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Impersonalization as a Mechanism of Impoliteness in Aeschines and Demosthenes: A Study of οὐδείς and μηδείς

Thank you, Emilio, for everything you have taught me

1 Introduction: Impersonalization in courtroom speeches[1]

Impersonalization,[2] a resource characterized by the absence or defocalization of the agent, is a communicative peculiarity of courtroom discourse. Greek orators use this linguistic mechanism for strategic purposes related to the goals of this discursive genre. The speaker, in search of a favorable verdict, constantly strives to please the jurors. The more objective his speech is – or seems to be –, the greater his chance of success.[3]

Legal language fosters impersonality by its very nature, and such impersonality is inextricably linked to generalization.[4] The presence of other generalization devices, as the adverb ἀεί in (1), is a clear proof of this:

(1)   Dem., *De cor*. 192.
Ἀλλὰ μὴν τὸ μὲν παρεληλυθὸς *ἀεὶ* παρὰ πᾶσιν ἀφεῖται, καὶ *οὐδεὶς* περὶ τούτου προτίθησιν οὐδαμοῦ βουλήν·

And yet, people *always* put the past aside, and *no one* ever makes it a subject for debate.[5]

2 On other denominations and a broader theoretical framework, cf. Fornieles (2020), a study on the function of τις in the same corpus.
3 His reputation would also derive first and foremost from his success with jurors. Cf. Yunis (2005, xvii).
4 Cf. Haverkate (1984, 82): "The expression of defocalizing reference inherently involves generalization".
5 Translations of Demosthenes and Aeschines are taken from Yunis (2005) and Carey (2000), respectively.

On the other hand, it should be noted that impersonalization does not only affect the speaker. Other participants can also be defocalized in the speeches, even the adversary[6] and the jurors.

Studies on politeness tend to focus on impersonalization. Brown and Levinson[7] (1987, 190) present it as a negative-politeness strategy, that is, a mechanism used by the speaker to soften the possible aggression that a speech act may provoke in the negative face[8] of his interlocutor:

> One way of indicating that S(peaker) doesn't want to impinge on H(earer) is to phrase the FTA (face-threatening act) as if the agent were other than S, or at least possibly not S or not S alone, and the addressee were other than H, or only inclusive of H. This results in a variety of ways of avoiding the pronouns 'I' and 'you'.

There are many linguistic devices that encode impersonalization in Greek. Of these, one common strategy also seen in other languages is the replacement of the pronouns 'I' and 'you' with indefinite pronouns.[9]

The present paper deals with impersonalization by means of two indefinite pronouns, οὐδείς and μηδείς, in Greek oratory. We will look specifically at two prosecution speeches (Aeschines' *Against Ctesiphon* and Demosthenes' *On the Dishonest Embassy*) and two defence speeches (Demosthenes' *On the Crown* and Aeschines' *On the Embassy*). My aim is to show how Aeschines and Demosthenes impersonalize using both pronouns when attacking the opponent. In such contexts they do not use impersonalization as a mechanism of politeness, but rather of impoliteness.

I have taken as a starting point Culpeper's (1996) seminal article on impoliteness, based (and opposite, in terms of orientation to face) on Brown and Levinson's model of politeness (§ 2). Subsequent works by Culpeper have also been

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6 That is, Aeschines, Demosthenes and – although not so frequently – Ctesiphon.

7 Cf. also Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1992, 207–211).

8 The concept of *face* was created by Goffman (1967) and later assumed by Brown and Levinson (1978 and 1987). As a member of society, every individual has a positive face (the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others) and a negative face (the want of every 'competent adult member' that his actions be unimpeded by others). When verbal interaction takes place, there are certain speech acts that threaten face: so-called face-threatening acts (FTAs). For instance, requests threaten the hearer's negative face, since they put him in an awkward position (he must accept or reject them). However, speech acts involving some criticism threaten the hearer's positive face. In courtroom speeches, such as those studied in this paper, the face at stake is not that of the adversary (the speaker does not want to preserve it, but quite the opposite), but that of the speaker and the jurors. In this regard, cf. Penman (1990, 34).

9 Cf. Brown/Levinson (1987, 197–198).

taken into account, as well as those written by other scholars that focus on impoliteness in general – Bousfield (2008), Kientpointner (1997, 2008) –, (im)politeness in the courtroom (Lakoff 1989, Kurzon 2001, Martinovski 2006), on political discourse (Harris 2001) and on electoral debates (Fernández García 2016). Within this theoretical framework, this paper identifies and explains the face-attack strategies in which οὐδείς and μηδείς are involved.

