

Normative language in the late Middle Kingdom  
epistolary material from el-Lahun

MA Thesis

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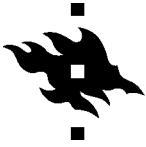
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Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract <p>This study examines the normative use of language in the late Middle Kingdom epistolary material from el-Lahun. Although the strong degree of conventionalisation in the discourse of the letters has been recognised in previous studies, the nature and characteristics of the phenomenon have been studied relatively little. This study examines the normative features in the discourse and their pragmatic and other functions. In addition, it discusses the possible factors affecting the use and style of the letter formula.</p> <p>This study is based on a closed corpus and analyses the characteristics of the material through close-reading of texts. The material on which this study is based consists of approximately 80 letters in the el-Lahun papyri collections. The material is exceptionally coherent in spatial and chronological distribution and forms a good basis for studies of normativity.</p> <p>This study shows that the letters which define the manner of communication as <i>swd3-ib</i> (a message, lit. to make heart at ease) follow a common ‘letter formula’. It appears that this specific manner of addressing has two core characteristics. These include the use of the expression <i>swd3-ib pw</i> in structuring the letter, and the use of specific addressing words to refer to the correspondents. In addition, it is clear that the use of this letter formula is restricted to specific situations of social exchange.</p> <p>In addition, the normative language of the Lahun letters favours several indirect requesting strategies and features that aim to background the presence of the author. In fact, it seems that one of the most prominent features of the normative discourse of the letters is the aim to alienate the presence of the author as the agent behind the speech acts performed. This feature appears to be prominent especially in the socially expected manners of formulating a request. This tendency seems to be connected to the nature of requesting in general, as something that is potentially a difficult and harmful situation for the author. On the other hand, the use of indirect requesting strategies can in some cases be related to the difference in the relative socio-hierarchical status between the correspondents.</p> <p>In addition, it is evident that the characteristics of the <i>swd3-ib</i>-letters reflect the socio-cultural structures in the community. Christopher Eyre has emphasised the importance of personal relationships in a society build upon complex patronage and client structures, in which the socio-cultural status of the person is strongly connected to the relationship he has with his patron. It appears that the various greetings, and carefully formulated requests attested in these letters should be understood in this slightly difficult socio-cultural context. The existence of a culturally valued, learned manner of addressing offers potential for several linguistic and philological studies, as well as on research on the complex socio-cultural structures in the community.</p>			
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Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract Pro gradu -tutkielmani tarkastelee normatiivista kielenkäyttöä muinaisegyptiläisessä el-Lahunin kirjeaineistossa. Suurin osa kirjeistä on kirjoitettu Senusret III ja Amenemhat IV hallintokausien välisenä aikana (1837–1764 eaa.). Vaikka kirjeissä näkyvä vahva konventionaalinen tyyli on tunnistettu jo papyruskokoelman ensimmäisistä julkaisuista lähtien, ilmiön luonnetta ja kirjeissä näkyvän konventionaalisen kielen piirteitä on tutkittu vähän. Tutkin työssäni, millaista el-Lahunin kirjeaineiston odotettu, sosiaalisesti hyväksytty kielenkäyttö on ja millaisia pragmaattisia funktioita diskurssin eri piirteillä on. Pohdin myös, onko mahdollista hahmottaa kirjeformulan tyyliin ja eri piirteiden käyttöön vaikuttavia tekijöitä. Työni on korpustutkimus, jossa analysoin tarkasti rajatun kirjallisen aineiston piirteitä lähiluvun keinoin. Lahunin papyruskokoelma on yksi harvoja keskivaltakunnan ajalta peräisin olevia laajoja korpusaineistoja. Sen ajallinen ja alueellinen yhtenäisyys muodostaa hyvän pohjan normatiivisten piirteiden tutkimukselle ja tunnistamiselle. Aineisto koostuu n. 80 papyruskirjeestä, jotka on kirjoitettu myöhäisellä keskivaltakunnan kielellä. Tutkielmani osoittaa, että el-Lahunin kirjeaineistossa on nähtävissä erityinen ns. <i>swd3-ib</i> -kirjeformula. Termi <i>swd3-ib</i> tarkoittaa viestiä tai yhteydenottoa. Kaikissa termiä käyttävissä kirjeissä on havaittavissa konventionaalinen tapa muotoilla teksti käyttäen erityistä <i>swd3-ib pw</i> -ilmausta ja sen variaatioita. Lisäksi kaikki kirjeet noudattavat yhtenäistä, normatiivista tapaa viitata kirjeen kirjoittajaan ja vastaanottajaan erityisillä konventionaalisilla termeillä. Kyseisen kirjeformulan käyttö on myös rajattu tarkasti määriteltyihin sosiaalisiin tilanteisiin. Edellä mainittujen piirteiden lisäksi kirjeissä nähtävissä oleva normatiivinen kielenkäyttö vaikuttaa suosivan erilaisia epäsuoria tapoja esittää pyyntö. Yhteinen piirre näissä pyyntöstrategioissa on niiden tapa tai pragmaattinen funktio, joka etäännyttää kirjoittajan roolin esitettyjen pyyntöjen agenttina, aktiivisena toimijana. Ilmiö tuntuu liittyvän yleisesti pyynnön esittämisen luonteeseen sen tekijälle mahdollisesti vaikeana ja vahingollisena tilanteena. Etäännyttävien piirteiden käyttö on yhteydessä myös kirjeen kirjoittajien suhteelliseen sosiaaliseen hierarkiaan. Lahunin kirjeaineiston normatiivisen kielen piirteet heijastavat myös laajemmin yhteisön sosiaalisia ja yhteiskunnallisia rakenteita. Christopher Eyre on nostanut esiin henkilökohtaisten suhteiden merkityksen faraonisen ajan hallintokulttuurissa. Kirjeissä käytetyt tervehdykset ja tarkkaan harkittu, opittu kielenkäyttö vaikuttavatkin liittyvän aikansa yhteiskunnallisiin erityispiirteisiin, joissa henkilön sosio-kulttuurinen asema on vahvasti sidoksissa hänen henkilökohtaiseen suhteeseensa yleisessä asemassa olevaan henkilöön. Tutkielmani osoittaa kirjekulttuurin tuntemuksen merkityksen useille erilaisille kysymyksenasetteluille.			
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## 1. Introduction

