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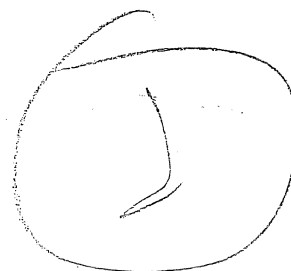
YEARBOOK OF ENGLISH STUDIES
VOLUME 3

ΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΟΝΙΚΗ ΕΠΕΤΗΡΙΔΑ ΦΙΛΟΣΟΦΙΚΗΣ ΣΧΟΛΗΣ
ΠΕΡΙΟΔΟΣ Β'

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ΑΡΙΣΤΟΤΕΛΕΙΟΥ ΠΑΝΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΙΟΥ ΘΕΣΣΑΛΟΝΙΚΗΣ

ΤΟΜΟΣ 3

ΑΝΑΤΥΠΑ - OFF-PRINTS



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COMMUNICATION FAILURES IN PERSUASIVE
WRITING: TOWARDS A TYPOLOGY



1991 - 1992

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by
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Communication Failures in Persuasive Writing: Towards a Typology

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1.0. INTRODUCTION

Most language teachers and linguists still believe that similarities and dissimilarities between languages play a major role in how quickly a particular foreign language may be learned by speakers of another language. Several studies during the 1940s and 50s focused on the structural differences between L1 and L2 and their role in second language learning. The term 'transfer' was introduced to describe the carrying over of a form "from the mother tongue or from other foreign languages into IL" (Faerch, et al. 1984:193). Behaviourist Theories (BT) refer to these 'forms' as habits and speak of *positive transfer* when first language habits are similar and consequently helpful in second language learning, and of *negative transfer* (another term is 'interference' or 'proactive inhibition') when previously formulated habits prevent or inhibit the learning of new ones. Ellis (1985:22), in support of BTs, points out that "differences between the first and second language create learning difficulty which results in errors, while the similarities between the first and second language facilitate rapid and easy learning". Contrastive Analysis (CA) also "took the position that a learner's first language 'interferes' with his/her acquisition of a second language, and that it therefore comprises the major obstacle to successful mastery of the new language" (Dulay, et al. 1982:97). Lado (1957) focused on the hypothesis that the *degree of difference* between the first and the second language is proportionate to the *degree of difference* between the first and the second language. Although there was considerable dissatisfaction with the 'Lado Hypothesis', contrastive linguists have argued that there is far more to applied contrastive linguistics and that they have a valid theoretical and descriptive contribution to make (Fisiak 1981; James 1980-83).

Kaplan (1972) went beyond the study of structural differences, suggesting that learners of a foreign language who manage to master its syntactic structures, often still seem to be unable to "compose adequate themes, term papers, and dissertations". He adds that effective communication depends on more than learning the rules of phonology and syntax of a foreign

language. In particular he visualises a possible pragmatic dimension of variation: *rhetoric*, which he notes is not universal, but varies from culture to culture. This led to *Contrastive Rhetoric*.

This paper examines some data relating to the use of inappropriate persuasive strategies and vocabulary, which constitutes what Thomas (1983) refers to as pragmatic failure. In particular, these will be related with a set of applications for a travel scholarship to the U.S.A. written by Greek learners of English.

1.1. PERSUASIVE STRATEGIES AND STYLE

Persuasive Discourse (PD) refers to the linguistic devices individuals use to convince others. Connor & Lauer (1985:312-313) consider written PD to be "that which integrates the rational, credibility, and affective appeals (corresponding to logos, ethos, and pathos) ... in its (the speaker's) effort to effect cooperation and identification with an audience". Their analysis of cross-cultural written PD attempts to identify those rational, credible, and affective features of a text that account for its persuasiveness. They developed an analytic system operating with 23 persuasive appeals consisting of fourteen logical categories, under the label 'rational appeals', four ethical categories labelled 'credibility appeals', and five affective categories labelled 'affective appeals'.

