg: Winter.
- POMERANZ, A & J. HERITAGE 2013: "Preference", in Sidnell, J. & T. Stivers (eds.), *The Handbook of Conversation Analysis*, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 210-228.
- RISSELADA, R. 1993: *Imperatives and other Directive Expressions in Latin. A study in the pragmatics of a dead language*, Amsterdam: Gieben.
- RISSELADA, R. 2005: "Particles in questions", in G. Calboli (ed.), *Latina Lingua!* (Proceedings of the Twelfth International Colloquium on Latin Linguistics, Bologna, 9-14, June 2003), *Papers on grammar IX/2*: 663-679, Roma: Herder.
- ROESCH, S. 2019: "Impoliteness in Plautus' comedies", in L.W. van Gils et al (eds.), *Lemmata Linguistica Latin. II: Clause and Discourse*, Berlin: De Gruyter, \*\*\*\*\*
- SACKS, H. 1987: "On the Preferences for Agreement and Contiguity in Sequences in Conversation", in G. Button & J.R.E. Lee (eds.), *Talk and Social Organisation*, Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 54-69.
- SACKS, H. 1992 : *Lectures on conversation* (2 vols.), Oxford: Blackwell.
- SCHEGLOFF, E. A. 1968: "Sequencing in conversational openings", *American Anthropologist* , 70/6, 1075 – 1095.
- SCHEGLOFF, E. A. 2007: *Sequence Organization in Interaction. A Primer in Conversation Analysis*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- SCHEGLOFF, E. A. & H. Sacks 1973: "Opening up closings", *Semiotica* 8, 289 – 327.

- STIVERS, T. 2013: "Sequence Organization", in Sidnell, J. & T. Stivers (eds.), *The Handbook of Conversation Analysis*, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 191-209.
- TSUI, A.M.B. 1991: "Sequencing rules and coherence in discourse", *Journal of Pragmatics* 15,111-129.
- UNCETA GÓMEZ, L. 2014: "La politesse linguistique en latin. Bilan d'une étude en cours", *Dictionnaire Historique et Encyclopédie du Latin*, Paris IV Sorbonne ([http://www.dhell.paris-sorbonne.fr/encyclopedie\\_linguistique:notions\\_linguistiques:syntaxe:formules\\_de\\_politesse](http://www.dhell.paris-sorbonne.fr/encyclopedie_linguistique:notions_linguistiques:syntaxe:formules_de_politesse) )
- UNCETA GÓMEZ, L. 2016: "La respuesta al agradecimiento en la comedia de Plauto y Terencio", *Pallas. Revue d'Études Antiques* 102/1, 229-236.
- UNCETA GÓMEZ, L. 2018: "Gli studi sulla (s)cortesia linguistica in latino. Possibilità di analisi e proposte per il futuro", *Studi e Saggi Linguistici* 56/2, 9-37.