This is a corpus-based study that examines the normative use of language in the late Middle Kingdom epistolary material from el-Lahun. Although the strong degree of conventionalisation in the discourse of the letters has been recognised in previous studies, the nature and characteristics of the phenomenon have been studied relatively little. The study of the conventions of the letter writing seems to be built around an image of a letter formula which consists of separate ‘parts of formulae’ without a more detailed analysis of the pragmatic functions of the expressions or their significance within the wider socio-cultural structure of the community.

The research questions of this study are the following:

1. What kind of features in the discourse of the late Middle Kingdom epistolary material from el-Lahun can be seen to be normative in character?
2. What kind of pragmatic functions these normative features of the discourse have?
3. Is it possible to identify factors affecting the use and style of the letter formula?

Several terms used above require clarification. In this study, the concept of normative language is used to refer to those features of the discourse of the letters which can be seen to represent the socially expected use of language in a particular communicative situation.<sup>1</sup> The concept offers a means to analyse the features of this specific type of discourse in more detail, and avoids the use of several relatively ambiguous terms often used in these contexts such as letter ‘phraseology’. The term pragmatic function, on the other hand, is used in the broadest possible sense to refer to meanings and functions of the text that cannot be derived and deduced directly from the semantic meaning of the individual expressions,<sup>2</sup> but which become meaningful within and in relation to the wider context of the text. The choice of this relatively ‘inclusive’ definition of the term is suited

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<sup>1</sup> This definition is based on discussion in Piippo 2012. See e.g. 27–50.