Johnstone (1989:142) makes a distinction between persuasive *strategies* and persuasive *style*. In her framework, the former are "broadly speaking, the various means of persuasion available to any speaker", while the latter refer to "a speaker's general tendency, resulting in part from cultural and historical factors, to adopt one particular persuasive strategy in any situation" (our emphasis). Johnstone however fails to take into account that persuasive style is not only an *individual speaker's* general tendency but also the tendency of a speech *community* (which to some degree or in certain respects affects the individuals) within a certain culture. Like Connor & Lauer (op.cit.) Johnstone develops a system with three categories of persuasive strategies:

- (a) *Quasilogical argumentation* which she defines as "informal, nondemonstrative reasoning that takes its effectiveness from its similarity to formal, demonstrative logic ..." (1989:146).
- (b) *Presentational persuasion* which "could be said to be based on the assumption that being persuaded is being moved, being swept along by a rhythmic flow of words and sounds, in the way people are swept along by poetry" (147).
- (c) *Analogical persuasion* which "works by calling to mind, explicitly or implicitly, traditional wisdom, often in the form of parable or fablelike stories" (149).

Note how this system she isolates contradicts her earlier definition of 'style': she now refers to a *culture's* 'style'; the former used in western cultures and the remaining two in eastern and more religious cultures.

1.2. PRAGMALINGUISTIC AND SOCIOPRAGMATIC FAILURE

The distinction between pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic failures can further illuminate our account of PD. Thomas (1983:94) argues that "... pragmatic failure is an area of cross-cultural communication breakdown ... which "... occurs when the pragmatic force mapped by S onto a given utterance is systematically different from the force most frequently assigned to it by native speakers of the target language, or when speech act strategies are inappropriately transferred from L1 to L2". Sociopragmatic failure, by contrast, "... refers to the social conditions placed on language in use" while pragmalinguistic failure is basically a linguistic problem, caused by differences in the linguistic encoding of pragmatic force, sociopragmatic failure stems from cross-culturally different perceptions of what constitutes appropriate linguistic behaviour" (94).

Riley (1989) points out that the distinction made by Thomas reflects an ideal opposition between those rules and norms which are language-specific, of which many lexicopragmatic aspects of words would presumably be a clear example, and those which are culture-specific. But, he warns that:

"... as language is itself, of course, extremely highly acculturated, the distinction often becomes very fuzzy indeed. It is obviously best, as Thomas points out, to see those terms as referring to the poles of a cline, rather than as discrete categories. At the pragmalinguistic end we are dealing with (mistaken) beliefs about the language and at the socio-pragmatic end with (mistaken) beliefs about the society". (Riley, 1989:235).

Riley adds also the notion of misperception and his definitions of both pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic failure differ from Thomas' in that they are two-sided, meaning that both hearer and speaker are susceptible: "... Pragmalinguistic *error* results from a failure to identify or express meanings correctly, sociopragmatic error is the result of a failure to identify the situation correctly". To 'express meanings' is presumably what the speaker does although both parties could be seen as needing to identify the situation. Unlike Thomas, Riley fails to make a clear association with language in defining 'sociopragmatic error': "Pragmalinguistic *error* refers, therefore, to a dysfunction in discourse processing and production; sociopragmatic *error* re-

fers to a failure to perceive, categorise and evaluate social reality in accordance with a particular set of cultural norms" (235: our italics). In neither statement is there any explicit reference to whether the 'error' (the term 'failure' suggested by Thomas is preferable to 'error' for reasons explained below) lies with the speaker or the hearer.

Littlewood (1983) suggests that pragmalinguistic failure is due to the preference of different speech communities for using different strategies for 'doing things' with language and who "produce inappropriate speech behaviour because they transfer their mother tongue conventions into their use of the foreign language" (202). He considers two further issues, namely, the problem of reconciling language norms (conventions of what is appropriate language use in a given context) and the problem of the speaker's behavioural style. Littlewood argues that if language teaching were to define the borderline between choices due to language norms, and choices due to personal factors, it would be denying to learners an important freedom which native speakers possess: "... the freedom to adapt aspects of their communicative performance to express their own personality and behavioural style" (202). In order to answer the two problems set by Littlewood it would be necessary to say what pragmatic competence is. Thomas (1983) claims that pragmatic competence is "... the ability to use language effectively in order to achieve a specific purpose and to understand language in context" (92). Consequently, the term 'pragmatic failure' seems preferable to 'pragmatic error' on the grounds that the word 'error' is also used in grammatical theory, whereas failure is of a different sort "... since grammaticality can be judged according to prescriptive rules..." whereas pragmatic competence, as Candlin (1976) observes, "entails probable rather than categorical rules" (238). Thus, it seems preferable to say that the pragmatic force of an utterance is not 'wrong', but that it does not achieve the speaker's goal.

All this has possible teaching implications. Thomas claims that "pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic failure reflect two fundamentally different types of pragmatic decision-making. The first is language-specific and it should be possible for the teacher to correct it quite straightforwardly. The second is in part culture-specific, a reflection of the student's system of values and beliefs, and should not be 'corrected', but only pointed out and discussed" (109).

