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Politeness in Petitions Signed by Nineteenth Century British Women before being Transported to Australia

Cortesía en peticiones firmadas por mujeres británicas del siglo diecinueve antes de ser transportadas a Australia

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The development of the concept of *face* and the categorisation of the so-called Face Threatening Acts are rooted in some changes that British society experienced in the nineteenth century and that led to the importance of the *self*. This study analyses fifteen nineteenth century manuscript petition letters signed by four women in prison. The analysis is two-fold. First, it compares these petitions with the model ones presented in letter-writing manuals of the time and the politeness instruction provided in them. Second, it provides a description of the Face Threatening Acts found in the original petitions. The conclusion shows that these women probably had an awareness of politeness rules despite possibly never having read one of these manuals first-hand. It also suggests that the use of the politeness strategies analysed may have contributed to the granting of these women's requests.

Keywords: *manuscript petitions; letter-writing manuals; Face Threatening Acts; nineteenth century Britain*

El desarrollo del concepto de *imagen* y la categorización de las llamadas amenazas a la imagen tienen su origen en algunos cambios que experimentó la sociedad británica del siglo diecinueve y que condujeron a la importancia del *yo*. Este estudio analiza quince peticiones manuscritas del siglo diecinueve firmadas por cuatro mujeres desde prisión. El análisis es doble. Primero, se comparan estas peticiones con las peticiones modelo que aparecen en manuales epistolares de la época y la instrucción sobre cortesía que incluyen. Segundo, se presenta una descripción de las amenazas a la imagen encontradas en las peticiones originales. La conclusión muestra que estas mujeres probablemente conocían reglas de cortesía a pesar de que posiblemente nunca habían leído ninguno de estos manuales directamente. También sugiere que el uso de las estrategias de cortesía analizadas puede que contribuyera a que estas mujeres obtuvieran lo que requerían.

Palabras clave: *peticiones manuscritas; manuales epistolares; amenazas a la imagen; Gran Bretaña en el siglo diecinueve*

1. INTRODUCTION

In late modern Britain, i.e. the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, writing letters was common practice. People wrote letters on all occasions, as evidenced in the variety of model letters found in the letter-writing manuals of the time. Despite the differences in society regarding rank or status, or even literacy levels, writing letters was a need for many and simply a way to communicate for others. This resulted in the proliferation of letter-writing manuals, which offered instruction and help particularly for those who felt more insecure about their writing abilities at a time when learning to read and write well could mean achieving a better position in life.

One specific type of letters, which could often be found in these manuals, is the *petition*. Nevalainen (2007: 4) points out that these letters “constitute a super text type of their own”, but as Bergs (2007: 33) indicates, both petitions and letters can be considered under the umbrella term *letters*, as they share some features from a text type perspective, that is, they are “interactive/bidirectional texts, i.e. written for a particular recipient”. Petitions had been common in Britain since the early modern English period, that is, since the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries (Zaret, 1996), but it was during the eighteenth century when petitioning became a need of everyday life for many people. Although most manuals refer to letters of request, some of them even contain a specific section on petitions (e.g. Brown, 1790; Cooke, 1791), which suggests that it must have been very common to write petition letters. When these model letters are observed, the variety of topics and addressees included show the popularity of this specific text type.

The instruction that the users of these manuals could obtain from reading them includes many aspects. While some of them contain brief grammatical or punctuation rules, information regarding politeness issues such as the correct use of terms of address can frequently be found. Similarly, those wishing to improve their writing skills could find guidance regarding the length or the content of the different types of letters, as in the case of the petitions.

The present paper aims at analysing how fifteen manuscript petitions signed by four women prisoners in nineteenth century England compare to the model petitions and the instructions present in letter-writing manuals of the time in terms of politeness. Particularly, the analysis will centre on the presence of Face Threatening Acts (henceforth FTAs), as described by Brown and Levinson (1987), and on how these FTAs are minimised, if and when they are present.

The addressees of these petition letters, the Governors of the Bank of England, were men in higher levels of society than those of the signees.¹ In addition, they had the power to decide on the future of the signees, women who were confined to prison awaiting transportation to Australia. These differences presumably conditioned the writing styles, as expressed in the politeness strategies used.

Before the details of this study are presented, an overview of the different theoretical aspects regarding the framework of the analysis will be described in the following subsections. These will include a description of the idea of politeness in eighteenth and nineteenth century Britain, the concept of FTAs, the main features of letter-writing manuals of late modern Britain and of the model petitions included in them, and the situation of women’s literacy and of petitions written in prisons at the time.

¹ The complete list of names of the Governors of the Bank of England can be consulted in the webpage of the Bank (<https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/about/people/governors>), where it can be observed that they were all men.