<sup>2</sup> In this study, the term ‘semantic meaning’ of the text is used generally to refer to the most conventionalised and ‘fixed’ meaning of the utterance as opposed to the meaning and functions of the text which can be derived only from the wider context of the text.

for its purpose, as it allows to analyse the phenomenon on various levels, and, as such, seems to capture a degree of the complexity of the phenomenon.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. Methodology and theoretical aspects

This study is based on a closed corpus and analyses the characteristics of the material through close-reading of texts.<sup>4</sup> In order for the reader to be able to evaluate the analysis made, this study should be seen in the context of Egyptian epistolography and within the wider research tradition of Egyptological linguistics and philology.

### 2.1. Earlier research and the concept of phraseology

Since the first publication of the parts of the el-Lahun collection in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, it has been acknowledged that the letters in the collection represent a highly stylised ‘letter formula’ meaning a conventionalised idea and a model on how a letter should be written. Despite of this general acknowledgement, the subject has been studied relatively little. In fact, the studies of the subject tend to be short commentaries alongside the editions of the letters and have mainly listed the conventional phrases frequently encountered in the letters with little discussion on the nature of the phenomenon and e.g. the criteria and terms used in these analyses.<sup>5</sup>

A common feature in these descriptions is that the letter formula is analysed mainly by dividing the letter into separate parts. The fixed expressions listed are categorised into

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<sup>3</sup> In broad terms, one could say that the term ‘pragmatic’ is used in this study from the point of view of the ‘continental’ research tradition of pragmatics. Jucker 2012, 501–503.

<sup>4</sup> This study should be understood within the wide tradition of hermeneutic analysis without a more specific reference to any particular subfield or school of thought.

<sup>5</sup> For the Lahun letter formula, the most complete general outline of the characteristics of the letter formula is to be found in Brose’s monograph on the grammar of the documentary sources from late Middle Kingdom (2013, 455–479). His description of the characteristics of the letters includes a list of the fixed, conventional expressions and comments on their function in e.g. structuring the text. Brose has also briefly studied the significance of the relative social hierarchy of the correspondents to the style of the letters (2012). In addition, Collier & Quirke (2002) add a list of ‘formulaic keywords’ in their edition of the letters. Their list or various notes alongside the letters are not accompanied with discussion, but include several observations on the use of some of the expressions. Similar notion can be made about the older edition of the same letters by Griffith (1898). In addition, Luft includes a short list of the fixed expressions of the letters and various useful comments in his editions and other publications of the Lahun papyri (e.g. Luft 1982; 1983; 1986; 1992a; 2006). For Middle Kingdom letters in general and discussion on their conventions and formulae, see e.g. Allen 2002; Hayes 1948; James 1962, 119–130; Wentz 1990. Research on epistolary material tend to concentrate on the Late Ramesside material. See e.g. Bakir 1970; Janssen 1991; Ridealgh 2013; Sweeney 2001.

different sections of the letter and characterised as different ‘parts of formulae’.<sup>6</sup> According to this traditional image of the letter formula, the text of the letter is usually seen to consist of seven different sections. In these descriptions, a letter begins with an address, and this is followed by salutations or formulae, inquiry after the recipient’s well-being, greetings and ending.<sup>7</sup> The actual content of the letter is seen to constitute a part of its own in the middle of this ‘complementary preamble’.<sup>8</sup>

Although the traditional model of the letter formula can be seen to describe some of the features of the letter writing relatively well,<sup>9</sup> it leaves several aspects of the epistolary conventions and the expected use of language undiscussed and creates too one-sided a picture of the phenomenon. In fact, it appears to create an image or an idea that a typical Egyptian letter consists of two types of text: the ‘phraseology’ meaning the formulaic sections, and the middle section, which is seen to comprise the ‘actual content’. This kind of implied opposition between the formulaic sections and the actual content matter of the letter tends to lead into an impression that the conventionalised parts of the letter are something relatively meaningless or content-poor in relation to the rest of the text. This image is reflected also in frequently attested comments on the significance of the ‘amount of phraseology’, and how it reflects e.g. the relative social hierarchy of the correspondents.<sup>10</sup> This kind of statement is always presented as a rough generalisation, but it reflects the common impression of phraseology as something that can be analysed quantitatively.