1.3. LEXICOPRAGMATIC ERRORS

In this study we consider if and where lexicopragmatic failure contributes to unsatisfactory persuasive strategies. Our suggestion for a possible test to distinguish between lexicopragmatic (see further) error (which may lead to either sociopragmatic or pragmalinguistic failure, see e.g. 7) and other errors/failure of a sociopragmatic or other pragmalinguistic nature is the fea-

sibility of substitution (in the case of lexicopragmatic error) of that particular word or formulaic lexical unit with a semantically same but pragmatically different lexical unit which would not precipitate such failure. This does not seem to be possible in the case of many sociopragmatic or other pragmalinguistic failures (lexical or non lexical) as such failure is not able to be localised in one word/lexical unit only, but extends over the context of an entire clause or utterance.

According to Sweet (1899/1972:64) "mastering the vocabulary of most European languages means simply learning to recognise a number of old friends under slight disguises" (The term used to describe these words is 'cognates'). For example the Greek *tilephono* and the English *telephone* or the Italian *concerto* and the English *concert* would give Greek and Italian learners of English a head start in the learning of these terms in English. Odlin (1989:78) notes that "despite the advantages of a large lexicon common to two languages, there are nevertheless, pitfalls in the form of 'faux amis', the 'false friends' notorious to many language teachers"; the forms of Greek *sympathitikos* and the English *sympathetic* look alike. But they are not 'true' cognates: *sympathitikos* in Greek means 'likable' while in English 'showing sympathy'. These are examples of primarily *semantic* differences and potential transfer errors.

However, as McKay (1980:17-18) suggests knowing a word "involves knowing how to use the word syntactically, semantically, and pragmatically". She adds that "lexical competence includes knowing the probability of a word's occurrence in a particular context". Scholfield (1981:31) stresses the notion of 'situation' or 'setting', which is dependent "on the specific topic or purpose of a piece of writing". Examples of pragmatic vocabulary errors are offered by Leech (1974; e.g.1) and McKay (1980; e.g.2):

1. Sorry to bother you with all. ... (meaning)
I am sorry to inconvenience you ...

where the word *bother* has the same semantic content as inconvenience but sounds too casual for a formal situation, and

2. He *mentioned* his determination to return to ... (rather than,
He *expressed* his determination to return to ...

where the verb *mentioned* contains "less strength of formality than the situation warrants" (McKay 1980:18). These errors lie with the difference in the pragmatic force between the terms *bother* and *inconvenience* for the first example and *mentioned* and *expressed* for the second. Leech (1974) describes such errors as conveying 'inappropriate social meaning-stylistic overtones'.

We prefer to employ the term **Lexicopragmatic errors** for

words—or formulaic lexical units (i.e. *How do you do, By the way*)—which assign 'unsuitable' (a term preferable to 'inappropriate') pragmatic force for the specific situation and context.¹ Such errors are characterised by being grammatically well-formed and semantically acceptable while pragmatically unsuitable in a particular context or situation. This type of error may occur: (a) either due to a mis-selection from a set of near synonymous words or formulaic lexical units (e.g. 21), (b) negative lexical pragmatic transfer from the mother tongue or from a second to a third language (e.g. 7 interpretation (a), 15), and/or (c) mistaken beliefs of what constitutes appropriate linguistic behaviour in a particular situation in the target culture (e.g. 7 interpretation (b), 9). We prefer the term *lexicopragmatic error* as many bad selections of words/formulaic lexical units of pragmatic interest are due to faulty language knowledge and *can* be corrected straightforwardly by the language teacher.

1.4. AIM OF STUDY.

Our study is an exploratory investigation, using quasi-naturalistic and self-report elicitation of the types of persuasive strategies employed in their EFL writing by Greek learners of English. We expected these strategies to be different from native speakers', due to pragmatic transfer and to have a different effect upon native recipients. We are also interested in the degree to which learners are aware of their strategies.

2.0. METHOD.

2.1. SUBJECTS.

The subjects were eight native speakers of Greek, all students at the University of Wales, Bangor, UK. All were in their early twenties and they were advanced speakers of English. The native speakers of English (recipients) were students of the same University.