2. POLITENESS AND FTAS IN EIGHTEENTH AND NINETEENTH CENTURY BRITAIN

In late modern Britain, politeness probably began to be understood in a similar way to what it would be understood today. However, until then these concepts had been different and changes in society possibly contributed to the changes that could be observed then.

Politeness is a term often associated with eighteenth century Britain. However, at that time its meaning was much wider than it is today. As Klein (2002: 874) indicates, “the polite was associated with decorum in behaviour and personal style”, and later adds that “politeness helped to situate eighteenth-century Britain in time, as a ‘polite age’, and in place, as a ‘polite nation’” (Klein, 2002: 875). This was the time when other terms that had been originally associated with high levels of society, such as *gentleman* or *lady* began to lose their original meaning in favour of being equated to polite people. It was also the time when people from different social ranks began to mix, for instance servants and masters, and these interactions brought the world of politeness to those who would not have been originally associated with it (Klein, 2002).

In order to understand the way politeness is dealt with in this study, it is necessary to understand where the concept of *face* analysed here is rooted. It was not until the nineteenth century that individuals fully acquired a strong connection with their own self, as different from the others, which means this is the period when what Culpeper and Demmen (2011: 52) identify as “the rise of the individual self” became evident. These authors point to some reasons for this rise, which include both social and economic ones. Furthermore, they also explain how some changes in earlier periods also had an impact on the concept of *individual thinking*. These include different ways of thinking about religion, including the rise of Protestantism and the movement towards a much more secular society.

Society experienced many changes. The movement of people from rural to urban areas due to the Industrial Revolution and increased opportunities to find a way of living in the cities was connected to the development of the concept of social classes as it is understood today. It is evident that those who wanted to scale the social ladder would have had to behave and speak in a polite way. In this respect, Fitzmaurice (1998: 313) indicates that politeness then had to be understood as “a mode of behaviour and a variety of language prescribed as correct and appropriate for middle classes”. Those polite uses of the language were recorded in the prescriptive grammars and the many other instruction manuals of the time. In a very similar way, Klein (2002: 880) states that “those who dealt with anyone of polite pretensions, were also well advised to comport themselves in a genteel way”.

This polite language was equated at that time with “the legitimate language variety”, or the “true English”, as Watts (1999: 6) points out. More precisely, in Watts’ words, “acquiring the ability to speak ‘true English’ involves imitating the ‘learned’ and ‘polite’” (1999: 17), that is, there were people in higher levels of society who spoke this variety and imitation was required in order to make progress. This implies that if this variety was not used, the language would not be acceptable English, and therefore, lack of access to this polite variety would imply lack of “access to high social status” (Watts, 1999: 6).

Understanding the role of politeness in eighteenth and nineteenth century Britain contributes to the understanding of the “social interactions ... between the landed and the non-landed, between masters and servants” (Klein, 2002: 898). This is precisely the kind of social interactions that the signees of the letters analysed here would have established with their addressees, who were in a much higher social position. However, in this case, their interest would not have been to acquire a better social position, but to cover some basic needs before being transported to Australia.

It is when the self becomes important for each individual that relationships with the others in terms of preserving or losing the so-called face from a politeness point of view become prevalent in society and acquire the importance that they seem to have acquired at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century. These concepts have prevailed in British society, and that explains the description that Brown and Levinson (1987) suggested, regarding how humans try to preserve their face in interaction.

2.1 FTAs in Brown and Levinson's view

The concept of face was first introduced by Erving Goffman (1955), however, it was Brown and Levinson (1987) that developed this idea within politeness theories, differently from Goffman's (1955), and established a whole typology of FTAs around this concept in the late twentieth century. Although very often these FTAs are present in spoken conversation, the language of letters is to some extent similar to that of conversation given their bidirectional nature and the interactivity that can be established in correspondence (Bergs, 2007), as mentioned above. Therefore, it is not surprising to find FTAs also in correspondence exchanges. This is particularly the case in petitions, as an FTA is an expression that damages the face of the addressee or the writer (in this case) by acting in opposition to the wants and desires of the other person.

Before explaining why Brown and Levinson's (1987) classification is appropriate in the analysis of nineteenth century petitions in Britain, it is essential to explain what face refers to. In fact, Brown and Levinson (1987) distinguish two types of face, *negative face* and *positive face*. Negative face refers to "the want that your actions are unimpeded by others", whereas positive face is "the want that your actions are desirable to others" (1987: 62). Any comment or expression that threatens either type of face is considered an FTA. However, speakers (or writers in the case of letters) also have the possibility to minimise these FTAs.