This traditional structure-based model of the letter formula may partly explain why the study of the normative use of language in the Lahun letters has received limited amount of interest in Egyptological research. In addition, the delayed publication of the papyri that is still partly incomplete affects, of course, several aspects of the study of the material; though the situation has greatly improved in the last fifteen years.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, the problems related to a lack of knowledge of the socio-cultural and administrative structures in the community affect the level of detail in which the socio-cultural aspects

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<sup>6</sup> See e.g. Bakir 1970, 31; Brose 2012, 39–40; 2013, 457; Collier & Quirke 2002 include it in the translations of the letters; James 1962, 119.

<sup>7</sup> Bakir 1970, 31; Brose 2012, 39–40; 2013, 457; Collier & Quirke 2002; James 1962, 119.

<sup>8</sup> This term is borrowed from Bakir 1970, 31.

<sup>9</sup> See e.g. the form of the opening and end greetings (chapter 4.2.).

<sup>10</sup> The significance of the social hierarchy and status to the amount of phraseology of the letter is one of the aspects which has been emphasised in the few studies of the Egyptian letter formulae. See e.g. Bakir 1970; Brose 2012; 2013, James 1962.

<sup>11</sup> See chapter 3.



affecting the style of the letter can be analysed.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, of course, several linguistic questions are in need of future research.

As a consequence, the analyses of the subject tend to discuss only relatively limited number of aspects related to the style and conventions of letter writing. Instead of concentrating on the number of the parts of formulae, the normative use of language in the letters can be analysed in more detail by analysing the pragmatic and other functions of the individual expressions and repeated patterns in the text. This master's thesis can concentrate only on a limited number of features of the normative language of the letters, but it shows how the conventions of the letter writing in el-Lahun determine several aspects of the formulation of the discourse in general and affect the number of the choices the author has in expressing himself and formulating his text. Therefore, the epistolographical knowledge should be seen as an important aspect in various analyses of the discourse of the letters.<sup>13</sup>

## 2.2. The concept of normative language

In the introduction chapter, the concept of normative language was defined to include those features of the discourse which can be seen to represent the socially expected use of language in a particular communicative situation.<sup>14</sup> Normativity in language and language use is a phenomenon which has long been discussed in various subfields of linguistics and social sciences. Irina Piippo's monograph studies the nature of the concept of normativity focusing on its use and understanding in sociolinguistics and analyses different theoretical perspectives to the subject.<sup>15</sup> Instead of giving one 'conclusive' definition of the concept, she analyses the complexity of the phenomenon from a perspective which has its inspiration in pragmatist-semiotically oriented tradition of sociolinguistics and focuses on the reflexive and dialogical nature of the phenomenon. The view point in question derives several of its theories and concepts from linguistic

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<sup>12</sup> See chapter 6.

<sup>13</sup> The importance of phraseological knowledge is an aspect that has been discussed e.g. in relation to the study of different registers, see Gillen 2013 for related bibliography.

<sup>14</sup> This definition is based on discussion in Piippo 2012.

<sup>15</sup> Piippo 2012.

anthropology and studies the nature of communicative phenomena in terms of complex semiotic processes constantly evaluated and interpreted by the speakers.<sup>16</sup>

This study does not concentrate on the nature of normativity as a phenomenon in language use or in other aspects of social conduct. However, it is important to note that the definition chosen comprises an idea that what constitutes normative use of language in a particular situation is subject to complex processes of change which on their most ‘profound’ level become visible in the interpretations and evaluations of the speakers in a particular time and place.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, in order to identify what is regarded as normative use of language in a particular social situation, one should have access to the evaluations and response of the participants in the communicative situation. However, in historical material, explicit statements that would evaluate the nature or style of the manner of addressing are rare, and the interpretation of the material is subject to several constraints.<sup>18</sup>