1.1 Defocalization of participants

In general terms, by using indefinite pronouns the speaker alludes to a referent whose identity he does not know or does not wish to reveal. From a semantic point of view, οὐδείς and μηδείς are universal (denoting all entities in a set) and negative (indicating the absence of all entities in the group) indefinite pronouns.[10] Taking into account the semantic references of all the instances of οὐδείς and μηδείς, and based on Gelabert-Desnoyer's (2008, 413) proposal, four variants of the pronouns in relation to their (absent or excluded) referent can be distinguished in the selected speeches:

Tab. 13: Variants of οὐδείς and μηδείς depending on the excluded referent.

Type	Excluded referent	
Omnipersonal	± speaker	The referent excluded can have any identity. Exclusion of the speaker is possible, but not clear in many cases.
Self-referential	+ speaker, - other referents	The referent excluded is exclusively and univocally the speaker. Linguistic and extra-linguistic contexts rule out any other possible referents.
Self-referential experiential	+ speaker, + other potential referents	While intimately linked to the speaker, there is a lesser degree of attachment to the speaker and, thus, a more open interpretation in respect to the exclusion of other referents.
Other-referential	- speaker, + interlocutor	The interpretation of this other-referential pronoun is univocally in regard to the interlocutor.

I have paid attention to occurrences in the nominative singular and to those passages in which the pronouns (in the accusative singular) function as subject of

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10 Cf. Crespo/Conti/Maquieira (2003, 52–55).

AcI and AcP constructions[11] because I am focusing here on οὐδείς and μηδείς in the syntactic function of subject. The total number of occurrences is 86 (63 of οὐδείς and 23 of μηδείς). The more emphatic form οὐδὲ εἷς – from which οὐδείς arose – also occurs seven times.[12] The analysis will focus on the behavior of οὐδείς and μηδείς in intentional face-attacks as defocalizing devices to avoid[13] referring directly to two agents: 'I' (both orators) and, specially, 'you' (the adversary as the recipient of the threat in potentially threatening speech acts).

2 Οὐδείς and μηδείς in face-attack strategies

Culpeper identifies five superstrategies used by the speaker to make impolite utterances: 1) *Bald on record impoliteness* (the FTA is performed in a direct, clear and concise way in circumstances where face is not irrelevant or minimized); 2) *Positive impoliteness* (the use of strategies designed to damage the addressee's positive face wants); 3) *Negative impoliteness* (the use of strategies designed to damage the addressee's negative face wants); 4) *Sarcasm or mock politeness* (the FTA is performed with the use of politeness strategies that are insincere); 5) *Withhold politeness* (the absence of politeness work where it would be expected).[14]

Based on Culpeper's pioneering work, Fernández García (2016, 136–176) examines the strategic use of impoliteness made by politicians in order to achieve their communicative purposes. The author proposes a classification of a number of functional strategies of impoliteness used by speakers in order to attack the adversary. I have revisited the four speeches of Aeschines and Demosthenes from this perspective and I have identified eight face-attack strategies, which I have grouped into four macrostrategies presented below.

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11 There are only six valid passages for this study. Two of the twenty six examples of οὐδένα correspond to this context and refer to the rival. There are sixteen instances of μηδένα. In nine of these, the pronoun functions as subject of an AcI construction, but the referent of the pronoun is the adversary only four times.

12 It is the answer to a question asked by the orator and whose subject is the interrogative pronoun τίς (cf., e.g., Dem., *De cor.* 112), the relative pronoun of indeterminate reference ὅστις (cf. Dem., *Emb.* 109 and 294: ἔστιν οὖν ὅστις) or the indefinite pronoun τις (cf. Dem., *Emb.* 93 and 294).

13 House/Kasper (1981, 168) call them agent avoiders and define them as follows: "Syntactic devices by means of which it is possible for X not to mention either himself or his interlocutor Y as agents, thus, for instance, avoiding direct attack".

14 For instance, failing to thank somebody for a present. In the analyzed speeches, there are no examples of οὐδείς and μηδείς in contexts 1) and 5), but there are of the others.