Although Brown and Levinson's (1987) concept of face was first developed in the late 1970s, its origins can be traced back to early modern Britain, as "the development of the notion of an inner self in the early modern period is a necessary foundation of the notion of face, as understood by Brown and Levinson (1987)" (Culpeper & Demmen, 2011: 59-60). In order to understand this development, it is crucial to observe the British society of that time, as explained above (see Section 2).

It is in this context that the present analysis has to be placed so as to be understood. The women signing the petitions analysed here inevitably used FTAs towards their addressees but they always tried to minimise them as their interest was to achieve certain goals, such as getting some money for clothes or some sugar for their tea for their voyage to Australia. Similarly, they used FTAs towards themselves very often because, despite not liking to be threatened, the use of these acts would probably guarantee the achievement of their aims.

2.2 Politeness in late eighteenth century British letter writing manuals

The same as politeness was part of everyday life in late modern Britain, it was also present in letter-writing manuals. This is clear in Cooke's *The New Letter Writer* (1775), which even at the end of the title states, *to which are added the principles of politeness*, and as much as twelve pages are devoted to these principles in this manual. Although not all of the principles refer to letter writing as such, some of them clearly indicate what should and should not be done when writing letters. For instance, it is advisable to include an excuse for writing and to admit if something was done wrongly.

It is not uncommon to find the term *polite* being used repeatedly in these manuals. This suggests the importance of this concept at the time. For example, *The Complete Letter Writer*

(Anon, 1778) insists on being very careful with the format and layout, as can be observed in comments regarding the placement of the salutation, the subscription or the signature keeping a relative distance from the rest of the text because this would be a sign of showing deference towards the addressee and, consequently, of being polite. The same manual establishes a connection between the quality of being *proper* and that of being *polite*, features that need to be taken into consideration when addressing people who are *honourable*. This manual, as appears to be the case in most manuals, seems to be particularly concerned with where and when to insert some types of comments, in addition to the terms of address that need to be used depending on the addressee, and the relationship between the writer (and/or signee) and the addressee.

2.2.1 *Petition letters in manuals*

Most late eighteenth century British letter manuals show a similar pattern and content. All of them include sample letters to follow and usually some instructions are given regarding aspects such as the terms of address to use when writing to different people. However, some of them contain more instructions than others, including grammatical and punctuation recommendations and/or rules to consider when writing.

Although petitions were very common at the time, not all the manuals incorporated a special section on petitions which included model petitions. However, it is not infrequent to find remarks on how to ask for requests even if no special section on petitions is present. For instance, in *The Young Secretary's Guide*, it can be read that in letters of request, “you must excuse your Boldness in requesting a Favour from a person ... and if it be upon an urgent occasion ... you must very feelingly press him to it, by remonstrating the Miseries and Misfortunes you are under” (Anon, 1721: 3). Similarly, in *The Complete Letter Writer*, writers are advised to aim for letters that are “short ... especially when in favours are requested” (Anon, 1778: 15), and when writing to somebody in a superior position.

Two out of the five manuals used in the present study contain model petitions. These are Brown's (1790) and Cooke's (1791). These texts provide some advice and some rules regarding the style, the content and even the format and/or layout of these types of letters. In addition, it is necessary to note that the writers of these manuals seem to be well acquainted with the difficulties that many people were experiencing at the time and with the fact that there was a need in society for these instructions, as evidenced by comments such as “as many unfortunate persons, under sentence of death or transportation, (...) we shall here inform such of the most probable means of proving successful, as well as instruct any other persons of inferior station to address their superiors with propriety upon any emergency” (Cooke, 1791: 202). It is precisely the situation that the four women analysed here experienced, since they were all expecting transportation to Australia and they felt the need to write to those in a superior position because of a real emergency or need.

When the model petitions present in Brown's and Cooke's manuals are analysed, some similarities can be observed. For example, they all start and end in the same way, that is, the salutation always starts with the phrase *To the honourable*, followed by the person or institution addressed (e.g. the Governors of the Bank of England). Similarly, the subscription always reads *And your petitioner as in duty bound shall ever pray*.²

In sum, all letter-writing manuals that either include a section on petitions or refer to politeness and requests, and which have been used in this study, seem to be concerned both with the content and the form of petitions or letters of request. Regarding the content, they all seem to agree on emphasising the difficulties that the signee or petitioner was going through,

² Both *shall* and *will* are used in this expression. The difference in use between the two modal verbs goes beyond the scope of this study and it is currently under investigation.

the expression of profound sincere emotion and the excusing of boldness for writing. Therefore, there appears to be an appeal to the use of some devices that would be identified and classified in the following century as politeness strategies. Similarly, in relation to the form, the two manuals containing model petitions which have been used instruct readers to be brief and, although not explicitly, they both include the same fixed formulae in the salutations and in the subscriptions, which suggests a common type of structures when writing petitions. The analysis of the comparison between these formulae and content included in the manuals and the one found in the manuscript letters is presented in Section 4.2.