One should perhaps point out that when studying normativity and socially expected behaviour in historical material, the research questions are usually very different from that of the linguistic studies. In e.g. sociolinguistics, what constitutes normative language or behaviour is rarely the actual point of emphasis, but the main concern lies in the processes related to the existing phenomena and the reasons and developments behind it. In analyses that concentrate on the characteristics of the ancient culture, the identification of the socially expected behaviour and expected use of language become questions of their own and have to be studied by careful examination of the preserved textual material.

### 2.3. Methodological aspects

In order to establish what features in the discourse of the letters should be regarded normative in character, the most important individual criteria has been the frequency of occurrences of particular features. The focus has been on fixed expressions, repeated patterns with which to formulate sentences and/or perform speech acts (e.g. how requests tend to be formulated), and on individual expressions or idioms attested.

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<sup>16</sup> Same themes of reflexivity are discussed in various other subfields of linguistics as well. For a ‘linguistic anthropology -oriented’ monograph on several basic concepts, see Agha 2007. Important concepts include e.g. indexicality and iconisation, see Jaffe 2016.

<sup>17</sup> For general discussion, see e.g. Piippo 2012, 44–50.

<sup>18</sup> As an example of this kind of metalinguistic evaluation, one could point out the ‘satirical letter’ (pUC 32204, example 38b) in the Lahun collection, in which the other party of the correspondence (real or imaginative) starts his reply with an evaluative comment on the tone of the letter received. For discussion on these kinds of linguistics evaluations, see e.g. Gillen 2014; Uljas 2013.

However, the question of frequency of occurrences should not be understood as exclusively quantitative or ‘statistical’ process: the quantity and in many ways uneven and potentially biased preservation of the material does not allow, nor favour, that kind of approach. Instead, the process has to be holistic on various different levels in the sense that an individual feature that is attested e.g. two or three times in the letters, may prove out to be a prominent characteristic when analysed in relation to features that share elements with each other. In practice, however, most of the features analysed in this study as normative are attested in the letters on several occasions and can relatively safely be assumed to be a phenomenon that is conventionalised to a certain degree.<sup>19</sup>

The fact that this study is based on a closed corpus determines various aspects of the analysis of the material. The material of this study forms an entity which is exceptionally homogenous in its chronological and spatial distribution (see below chapter 3). This was one of the first starting points for this study, and it is also an important aspect to take into account when evaluating the analyses made. The unity of the material provides a good starting point for the study of normativity as it excludes some of the problems related to the spatial and chronological differences in the meanings given to e.g. individual expressions. However, the fact that this analysis is based on a closed corpus without e.g. more detailed consideration of the diachronical aspects may possibly create biases in the analysis. It is possible e.g. that individually attested expressions may have been left unnoticed, and a study based on a larger material would have offered new possibilities and insights for the identification and characterisation of some of the features.

As noted, this study is a textual analysis based on a close-reading of the material. Accordingly, the interpretation of the pragmatic functions of the normative features of the discourse is based on a close-reading and complex process of contextualisation. The study includes several source-critical problems that cannot be excluded from analysis. In relation to Lahun letters, an important individual aspect that puts its limitations on the interpretation of the material is that usually only the letter by one of the correspondents has been preserved, and there is no possibility to know and evaluate the response of the addressee and construct a more complete picture of the communicative process. At the

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<sup>19</sup> There are a couple of expressions of gratitude that are attested only twice in the letters (see chapter 5.3.).

same time, of course, our knowledge of the various contextual factors and circumstances, including the sociocultural knowledge, is extremely limited.