2.1 To attach negative facts to the adversary

As is well known, Aeschines brought a γραφή παρανόμων (indictment of an illegal proposal) against Ctesiphon, who proposed a decree that the city should bestow a golden crown on Demosthenes in a ceremony in the theater of Dionysus. One of the arguments he used was that it would be illegal to celebrate the ceremony in the theater (the law deprived the recipient of the crown announced in that place and ordered it to be consecrated to Athena). This puts Ctesiphon – whose actions are being criticized by Aeschines – in an awkward position:

(2) Aeschin. *In Ctes*. 46.
μὴ γὰρ ὅτι πόλις, ἀλλ' οὐδ' ἂν *ἰδιώτης οὐδὲ εἷς* οὕτως ἀγεννὴς γένοιτο ὥστε ὃν αὐτὸς ἔδωκε στέφανον ἅμα καὶ ἀνακηρύττειν καὶ ἀφαιρεῖσθαι καὶ καθιεροῦν.

To say nothing of cities, there's *not a single individual* who would be so ungenerous as to announce and at the same moment take away and consecrate a crown that he had personally given.

Aeschines does not explicitly mention Ctesiphon but impersonalizes. However, the context allows us to deduce that he is the only referent of the pronoun. In addition to this, we should note the use of the potential optative (ἂν γένοιτο) of which the emphatic form οὐδὲ εἷς functions as a subject, which provokes a rupture in politeness conventions. Thus, apparently polite discourse – since the speaker uses a politeness mechanism, the potential optative – is in fact the opposite: an indirect but intentional attack to Ctesiphon's positive face. We are, therefore, faced with an example of *mock politeness*, one of the superstrategies proposed by Culpeper.[15]

On other occasions, the attack is performed by including the opponent in a collective. In (3), Demosthenes accuses Aeschines – as well as the other members of the embassy – of inaction:

(3) Dem., *Emb*. 207.
καὶ *τούτων οὐδεὶς* πώποτ' ἀκούων ταῦτ' ἀντεῖπεν οὐδὲ διῆρε τὸ στόμα, οὐδ' ἔδειξεν ἑαυτόν.

And when they heard these charges, *none of them* has ever yet rejected them, opened his mouth, or even shown his face.

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15 Cf. Culpeper (1996, 356): "The FTA is performed with the use of politeness strategies that are obviously insincere, and thus remain surface realisations".

2.2 To attack the credibility of the adversary

The following passage is located in the prooemium of Aeschines' *On the Embassy* speech. After criticizing Demosthenes for asking the jurors to refuse to listen to him, Aeschines accuses his opponent of lying:

(4) Aeschin., *Emb.* 2.
Καὶ ταῦτ' εἶπεν οὐ δι' ὀργήν· *οὐδεὶς γὰρ τῶν ψευδομένων* τοῖς ἀδίκως διαβαλλομένοις ὀργί-ζεται, οὐδ' οἱ τἀληθῆ λέγοντες κωλύουσι λόγου τυχεῖν τὸν φεύγοντα·

And he did not say this in anger – *nobody who lies* is angry at the victims of his unfounded slander, nor do people who are telling the truth prevent the defendant from receiving a hearing.

Once again, the speaker includes – generalizing by means of impersonalization – his adversary in a collective: that of the liars. With regards to its referent, the context favors the classification of οὐδείς as other-referential. In (5), however, the situation is different. Demosthenes advises the judges on how to deal with a hypothetical, but more than foreseeable, negative reaction in Aeschines:

(5) Dem., *Emb.* 335–336.
ἂν τοίνυν ταῦτα μὲν φεύγῃ, πλανᾷ δὲ καὶ πάντα μᾶλλον λέγῃ, ἐκείνως αὐτὸν δέχεσθε. 'οὐ στρατηγῷ δικάζομεν, οὐ περὶ τούτων κρίνει. (...) μὴ λέγ' ὡς καλὸν εἰρήνη, μηδ' ὡς συμφέ-ρον· *οὐδεὶς γὰρ αἰτιᾶταί σε τοῦ ποιήσασθαι* τὴν πόλιν εἰρήνην· ἀλλ' ὡς οὐκ αἰσχρὰ καὶ ἐπο-νείδιστος, καὶ πόλλ' ὕστερον ἐξηπατήμεθα, καὶ πάντ' ἀπώλετο, ταῦτα λέγε. τούτων γὰρ ἁπάντων ἡμῖν αἴτιος σὺ δέδειξαι.

Now should Aeschines evade these charges, should he digress and try to speak of anything else, address him thus: "We do not sit in judgment of a general; you are not being tried for those matters. (...) Do not tell us what a wonderful and beneficial thing peace is. *No one* blames you for the city making peace. Rather, tell us that this peace is not a shameful and reprehensible one, that subsequently we were not deceived many times, that all was not lost. For in our eyes you have been shown to be responsible for all these acts".