2.2. PROCEDURE.

The study was divided into three parts:

(A) The subjects (also referred to as 'applicants') were asked to write a letter applying for a fictitious scholarship offered by the U.S. Information Service (USIS), and advertised in the press, for travel to the USA. No instructions were given on how the letter should be written so they could express themselves freely and promote their candidatures in the way they thought it would be best. No time limit was specified; however the subjects were advised to spend no more than one hour composing their applications.

The letters were written at home, so the writing was quasi-authentic. The use of a dictionary was allowed on condition that every word checked should be underlined in the text and the name of the dictionary used be specified. The dictionary used was the Oxford Dictionary of Modern Greek (1990). Thus, it would be possible to see whether the use of dictionaries helps learners to avoid pragmatic failure. The subjects were also asked not to discuss their letter with anyone. The results of the protocols were analysed by the researchers in terms of the persuasive strategies used.

(B) A panel of native speakers also referred to as 'recipients' were asked to read and evaluate the applications, taking into account the content, structures and language used. The recipients were also asked to identify the word(s) that they felt to be unsuitable and to state why. Their reactions and comments were recorded and noted down.

(C) The third part involved a discussion with each applicant concerning his/her letter, in order to see if they could monitor their own failures. Their pragmatic errors as determined by (B) were underlined—but without any specification of the nature of the deficit—and they were encouraged to correct themselves. If they were unable to correct themselves, this would probably reveal either (a) their linguistic limitations, (b) a conscious decision on his/her part to use the strategy which led to the failure or (c) no awareness of the pragmatic norms of the target language. These writer oral protocols were recorded.

3.0. RESULTS-INTERPRETATION.

In this study we use elements of two systems discussed in 1.1 (Johnstone 1989, Connor and Lauer 1985) but further separate two major categories of persuasive strategies: *Direct Strategies*, whereby the applicant refers explicitly to himself and asks something from the recipient directly; and *Indirect strategies*, which appeal to the recipient's emotions by using complimentary expressions which refer to the donor institution indirectly. In the analysis, examples of persuasive strategies were examined along with the lexicopragmatic errors, which in the native speakers' view together lead to pragmatic failure, of either a pragmatic or a sociopragmatic nature. Data quoted to illustrate persuasive strategies is enclosed in quotation marks. It should be noted that all lexicopragmatic errors and all unsuitable utterances in this study would be perfectly acceptable in another context, but they seem to be unsuitable for this particular situation. The analysis is qualitative in the sense that it does not examine the frequency of pragmatic failures or the number of lexicopragmatic errors but addresses the probable reasons why they occurred, and the reactions of native speakers.

(A) Direct Strategies

(D.S.1.) A direct strategy used by all subjects was 'quasilogical argumentation' (Johnstone 1989). This was a direct statement referring to themselves which was considered highly egocentric by the native speakers. See examples 3-5.

3. "I consider myself a good candidate due to the following reasons."
4. "I am very hardworking student."
5. "By the way, I strongly believe that I consider myself a good candidate for this award."

This approach seemed uncomfortably direct to our English judges. This is because it violates Grice's first maxim of politeness: do not impose on your hearer (or reader). There seems to be no attempt to soften the force of these statements. The applicant states his own point of view, and so risks seeming arrogant or pushy to the native speaker: he seems to have no awareness of the reader's values. A native speaker would be likely to soften these claims. One device he might use for this would be to use the Passive, saying *I am considered to be ...* or *my tutors judge me to be ...*. An example of syntactic choice having pragmalinguistic force. Moreover, the use of the formulaic *By the way* in example (5) trivialises the rest of the sentence, thus annulling the applicant's move to make a very important statement about himself. Consequently, the applicant comes over as inconsistent. The use of the form *I am* in example (4) is another pragmatic error, as it makes a stronger claim than *I consider ...* although they are both too direct. Moreover, it seems to be inconsistent to use the form *I strongly believe* followed by the form *I consider*. One is unlikely to *strongly believe* what one considers. The dictionary offers no solution in this case since it contains only semantic, phonological, and syntactic information and usually no relevant pragmatic information. In this case the subjects could not monitor themselves and gain awareness of the failure they had manifest.

(D.S.2.) Another direct strategy employed by the applicants was to refer directly to their impecuniousness or their unemployment. This is what Connor & Lauer (1988) call an 'affective appeal' with the subjects using 'charged language' to evoke the reader's emotions and so secure the scholarship. See examples 6-8.