3. WOMEN'S LITERACY AND PRISONERS' PETITIONS IN LATE EIGHTEENTH AND EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY BRITAIN

Since the letters analysed in the present paper were signed by women from low ranks of society and in a very specific context, a prison, it proves essential to make a few remarks on women's literacy and on correspondence from prisons in the time period analysed in Britain. As Vickery indicates, this is the time when an "expanding culture of female literariness" (2006: 281) can be observed. This means that increasingly more women were gaining access to education and, therefore, their reading and writing skills were gradually improving. Despite the level of education of the people at the time, letter writing was a common practice for them, as according to Whyman, even "persons with little formal education acquired and used letter-writing in their daily lives" (2009: 75). This implies that the women in the present study would have attempted to write these petitions independently of whether they were more or less skilled to do so.

However literate they may or may not have been, it is clear that writing letters was common in prisons, and they are very valuable documents, as they help present day readers "get in and out of prison by reading prison correspondence" (Brant, 2006: 134). When the signee was not able to write, the turnkeys may have provided the hand to write the petition (Palk, 2007). It is not surprising that the petitions' "form and wording were shaped by established conventions, ..., and transmitted no doubt within the prisons in imitation of earlier documents" (Woodfine, 2006: 7) because of the number of people who would have felt the need to write petitions, some of whom might have even had access to some of the letter writing manuals of the time, or at least they would have read other petitions that would have served as models for them.

4. THE PRESENT STUDY

4.1 Data and method

For the purpose of the present study, fifteen manuscript petition letters addressed to the Governors of the Bank of England are analysed. These letters were signed by four different women, namely Ann Foss (five letters), Mary Ann Jenkinson (three letters), Ann Macarthy (four letters) and Sarah Whiley (three letters), in a period of three years, between 1802 and 1805. These petitions were extracted from a larger collection of petitions addressed to the Governors of the Bank of England between 1781 and 1827. They were originally transcribed by Palk (2007), but a new transcription was carried out for the present study, as the transcription by Palk (2007) did not maintain the format of the original letters. For instance, margins and indentations are not as in the original manuscripts, and the dates and places, which are sometimes indicated in the letters, have been removed from the original text and are indicated in the introduction of each petition, together with other information. Similarly, some spelling

and/or punctuation differences were observed when transcribing some of the letters, when compared to Palk's (2007) transcription.³ For these reasons, and since further studies are attempted of other issues of these petitions, it was considered important to transcribe the letters and not make use of Palk's transcribed texts.

Each of the women exchanged several letters in the form of petition with these Governors, and in some of them it is possible to observe that they had been granted some of their previous needs, which seems to have encouraged them to continue petitioning, as is also expressed in their letters. The reason for choosing these women is that some commonalities can be observed among them. First, they were all in the same prison, Newgate Gaol in London, and had been sentenced for the same reason, the exchange and/or utterance of forged bank notes. Secondly, they were inmates at the same time, as manifested by the dates of the letters. Finally, they were all transported to Australia on the same ship, the *William Pitt* (Palk, 2007). It is also highly likely that they belonged to low ranks of society, as "the vast majority of women who appeared before the courts were from poor and labouring classes" (Kilday, 2005: 176). However, since the number of petitions is low, the results are expected to provide some tendencies rather than conclusive results. For this, future studies are intended.

Although the four women signed the petitions, it is not clear whether they actually wrote them or not. On some occasions the handwriting of the text itself does not match that of the signature. In other cases, the same signee is present in letters with different handwriting. Despite the difficulty in knowing whether the signees were the writers or not, they would probably have been next to the writer, providing them with the indications as to what to include in the content of the petitions, as evidenced by the topics that they mention, such as the favours that they had already received, or the situation of their children, for instance.

The manuals that were used to compare the manuscript letters with are listed below in chronological order. As can be observed, they all date from the eighteenth century. The reason for this is that the manuscript petitions analysed were written at the very beginning of the nineteenth century, which means that if the writers had had any access to manuals, they may have been these or other similar ones to these. As indicated in Section 2.2.1, the last two, that is, Brown's (1790) and Cooke's (1791) are the ones that contain model petitions, and therefore, they were used for the comparison with the manuscript petitions regarding the salutations and subscriptions used. As for the other three manuals, they were mainly used to observe the instructions given in relation to the content of the petitions or the letters of requests, particularly regarding politeness issues.