Demosthenes' intention is – once again – to accuse Aeschines of lying and his tactic is to avoid responsibility when making the accusation. Instead, he passes that responsibility onto the jurors. In this case, the referent of this self-referential experiential οὐδείς is apparently generic, but we can easily infer that it includes both the jurors (Demosthenes is 'inviting' them to pronounce these words) and Demothenes himself (in fact, he is the real speaker and, therefore, the accuser).

2.3 To take distance from the adversary and to show his inferiority

Culpeper (1996, 354) points out that the fact that impoliteness is more likely to occur in situations where there is an imbalance of power reflected in its relatively frequent use in courtroom discourse.

In (6) Demosthenes shows his superiority over Aeschines with a specific example. After the defeat at Chaeronea, the city had to make two decisions: which renowned orator would deliver the usual funeral oration and where the funeral meal would be held. He and his house were chosen for a simple reason:

(6) Dem., *De cor.* 288.
  εἰκότως· γένει μὲν γὰρ ἕκαστος ἑκάστῳ μᾶλλον οἰκεῖος ἦν ἐμοῦ, κοινῇ δὲ πᾶσιν *οὐδεὶς ἐγ-γυτέρω·*

  Rightly so. Though each of them had a closer familiar tie to his own dead kinsman than I, *no one* had a closer public bond to all the dead.

Demosthenes' message to Aeschines is clear: if anyone has looked after the city's interest, that man has been me, not you.

In (7) Demosthenes' purpose is to mock Aeschines, to ridicule him with irony.[16] Aeschines' strong (and trained) voice and his career as an actor provide Demosthenes with a lode:

(7) Dem., *De cor.* 259–260.
  καὶ ἀνιστὰς ἀπὸ τοῦ καθαρμοῦ κελεύων λέγειν 'ἔφυγον κακόν, εὗρον ἄμεινον,' ἐπὶ τῷ *μη-δένα* πώποτε τηλικοῦτ'ὀλολύξαι σεμνυνόμενος (καὶ ἔγωγε νομίζω· μὴ γὰρ οἴεσθ' αὐτὸν φθέγγεσθαι μὲν οὕτω μέγα, ὀλολύζειν δ' οὐχ ὑπέρλαμπρον).

  You raised them up after purification and bade them utter, "Affliction removed, condition improved", proud of yourself because *no one* ever shrieked so loud. I quite agree. Don't believe that one who talks so loud does not also shriek piercingly.

2.4 To invade the space of the adversary

Another tactic used to attack face is to pose obstacles for the opponent, revealing facts that make him feel uncomfortable. One of the arguments used by Aeschines when the indictment for an illegal decree took place had to do with the law. A

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16 The ironic performance of certain speech acts is another mechanism to consider. I will deal with irony in future works.

statute forbade a magistrate from receiving a crown before he had successfully faced the mandatory audit (εὐθύνα) at the end of his term of office. Aeschines had alleged that Demosthenes had already had the audit. Hence there is no doubt about who is the referent in (8):

(8) Aeschin., *In Ctes*. 17.
Ἐν γὰρ ταύτῃ τῇ πόλει, οὕτως ἀρχαίᾳ οὔσῃ καὶ τηλικαύτῃ τὸ μέγεθος, *οὐδείς* ἐστιν ἀνυπεύθυνος τῶν καὶ ὁπωσοῦν πρὸς τὰ κοινὰ προσεληλυθότων.

In this city, ancient and great as it is, of all who come into public life in any way at all, there is *no one* who is not subject to audit.

3 Conclusion

This paper provides a study of the function of the indefinite pronouns οὐδείς and μηδείς in the framework of the invective between Aeschines and Demosthenes. I have identified eight face-attack strategies, which I have grouped into four macrostrategies:
1. To attach negative facts to the adversary
    1.1. To criticise his ideas, actions, etc.
    1.2. To accuse him of inaction or incompetence
2. To attack the credibility of the adversary
    2.1. To accuse him of lying
    2.2. To highlight his contradictions or incoherencies
3. To take distance from the adversary and to show his inferiority
    3.1. To highlight the differences that separate them (I would not do it or I am better than you)
    3.2. To show indifference towards him, to scorn him
    3.3. To mock or to ridicule him
4. To invade the space of the adversary
    4.1. To reveal facts that make him feel uncomfortable

In these contexts, as we have seen, both orators use impersonalization not as a mechanism of politeness but rather of impoliteness. Thus, by using this mechanism associated (in principle) to politeness (as well as others, such as the potential optative), the speaker inflicts an indirect but intentional attack to the adversary's face that provokes a rupture in politeness conventions.

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