6. "... your scholarship is my *only chance* to make a study visit to the U.S.A. since my *financial state* would not permit me to do such a thing at my own expense."
7. "Unemployment *crisis* in Britain this year has made it almost

impossible for final year students to obtain a permanent job post, and especially when it is restricted to areas of special needs in education. So, my *financial state* does not permit me to go to the U.S.A. on my own expense."

8. "... I hope you will not *refuse* to me the *chance of a life time*."

There seems to be a violation of Grice's second maxim of politeness: give the hearer (reader) options. These appeals are sanctioned by the Christian ideal of charity which plays an important role in Greek culture. This relation seem to show another case of pragmatic failure. In these examples there are also some possible lexicopragmatic errors. A *unique chance*, tends to be used in English to mean 'extraordinary'. On the other hand, to use the phrase *my only chance* or *my sole opportunity* (see example 17) might be felt to constitute 'emotional blackmail', since it implies that a refusal would be disastrous for the applicant (see also, example 8). There also could be a mis-translation evident in *my only chance*. The result is pragmatic failure and makes the appeal more emotional to the native speaker than it was probably intended to be. The use of a dictionary would not help the learner in this case because, as is shown below, it gives the equivalent translation of the Greek form *monadikos* which would be in English, *unique or sole*. However, in both cases it gives the word out of context and this might lead the learner either to the more likely one for a native speaker to use *unique* or to the more unlikely one for the native speaker to use *sole*.

State is a lexicopragmatically unsuitable selection here. It carries negative associations i.e. implies a bad state of affairs, as in *a sorry state*. The positive or neutral analogue would be *my finances* or *financial conditions*.

The use of the word *crisis* would only be used by native speakers if they wanted to describe a desperate situation. It might appear in sensationalist tabloid newspapers like *The Sun*. In this case the applicant is again translating directly from Greek, where the word has lost its strong connotation. In Greek it is used as 'crisis anergias' but does not necessarily mean a desperate situation. The use of a dictionary would not have helped the learner in this case because, as we see below, one of the equivalent terms it gives for the Greek word *crisi* is the English cognate *crisis*. Again the term is offered out of context. The use of the word *refuse* again constitutes 'emotional blackmail' to the recipients and it seems too demanding. It also seems to put the recipient in a position where s/he cannot say *no*. The use of a dictionary would not have helped because it does not give the word in context but simply the English semantic equivalent without its pragmatic value, as can be seen here *arnoume=refuse; deny*. In all these cases the reactions of the native speakers were to say that the applicant seemed cheeky. It should be noted that the fact of making an emotional appeal does not lead necessarily to pragmatic failure since native speakers do it. However, s/he would be unlikely to

use lexical items such as the ones quoted above. In this case (and generally of lexicopragmatic errors) there seem to be *two possible* interpretations:

- (a) The learner creates the wrong pragmatic effect through the pragmatic overtones of *crisis*, probably misled by the Greek language. S/he does not realise the meaning is so 'strong' in the target language (s/he would probably have not used this word had she realised). This is a lexicopragmatic error which leads to pragmalinguistic failure and the learner can be corrected as the error lies with faulty *language* knowledge.
- or (b) The learner creates the wrong effect through misjudging what is appropriate to the situation (application) in the culture (Brit/US). S/he knows the overtones of *crisis* are strong, but thinks that is what is needed (misled by Greek culture). This is sociopragmatic failure and can only be discussed with the learner as it is a case of faulty *cultural* knowledge.

In this case the applicants could not self-monitor (except in the case of *monadikos* = *unique, sole*) and claimed that the 'emotional blackmail' created was intentional (as in b) in order to show strong interest in the scholarship. This supports Riley's idea of 'mistaken' beliefs about the target language (1.2).

(D.S.3.) Another common direct strategy used by the subjects was quasilogical argumentation which involves the use of a direct statement about their *worth* or asking directly to be taken *under serious consideration*. This strategy involves constant first person reference, which again is excessively direct. See examples 9 and 10.

9. "I am sure my qualifications did convince you about my worth."
10. "I am sure you will take my application under serious consideration."