- *The Young Secretary's Guide* (Anon, 1721)
- *The New Letter Writer [...] to which are added the principles of politeness* (Cooke, 1775)
- *The Complete Letter Writer* (Anon, 1778)
- *The English Letter-Writer or the Whole Art of General Correspondence [...] together with the Universal Petitioner* (Brown, 1790)
- *The Universal Letter-Writer or New Art of Polite Correspondence [...] to which is added the Complete Petitioner* (Cooke, 1791)

Since the total corpus under analysis is small (fifteen letters amounting to a total of 2,840 words), mainly a qualitative analysis was carried out, although on some occasions also

³ Palk's (2007) transcribed petitions were first published in a book (see Reference list), but they have later been made available online, and can be found at <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/london-record-soc/vol42>. The original manuscripts can also be found online in PDF format at <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/archive/freshfields-prison-correspondence-1781-1840>.

quantitative data is briefly provided. The petitions were analysed one by one in relation to their similarities and/or differences with the manuals, and to their use of FTAs. A description of these and pertinent examples of each FTA are provided in the analysis and results section.

4.2 *Analysis and results*

The present section is subdivided into two parts. First, a comparison is established between the manuscript petitions and both the instruction provided and the fixed expressions used in the model petitions in the manuals, as indicated in Section 4.1. The reason for this is to observe if these women were following the recommendations present in these books, and therefore, they were complying with the politeness rules of the time. The second part includes the analysis of the FTAs employed in the letters following Brown and Levinson's (1987) categorisation. The results found will serve to understand the reasons for the language used by these women in their petitions.

4.2.1 *Comparison with the letter-writing manuals*

Whether the manuscript petitions analysed were based on the models provided in the letter-writing manuals or not is a question that cannot be answered based on the information known today about this correspondence. Independently of the possible access that the writers, not so much the signees, could have had to these manuals, what seems clear is that many of the features, recommendations and/or instructions present in the manuals (see Section 2.2.1) can also be observed in the real manuscript petitions analysed here. For instance, the majority of them, fourteen out of fifteen, include a clear indication of the miseries and misfortunes that the signees were experiencing at the moment of writing, as can be seen in Example (1).

(1) *through the inhumanity of my husband have I involve myself in distress* (Sarah Willey, 1804)⁴

In a similar way, more than half of them, more specifically nine out of fifteen, excuse their boldness in writing, as had been suggested in the manuals. Although not a fixed formula seems to be used in this case, they tend to incorporate an expression similar to *taking the liberty to write*, as shown in Example (2).

(2) *Pray parden me taking the litterty of writing to you* (Ann Macarthy, 1805)

All the petitions are also written with deep and sincere emotion. This is not usually expressed in single expressions, but it can be observed when reading the whole content of the petitions. However, for the sake of consistency, Example (3) shows these feelings while trying to achieve their goals from the addressees.

(3) *I would plead, in extenuation of this intrusion on your Charity, that in the unfortunate Place where I am Confined your Generous Goodness soon transpires* (Ann Foss, 1804)

All the women experienced a lack of even the more basic necessities of life, such as some money for clothes or for food, as shown in (4) and (5).

⁴ All the examples provided in the analysis section have been extracted from the manuscript letters and they remain faithful to the original text. They have been numbered, and the name of the writer and the year have also been included in parentheses after each example.

(4) *I have lost almost all my Cloaths, if you would be so humane as to grant me a trifle*
(Mary Ann Jenkinson, 1805)

(5) *will give me Som Tea and Suger* (Ann Foss, 1805)

On occasion those needs were urgent because they were about to go to Australia. The manuals indicated also how to request when in these circumstances, as indicated above, that is, “feelingly pressing” (Anon, 1721: 3) the addressee to do as requested because of the immediacy of the leave in this case. This occurs in four of the fifteen petitions analysed, two of which are exemplified in (6) and (7).

(6) *As I am now going to be sent away at two o’clock this afternoon* (Ann Macarthy, 1805)

(7) *we are going to Saill from hear in a Day or two* (Sarah Willey, 1805)

As indicated in Section 2.2.1, one of the recommendations that was mentioned in the letter-writing manuals was the briefness of the petitions. When the petitions are analysed, it can be observed that in this respect there seems to be variation. Some of the petitions contain as few words as approximately 100 whereas the longest include just over 300 words. Mainly, the difference lies in the fact that those that are longer simply include more details regarding their difficulties and their situation at the time of writing. When this is compared to the length of petitions in manuals, the average is more similar to the shortest petitions analysed (Calvo Cortés, 2020: 201).