A special note should be made on the translation of the letters and ancient Egyptian material in general. Translation from one language and culture to another is always a difficult and complex process, but Egyptian material includes several ‘additional’ problems due to the characteristics of the writing system<sup>20</sup> and a lack of knowledge of the functions of various grammatical features and e.g. the meaning of individual expressions. Hence, the translations of the same text may differ considerably from one author to another and the translation of the text is in itself interpretative, holistic process. The translations of this study have undergone various changes throughout the working process of this thesis. In the final choices made, the emphasis has been on the way individual grammatical elements and other expressions are used within this closed corpus.<sup>21</sup>

Finally, the sheer complexity of the phenomenon of normativity raises problems for the analysis. One should note that linguistic and philological studies which touch on questions such as the above always work on a level of generalities and stereotypes. Although the frequently attested greetings and other fixed expressions can give an overall picture of material that is relatively unified in style and modes of addressing, the collection is varied and heterogenous, and it is in many ways a complex process to form a coherent, ‘intelligent’ picture of the language and style of the letters. However, through holistic, interpretative analysis, it is possible to identify repeated patterns in the text and study the meaning and function of the individual expressions in detail.

### 3. Epistolary material from el-Lahun

The material on which this study is based consists of approximately 80 letters in the el-Lahun papyri collections, today mostly in the collections of Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology of the University College London and the State Museum in Berlin. The material is exceptionally coherent in spatial and chronological distribution and can be considered as one of the rare true corpora from Middle Kingdom Egypt.

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<sup>20</sup> Hieroglyphs e.g. do not mark vowels or spaces between individual words.

<sup>21</sup> The translations have, of course, benefitted hugely from the work done by the editors of the material. In addition, special thanks should be given to Sami Uljas for discussion and valuable comments.

### 3.1. Find context of the papyri

The papyri originate from a late Middle Kingdom settlement attached to the royal cult of Senusret II (1845–1837 BC) close to the modern-day village of el-Lahun in the Fayum.<sup>22</sup> From the middle of the 12<sup>th</sup> to the early 13<sup>th</sup> dynasty, the area enclosed a founded town site and temple area near the pyramid of Senusret II. The site was originally discovered by William Flinders Petrie during his field work in the Fayum in spring 1889.<sup>23</sup>

Although the Lahun papyri can be considered to comprise one corpus, the material consists of two larger collections and some individual pieces of papyrus. The UCL collection originates from the first two field seasons of Petrie at the site in 1889–1890 and can be generally connected to the town site ('Kahun' in Petrie's terminology).<sup>24</sup> It should, however, be noted that it is possible that the distinction between the town site and the adjacent areas at the site has not been consistent throughout the field seasons, and some of the material may have been found outside the town site, and delivered to Petrie later.<sup>25</sup> The basic problem with the recovery process of the finds is that due to the insufficiency of the documentation practices at the time, it is not possible to trust the consistency and transparency of the working process.

Although Petrie can in many ways be considered a pioneer of scientific recovery and documentation practices, he followed this practice only in certain elements at the site. Gallorini's analysis<sup>26</sup> of the unpublished material of the excavations reflects how the documentation of the building structures at the site appear to have been one of the main priorities for Petrie, based on the detailed drawing of the maps and on the working practices at the site. The exact find spot for the finds, on the other hand, is documented

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<sup>22</sup> For the dating and chronology in general, see Hornung, E. 2006.

<sup>23</sup> For more recent archaeological investigations at the site and re-examinations of the material, see e.g. Frey & Knudstad 2008. See also the on-going The El-Lahun Survey Project initiated by The Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest.

<sup>24</sup> Petrie conducted archaeological investigations at the site during two field seasons from April 1889 to May 1889 and from October to January 1890, and later on three separate occasions in 1911, 1914 and 1920. Gallorini 1998, 42. In 1921, the work was continued by Brunton. For reports of the field seasons, see Petrie 1890; Petrie 1891; Brunton 1920; Petrie *et al.* 1923.