Use of the form *I am sure (that...)* was interpreted as presumptuous by the native speakers since the applicant seems to be dictating to the selection panel what criteria to base their selection on. It is presumptuous therefore. The applicant assumes that it is reasonable to take the decision of the panel for granted. It is really a polite imperative (c.f. *I trust that...*). There seems to be violation of Grice's second maxim of politeness because the applicant seems to impose his high opinion of himself on the recipient. All the applicants managed to find and correct this error and changed the word *sure* to *hope*. *Convince* (especially when emphasised by the auxiliary *do*) seems aggressive and arrogant to native speakers. In the case of the word *convince* the learner would have got help from the dictionary (*convince*=*persuade*); it has the

same overtones in Greek as in English, allowing therefore positive transfer) while by contrast the emphatic use of the auxiliary *do* should not be expected to be included. The use here of *worth* seems to be very definite and direct. It also sounds odd to use this word with the possessive *my*. A native speaker might use the word *worthiness*, which would sound a little pompous/ecclesiastical but less conceited. The use of the dictionary would not help the applicant since it does not include the word *worthiness* at all. There also seems to be an implicature (Levinson 1983) in the use of the word *serious* which might seem rude to the recipient. It might imply that the recipient does not normally take applications seriously. In this case the dictionary would not have helped the applicant at all because it does not include any information about implicatures. Consequently the applicant could not self-monitor and when asked what exactly she meant, replied that she used the adjective *serious* in order to 'dress up' the word *consideration*.

(B) Indirect Strategies.

(I.S.1.) A very commonly used indirect strategy involved quasilogical argumentation by making extensive reference to their qualifications, and by using the first person singular. This is known as the 'rational appeal' by which the applicant seems to know the recipient's values because the argumentation employed is logical: it does not appeal to the recipient's emotions. Although rational appeals are claimed to be used in Western cultures (Connor & Lauer 1989) its misuse (extensive reference to their qualifications) leads to pragmatic failure. 11-14 are examples.

11. "I speak four languages ... I hold one degree ... I am in my final year ... I have just started ..."
12. "I have finished ... I have already taken ... I speak ... I am interested ..."
13. "I have been ... I have finished ..."
14. "My promising academic performance supported by quality academic provisions."

Such recital of the applicant's qualifications might cause boredom or annoyance of the reader. There seems to be a violation of the Gricean maxim of 'quantity' which says: avoid redundancy, that is, be as informative as required and not more than that. It is interesting to see here a case where the message is not wrong in itself (that is, stating their qualifications). The pragmatic failure lies with the way it is presented (form of the language used). We have identified excessive use of *I* as the root cause of this failure: this egocentricity is reinforced by the use of the possessive *my* and even the use of the adjective *promising* seems inappropriate to mention by the applicant

himself; it would be more likely to be stated by a referee. In particular, a native speaker would be less likely to use expressions like *I have*..., *I am*... in order to present his/her qualifications. *S/he* would be more likely to include this information in a C.V. (Curriculum Vitae). After all, an application letter is subjective because it is written mainly in the first person singular and it is also signed by the applicant. On the other hand, a C.V. seems to be objective because all the qualifications or interests of the applicant are stated in an objective manner. The dictionary would not help the learner at all in this case because it does not include such information, as it is not localised in specific lexical items. So self-monitoring would not be easy, and would be complicated by the fact that C.V.s are often written in the first person singular in Greek.

(1.S.2.) Another indirect strategy was to connect their studies explicitly with American themes. In so doing they sought to demonstrate the relevance of their own aspirations to the American study visit. See examples 15-17.

15. "...finally, *I have to admit* that the reason *I am applying* for this award is that *it will give me the chance to complete my research* on Crime and Defiance; data from the U.S.A. would be very helpful for this."
16. "That is why it is very important to me to visit *America* so as to gain a good experience."
17. "Making a study visit to the U.S.A. is my *sole opportunity* to live in the country *where American English is spoken*, get to know the *native speakers* better and have a personal experience of the *American culture*."

On the surface this looks like a rational appeal based on the structure of reality: argumentation by reason, and it shows the applicant's awareness of the recipient's values (Connor & Lauer 1988). The way it is done by the applicant, however, would make the native speaker think that the applicant is coming on too strong or that *s/he* is asking for their mercy (in relation to the Christian idea of charity) to *complete his work* (as in example 15). This is the kind of thing a native speaker might also write; however, *s/he* would be unlikely to use charged language. A lexicopragmatic error has also occurred, the word *admit* in *I have to admit* used (with performative force) to introduce something the speaker regrets or is ashamed of. It would seem strange to regard a wish to visit the U.S.A. as a failing where it is in fact the reason for applying. The use of a dictionary would not help in this case because it gives again only the semantic meaning of the word *admit* and not its pragmatic value (*admit=paradehome*). In Greek the expression *ofilo na paradehito* does not imply guilt as it is a formula intended to affirm sincerity. Therefore it

may occur in an application. Moreover the sentence *it will give me the chance to complete my research* implies that if the applicant is not awarded the scholarship *s/he* might not be able to complete his/her work that is, *s/he* would be placed at a disadvantage. The use of the definite article *the (chance)* emphasises the uniqueness that was not intended (as confirmed when *s/he* was asked) for the applicant to finish his/her work. The use of a dictionary would not help the applicant in this case because it does not include information on the pragmatic value of the definite article *the*. Expressions like *America* (as used in example 16) and *so as* are too informal and would be unlikely to appear in a native speaker's letter of application.