As summarised in Table 1, when the content of the petitions is analysed, the writers seem to have included the recommendations present in the manuals. This is particularly the case in relation to emphasising the situations of misery that they were experiencing and to the expression of deep and sincere emotion. Since not all the petitions required an urgent response, it is not surprising to find that the percentage of petitions pressing the addressees is low. However, when required, this is present, which follows the suggestions indicated in the manuals.

Table 1: *Presence of manuals recommendations in the manuscript petitions*

CONTENT RECOMMENDED IN MANUALS	NUMBER OF PETITIONS
<i>Miseries and Misfortunes</i>	14 (93%)
<i>Excusing boldness</i>	9 (60%)
<i>Expressing deep and sincere emotion</i>	15 (100%)
<i>Pressing addressees to do something when urgent</i>	4 (27%)

Finally, salutations and subscriptions show differences when the model petitions in the manuals and the manuscript petitions are compared. Whereas all the petitions in manuals include fixed expressions, none of the analysed manuscript petitions include the same salutation formula (*To the Honourable (Addressee’s name), The petition of (person’s name) sheweth that...*) as in the manuals. On the contrary, the petitions start by addressing the Governors directly by writing *Gentlemen* or *Hon. Gentlemen*, among other expressions, as shown in Table 2. These salutations are commonly found in other types of letters present in the letter-writing manuals, but not in the petitions, which contain the fixed formula indicated in all the cases both in Brown (1790) and in Cooke (1791).

Table 2: Types of salutation present in manuscript petitions

SALUTATION USED	NUMBER OF PETITIONS
<i>Gentlemen</i>	3 (20%)
<i>Hon./ Honrid/ Honoured</i> ⁵ <i>Gentlemen</i>	9 (60%)
<i>Oh most honorable Gentlemen</i>	1 (6.66%)
<i>Sir</i>	1 (6.66%)
<i>Hon. Sir</i>	1 (6.66%)
Total	15 (99.98%) ⁶

Similarly, only one petition includes a subscription similar to the one in the manuals, that is, promising to pray, but as can be observed in Table 3, the structure is much more elaborate than the formula found in the manuals (*And your petitioner as in duty bound shall ever pray*), and with an underlying FTA to the addressee's face (see Section 4.2.3). The other fourteen subscriptions contain a closing formula which resembles the one found in letters of the time, that is, a noun phrase where the petitioner usually refers to herself as *servant* and this noun is always modified by at least one adjective, which on occasion is also modified by adverbs such as *much*, *most* or *greatly*, which simply emphasise the humility that they possibly wished to express. As regards the adjectives used in these noun phrases, as shown in Table 4, although most of them also encode the idea of humility, the use of *distressed* provides an idea of the difficult situation these women were experiencing and it emphasises the misery they felt and which was referred to in the manuals.⁷

Table 3: Types of subscriptions present in manuscript petitions

SUBSCRIPTION	NUMBER OF PETITIONS
<i>the unfortunate</i>	1 (6.66%)
<i>I am in Duty Bound for ever to Pray for your Kindness</i>	1 (6.66%)
<i>While Life Remains</i>	
<i>Your</i> + 1 adjective + <i>servant</i>	2 (13.1%)
<i>Your</i> + 2/3 adjectives + <i>servant</i>	4 (27%)
<i>Your</i> + modifier + 1 adjective + <i>servant</i>	2 (13.1%)
<i>Your</i> + modifier + 2/3 adjectives + <i>servant</i>	3 (20%)
<i>Your</i> + adjective + <i>petitioner</i>	1 (6.66%)
<i>Your</i> + adjective + <i>applicant</i>	1 (6.66%)
Total	15 (99.84%) ⁸

Table 4: Adjectives used in the subscriptions in manuscript petitions

ADJECTIVE	NUMBER OF PETITIONS
<i>Humble</i>	8 (40%)
<i>Obliged</i>	4 (20%)
<i>Obedient</i>	2 (10%)
<i>Respectful</i>	2 (10%)
<i>Distressed</i>	4 (20%)
Total	20 (100%)

⁵ The three forms are found, but *Hon.* is the most common of them all, as only one example of *Honrid* and one of *Honoured* are found.

⁶ Unfortunately, the use of decimals in the case of single examples (6.66%) does not allow for this figure to be 100%, which is what it should be as it represents the total number of petitions.

⁷ This is all described in Section 4.2.3, as it concerns the FTAs analysed.

⁸ See Footnote 6, as the same applies here.

This comparison suggests that the manuscript petitions analysed were more similar to the content recommended than to the form of the model petitions found in the manuals, as there is much variation regarding the salutations and the subscriptions. This may suggest that the writers may not have been acquainted with the manuals directly, but they possibly had an awareness of the concept of politeness required when petitioning.