<sup>25</sup> During the time of the excavations, Petrie seems to have been working at several different places in the area: including the town site, the adjacent temple and the pyramid; as well as possibly supervising investigations at Gurob close to Illahun. He also refers to robberies and problems concerning the recovery of the objects at several sites in the Fayum. Petrie 1899, 5–12.

<sup>26</sup> Carla Gallorini (1998) has made a rough time chart on the proceeding of Petrie's excavations by comparing the sporadic notes in Petrie's notebooks and journals, but it offers no conclusive evidence with which to identify the find spots for any of the artefacts at the site, except the ones especially marked down by Petrie. The time chart by Gallorini, although tells about the proceedings of the excavations as such, is not accurate enough to be used as a method for establishing a find context for the objects. See also Collier 2009, 230–232 for the papyri.

only sporadically, probably in those instances when Petrie had the possibility to inspect and mark it down personally.<sup>27</sup> During this time Petrie appears to have gradually begun to practice his method of paying the workers for every recovered item in order to avoid some of the problems concerning the trade of antiquities in the area.<sup>28</sup>

Although Petrie did not generally mark down the find context for the papyri, the found pieces were collected and divided in groups, which Petrie referred to as ‘lots’ before sending them to England, where they were prepared and studied further by Frances Llewellyn Griffith and Percy Newberry.<sup>29</sup> Collier and Quirke have discussed the procedures behind the lot-system, and they have been able to identify some of the lots with references in Petrie’s journals and correspondence.<sup>30</sup> It is, however, a little unsecure how consistently we can trust that the pieces of papyrus catalogued into one lot actually originate with relative proximity to each other. Petrie’s publications or the unpublished material from the excavations contain no explicit comment on the practice.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, individual comments by Petrie and Griffith suggest that the papyri were intended to be regarded as an assembly of pieces which were found with relative proximity to each other.<sup>32</sup>

Another aspect concerning the criteria behind the lot-system is the previously undiscussed role of Griffith in adjusting and maintaining the assembly. Collier raises this question, and pays attention especially to the manner of Griffith in modifying the relative sequence of the lots themselves and the individual fragments within one lot. It seems that Griffith moved the larger fragments and more extensive lots forward in the relative sequence of

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<sup>27</sup> For description of Petrie’s journals and working practices, see Collier 2009. In addition, one of the aspects that Petrie seems to have prioritised is the dating of the material in relation to the arrival of new technologies to the area. This is reflected in the way his publication includes various descriptions of the objects being found e.g. in the same chamber with each other or otherwise within a proximity to each other. This seems to have been done in the hope of being able to cross-date the objects, although Petrie does not use the word himself. See e.g. Petrie 1899, 25–26.

<sup>28</sup> ‘-- and I always was certain of searching the places myself, as the men could not fill up the rooms without inspection, because no pay could be had until I had measured the emptied chamber. The price for this clearing in light rubbish was half a piaster the cubic metre, or a little under a penny a yard: of course there was extra money for everything found, papyri or bronze tools being especially well paid for.’ Petrie 1889, 12.

<sup>29</sup> For the history of the publication of the papyri, see Collier & Quirke 2002, v–xiii.

<sup>30</sup> For a list of references to the context of the papyri in the publications and in the unpublished material, see Collier & Quirke 2002, v–ix and Collier 2009, 223–229.

<sup>31</sup> Collier 2009, 223–229. For the list of currently known unpublished material relating to the excavations, see Collier 2009.

<sup>32</sup> Petrie 1890, 49. ‘--- thanks to Mr. Petrie’s careful packing in “lots” as they were obtained, --- there’s no cause to despair of discovering how pieces join or whether they *will* join (although one lot may contain 50 to 60 pieces of which some parts are sometimes to be found in a different lot). See also note 24 on the importance given to the cross-dating of the objects.’

the lots.<sup>33</sup> A difficult question is how much Griffith moved the individual fragments from one lot to another. Although Petrie's descriptions of some of the lots match the assembly to which it is attached, at least one of the lots (lot IV) contains fragments from another lot.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, the fact that Griffith wondered whether the pieces may originally be part of the same find, may also reflect that he has not trusted the consistency of the working practices at the site. On the whole, it appears that the individual assemblages of the lots can be relatively safely assumed to derive from a close distance to each other, but it is important to note that it offers no conclusive evidence on the original find context of the texts.