(1.S.3.) The last indirect strategy used in this study by all the applicants involves affective appeal (*thanking* the recipient *in advance*) in order to evoke his/her emotions and to presumptuously display good manners. See examples 18-20.

18. "Thanks in advance."
19. "Thank you in advance, I look forward to hearing from you as soon as possible."
20. "Thanking you in advance for you cooperation ..."

In all cases there seems to be lack of respect caused by the ellipsis of *I am*. It may also be a vocabulary error due to deficient learning of the formulaic *thanking you in advance, I remain ...* Forms like *thanks* however, seem to be too colloquial for this context and moreover the use of forms such as *soon as possible* are impolite for this situation. The failure here is that the applicants seem to be thanking the recipient for something *s/he* has not yet done, in order to gain his/her preference. There seems to be a violation of the second Gricean maxim of politeness: do not impose on your hearer (reader). A native speaker would be unlikely to thank the recipient *in advance*, since this would imply that *s/he* is absolutely confident of the panel's favourable consideration (an exception to this would be in correspondence for hotel reservations although in that case the writer would thank the recipient for his attention and not his favour). The use of the form *cooperation* (in Greek *synergasia*; which would also be unsuitable) is again a lexicopragmatic error because there is the risk of making the recipient think that the applicant anticipates their collaboration and this might be considered an attempt to impose his opinion. The use of the dictionary in this case would alert the learner to the unsuitability of the word and possibly suggest use of an alternative such as *consideration*.

Furthermore there is the case of a subject who used a complimentary expression (flattery-affective appeal) possibly to sound likable or to positively bias the recipient. This seems to be a sociopragmatic failure (an oriental cultural feature) due to transfer of a strategy (less frequently used in

present times) in Greek application letters. See example 21.

21. "First of all I would like to *congratulate* you for this initiative of yours, and secondly to *express my concern* to take part in this *competition*."

The applicant seems to be trying to ingratiate himself by praising the recipient and generally approving of his action. The word *congratulate* seems to be sociopragmatically infelicitous (*congratulate* has the same overtones in Greek) for this context because to congratulate implies that the positive opinion expressed is valued by the party congratulated. It is not the role of the applicant (comparatively low status) to congratulate the institution (relatively high status). Similarly the form to *express concern* is not suitable for this context. The applicant (when asked) said that s/he meant to *express my interest*. This is a lexicopragmatic error due to a literal translation from Greek (in Greek it would not have the same effect). In this case the use of dictionary confused the applicant even more because it gives both words (*endiaferon*=*interest*; *concern*) out of context. The applicant chose the less frequent one, possibly attempting to show his knowledge of rare vocabulary. The use of the term *competition* gives the idea that the applicant is trying to win or come first rather than showing himself as a suitable candidate. This is a preconceived idea based on linguistic factors transferred from a set expression in the Greek language *kirixi diagonismou* (*a competition is announced*). This probably indicates the reasons for the use of charged language by the applicant. The use of a dictionary in this case would help the applicant to find a more suitable word (i.e. *scholarship*). By using the expression of *yours* the applicant risks being considered as sarcastic ('this child of yours'). This could be from a straight translation of the form in Greek *ti diki sas protovoulia*. The form *concern* seems to be a reinforcement of the idea that s/he is risking being seen as sarcastic because it seems that s/he does not consider it a good idea.

3.0. MAIN FINDINGS.

The following tables summarise our main findings. In the first column we present the strategies employed by the applicants. In the second column we present the vocabulary and the grammar used (language used), and in the third column we present the pragmatic failure involved.

(A) Direct Strategies

Strategy Employed	Language Used	Pragmatic Failure
Quasilogical Argumentation	Egocentric language Active Voice e.g. 'I strongly believe' 'I consider' 'I am'	Don't impose on your hearer (Grice)
Affective Appeal	Charged language e.g. 'your scholarship is my only chance' 'I hope you will not refuse to me ...'	Give hearer option (Grice)
Quasilogical Argumentation	Direct demands e.g. 'I am sure ... did convince you ...'	Don't impose on your hearer (Grice)

(B) Indirect Strategies.