4.2.2 FTAs in the manuscript petitions

An analysis of FTAs facilitates an understanding of the expressions that appear in the manuscript petitions, and it contributes to better explaining the reasons why this analysis, based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) ideas, is not only appropriate, but very useful to comprehend the relationships that signees and addressees could have had at that time and in that context.

Apart from requesting, which is the FTA that the simple action of petitioning implies, other FTAs can be observed when these petitions are analysed. They threaten both the addressee's and the signee's face. However, while the former are always minimised, the latter are not. The different types of FTAs employed, as well as examples of each will be provided below.

4.2.3 FTAs towards the addressee's face

Although the fifteen petitions display many similarities, not all of them contain exactly the same features, which means that the use of FTAs also varies. Nevertheless, as all of them are petitions, they all contain a request, which is one of the FTAs to the addressee's negative face. The addressees probably would not have wanted to be bothered by these prisoners, and the request was something that the women needed and wanted but it was not what the addressee probably desired. This threatening act is always minimised in these petitions, as it is accompanied by some expressions that usually show deference to the addressee and at the same time may be interpreted as self-humiliation on the side of the signees, as shown in (8) and in (9), where despite the imploration, the use of the adverb *humbly* serves as a minimiser of the act.

(8) *I humbly implore a small Relief* (Ann Macarthy, 1805)

(9) *I humbly implore you to have Pity on me* (Ann Foss, 1805)

Another FTA against the addressee's negative face which can be found in the petitions analysed is a promise. All the petitions in the manuals contain the final promise *and your petitioner as in duty bound shall (or will) ever pray*, which could be understood as a formula that may have lost its original meaning and it would simply be used as a concluding phrase. Even though only one of the petitions analysed contains a phrase akin to this (see Table 3 above), more than half of them, nine out of fifteen, include a promise towards the end of the petition, usually before the subscription, as can be seen in (10). On occasion this promise is accompanied by a condition of being granted the request, as in (11).

(10) *My Prayers, and my nine innocent Children shall join with me in Gratitude for your Benevolence extended* (Sarah Whiley, 1804)

(11) *if you would be so humane as to grant me a trifle, as in your Goodness may seem me it will be received with Gratitude by her* (Mary Ann Jenkinson, 1805)

In addition to the minimisation that has already been pointed out by the use of adverbs such as *humbly*, there are other strategies that appear to have been employed by the writers so

as to minimise the FTAs described. These include the use of apologies and the deference expressed continuously throughout the letters. Although when the petitions have been compared with the manuals, the use of apologies has been mentioned as the manuals suggested excusing one's boldness in writing, it is important to indicate this aspect here as it is necessary to understand how the threatening acts are minimised. One of these examples is (12).

(12) *Pardon the Liberty I take* (Ann Foss, 1804)

As shown in (13), sometimes those apologies are preceded by positive words to the addressees, namely *Humanity and goodness*. These do not only add more to the minimisation of the act, but they also function as a politeness strategy to appeal to the positive face of the Governors.

(13) *your Humanity and goodness I humbly hope will Please to Pardon the Liberty taking by me* (Sarah Whiley, 1805)

The deference given to the addressee is rooted in the fact that these women felt that they were inferior to the Governors, but they served the function of minimising the requesting act. This deference is present in numerous expressions and vocabulary used in the whole content of the petitions, but it is particularly evident in the salutations and in the subscriptions. As shown in Table 2 above, the terms *gentlemen* and *sir(s)* are commonly found in the body of the petitions, as the writers seem to be constantly addressing the Governors, and more often than not they are capitalised, which could be interpreted as another sign of deference. Although capitalisation rules were not fully established in the nineteenth century as they are today, the fact that these terms of address are capitalised could be an indication of the importance the writers gave to the addressees. Similarly, the adjective *honoured* (often abbreviated as *Hon.* and sometimes spelt differently, as shown in Table 2 and in Footnote 5) usually precedes the noun *gentlemen*, and even a superlative form of the adjective *honourable* is also present in one of the petitions, both of which emphasise the deferential treatment employed, as can be seen in the salutations that appear at the beginning of two letters by Sarah Whiley, Examples (14) and (15).

(14) *Honoured Gentlemen* (Sarah Whiley, 1804)

(15) *Oh most Honorable Gentlemen* (Sarah Whiley, 1805)

The subscriptions also manifest that deference to the addressee and, as shown in Tables 3 and 4, they tend to include phrases such as *obliged servant*, *humble servant*, or even more emphatic expressions making reference to the difficult situation the women were living, including the term *distressed*, or even *obedient* and *respectful*. All the adjectives clearly serve to humble the signees and at the same time they minimise the threatening acts by giving deference to the addressee, as has already been commented. These subscriptions are exemplified in (16), in (17), and in (18).