Strategy Employed	Language Used	Pragmatic Failure
Quasilogical Argumentation	Extensive reference to their qualifications e.g. 'I speak ... I have ... I am ...'	Be as informative as is required but no more than that (Grice)
Quasilogical argumentation	Charged language e.g. 'It (scholarship) will give me the chance to complete my research'	Don't impose on your hearer (Grice)
Use of complimentary and anticipatory expressions	Charged language e.g. 'Thank you in advance' 'I would like to congratulate you ...'	Display of manners Don't impose on your hearer (Grice)

4.0. DISCUSSION.

In conclusion we see that the types of persuasive strategies our subjects preferred to use are:

- (a). Four quasilogical argumentations with extensive use of the first person singular and direct statements about themselves.
- (b). Two affective appeals in order to evoke the reader's emotions.
- (c). One flattery (use of complimentary expressions) in order to seem likable or to positively bias the recipient.

In neither category was there any Analogical persuasion used by any subject. Notice that the use of quasilogical argumentation is not a failure as they are claimed to be used (Kaplan 1972) in 'Western cultures', however the failure lies with the extensive use of the first person singular and the direct statements about themselves.

The language employed by the applicants was considered by the native speakers to be; (1) egocentric, (2) charged, and (c) overcolloquial in places, and there seem to be extensive violations of Grice's maxims. It should be noted here that the resultant misunderstanding is very different from that due to grammatical errors. Most importantly, it is not apparent to native speakers, who are usually not aware that pragmatic failure has occurred. This fact endorses our claim that pragmatic failure is both productive and receptive. Thomas (1983:107) says that a foreign learner who does not operate according to "the standard grammatical code is at worst condemned for 'speaking badly'". On the other hand, a foreign learner who "operates according to differently formulated pragmatic principles may well be censured as 'behaving badly'...". Thus, a native speaker would be likely to attribute such impoliteness or unfriendliness 'not to any linguistic deficiency, but to boorishness or ill-will, and consequently the judgment would not reflect his linguistic competence but his personality' (Thomas, 1983:97). Indeed we have witnessed a number of cases where lexicopragmatic factors have almost certainly led to pragmalinguistic or to sociopragmatic misconceptions. It should be also noted that written pragmalinguistic failure is worse than the spoken form because the speaker in the latter case has a second chance to correct him/herself if s/he sees from the reaction of the hearer (facial expression) that there is something wrong with what s/he said. Written pragmalinguistic failure (as in letters of application) cannot be monitored after they are sent and this might result in losing a scholarship or a job. Therefore potential lexicopragmatic errors which may contribute to such failure need to be identified and raised to the learner's awareness.

In most cases the subjects could not self-monitor (except in two cases;

e.g.9, 21) and showed little awareness of the failures they had perpetrated. Therefore lexical competence should also include "knowing the probability of a word's occurrence in a particular context" McKay (1980:18). The use of dictionary did not seem to help (except in examples 9, 20, 21) as the pragmatic force of words is not included in it.

It should be noted also that the border between sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic failure is not always clear (as in examples 6,7,8) as they often influence each other or examples could be explained as involving *either* or *both*. Our remarks are only a small contribution to illuminating the distinction. Furthermore this study needs to be extended by considering subjects from different cultures (Middle and Far East), and other Greek learners of English evaluating these letters. It would also be interesting to see how 'real' application panels from the British Council or the United States Information Service (USIS) consider such applications and whether they take account of such potential for international pragmalinguistic failure. Research on the converse effect, namely where a falsely positive image of the applicant can be communicated by (positive) pragmalinguistic failure and the applicant is made to seem more attractive than he/she would have done in his/her own language, would be interesting. Finally we endorse the assertion that "speaking 'good English' does not necessarily mean conforming to the norms of the culturally hegemonic strata. Our only concern as language teachers is to ensure that the learner knows what s/he is doing" (Thomas 1983:110). However, this could only be put into action if teachers recognise the *difference* between a pragmatic failure that is based in lack of linguistic (e.g. lexicopragmatic) knowledge and that based in lack of knowledge of the target culture.

Notes

- ¹ Analogous to this are pragmatic failures which are not of a lexicopragmatic nature but due to a misselection of syntactic/grammatical structures (i.e. the use of Active - rather than Passive—voice e.g.3,4,5).

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