(16) *Your Most Respectful, Humble and Obedient Servant* (Ann Foss, 1805)

(17) *your much obliged and Respectful Humble Servant* (Ann Macarthy, 1802)

(18) *your obliged, distressed Servant* (Mary Ann Jenkinson, 1805)

4.2.4 FTAs towards the signee's face

Whereas the FTAs towards the addressee's negative face are more common than those to their positive face, in the case of the signees the situation is reversed. In other words, the positive face of the signees is much more often threatened than their negative face. This can be explained due to the main act expressed in petitions, that is, a request.

In this respect, only one type of FTA towards the signee's negative face has been identified, namely the act of expressing thanks. This act is present because these women maintained correspondence with the Governors of the Bank of England for three years, time in which they were granted some of the needs that they requested, and as such they appear to have thanked them for their good actions towards them, as in (19) and in (20). However, this is not a commonly found expression in the petitions provided in the manuals, as they include petitions that were not part of a series of correspondence.

(19) *Thankful indeed I ought to be for the unbounded Generosity to me* (Ann Macarthy, 1805)

(20) *With Grateful Respect do I return you my sincere Thanks for your Generous Relief to me* (Sarah Whiley, 1804)

Some of the FTAs threatening the signee's positive face have already been described, as they served to minimise the FTAs to the addressee's negative face at the same time. These include the apologies and the expressions of self-humiliation. However, it is necessary to add a third FTA to this list, the confessions or admissions of guilt. All of them are considered by Brown and Levinson as FTAs that threaten the positive face of the speaker, or the signee in this case. Example (21) includes a different apology from the ones mentioned in (12) and (13) above, whereas (22) and (23) are two examples of the signees confessing or admitting guilt, as well as repentance in the case of (22).

(21) *I hope your Goodness will Pleas to Excuse* (Sarah Whiley, 1805)

(22) *Since my Confinement I have endeavoured to behave myself with becoming propriety sorry for my misconduct* (Ann Macarthy, 1805)

(23) *I know I have been guilty* (Ann Foss, 1804)

The expressions of self-humiliation are distributed all the way through the content of the petitions. In addition to the use of the adverb *humbly*, which has already been pointed out in (8) and (9), other phrases that can be read, and which transmit the same idea, are *implores your pity, take compassion, have merited the punishment I receive, and acting like a foolish woman*.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

The concept of the rise of the individual self that Culpeper and Demmen (2011) place in nineteenth century Britain seems to be clearly identified in the petitions analysed in this study. This justifies the analysis of FTAs, as described by Brown and Levinson, which has been carried out here, and which shows that, although this concept was developed later, the writers of the letter-writing manuals could perceive that in their society the concept of politeness was acquiring a dimension that needed attention in their instructions.

It also seems evident that the signees of these petitions were aware of the differences in relation to the social class they belonged to and that of their addressees, as evidenced in the use of the FTAs discussed. Although the four women signing these petitions might never have read the instruction manuals available to those who could read and write at the time, they appear to have known that there was a specific language and specific expressions that they had to use in the given context if they wanted to be granted what they were requesting. Certainly, if not them, other people around them in prison would possibly have been familiar with the polite language that was required. This is evidenced in the presence of most of the recommendations provided in the manuals, particularly the fact that the petitions are written with emotion and that the miseries and misfortunes are an extremely recurrent topic, present in almost all of them.

The fact that these women maintained a relatively regular correspondence with their addressees and thanked them for previous granting of their needs suggests that their use of the language may have been seen as proper and the expected one by the Governors. While both participants in the correspondence exchange, addressees and signees, experienced FTAs both to their positive and negative face, expected differences are observed due to their social positions and the features of the act of requesting, which directly threatens somebody's negative face. Therefore, it is not surprising to have found an abundance of FTAs threatening the addressee's negative face, such as requests and apologies, which are present in all the petitions, or a promise that more than half of them include. On the contrary, it is the signee's positive face that is more often threatened. This is evidenced in the constant use of apologies and self-humiliation, which are recurrent in all the petitions, and the occasional admission of guilt.

The signees' use of repeated humiliating language towards themselves as opposed to the deference expressed towards the Governors appears to have contributed, together with all the other minimising expressions described, to obtaining the *little trifle* that they requested before the distressful journey that was ahead of them.

Despite the small size of the corpus analysed, some of the conclusions drawn may probably be extended to other similar texts from the same period. Further studies could include not only more petition letters written by women but also by men so as to draw more definite conclusions and to establish a comparison between the two gender groups. This would allow further clarification of the use of the politeness strategies discussed in this paper.

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