The second part of the collection, The Berlin papyri, were purchased about ten years after Petrie's first excavations by Reinhardt and Schäfer for the State Museum in Berlin.<sup>35</sup> Most of our knowledge of the origin of the papyri comes from Ludwig Borchardt's published report on the subject in which he recounts that he was able to identify one of the rubbish heaps close to the temple as the original find spot for the papyri. He tells that he asked the locals to show him the place where the papyri were found, and discovered that the rest of the pieces in the rubbish heaps included the same names as the papyri purchased by Reinhardt and Schäfer.<sup>36</sup> Although a large part of the Berlin papyri seem to origin from a relatively small area, Borchardt's report of the find conditions offers no conclusive evidence on the original find site for the papyri.<sup>37</sup>

Nevertheless, although the origin of the Berlin papyri is in many ways problematic, it is generally regarded that the papyri in the Berlin material form a more coherent and homogenous group of papyri than the papyri from Petrie's excavations, and it is commonly suggested that the papyri in the Berlin collection comprise part of a single temple/private archive.<sup>38</sup> This is based on the fact that most of the letters in the collection seem to be written by the temple scribe (future temple overseer) Horemsaef or addressed to him, and the other papyri in the collection seem to be connected to temple affairs.<sup>39</sup> An

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<sup>33</sup> Collier 2009, 224–232.

<sup>34</sup> 'Some small fragments fitting to the left-hand end of this papyrus were in Lot XVIII., which is probably therefore part of the same find.' Griffith 1899, 25.

<sup>35</sup> Borchardt 1899, 89.

<sup>36</sup> Borchardt 1899, 89–90.

<sup>37</sup> For discussion, see e.g. Luft 1998, 1–4.

<sup>38</sup> For a discussion on the subject, see e.g. Luft 1998. Additional problem to the subject is that a lack of information on the find conditions of the papyri concerns all of the possible 'truly' private archives known from the pharaonic Egypt. As a consequence, the relationship between private and official archives is poorly known. Eyre 2013, 19.

<sup>39</sup> For the catalogue of the papyri, see Kaplony-Heckel 1972.

important aspect concerning the Berlin papyri is that, unlike the UCL collection in the Petrie Museum, the collection has not yet been completely published, and various questions relating to the collection are out of reach for most of the researchers.

### 3.2. Description of the epistolary material

As already noted, this study is based on material consisting of approx. 80 letters in the Lahun papyri collections. The UCL papyri collection comprises a variety of different kinds of texts; in addition to letters, it includes accounts and administrative documents, literary, medical and religious texts. The collection has been preliminary edited and published by Mark Collier and Stephen Quirke in three volumes in 2002, 2004, 2006. The Berlin collection is not completely published, and the use of some of the earlier editions and catalogues of the papyri is problematic due to their preliminary nature.<sup>40</sup> This study therefore relies primarily on the critical editions of papyri by Ulrich Luft (1992a, 2006) published with adjacent photographs and transliterations. In addition, an individual letter purchased by Bernhard Grdseloff in 1943 can be connected to the settlement site (now part of the collections of the British Museum).<sup>41</sup>

The physical appearance of the Lahun letters varies greatly, and is only summarised here.<sup>42</sup> All of the letters in the Lahun collections are written on sheets of papyrus.<sup>43</sup> The condition of the papyri varies greatly; only a couple of the letters are preserved practically complete, and most of the larger fragments of the letters include approximately half or one third of the original letter. The text is written in black ink, with occasional markings or palimpsest replies in red, in both horizontal and vertical lines.<sup>44</sup>

The language of the Lahun letters is late Middle Egyptian showing features that become more common in Late Egyptian. The letters are written in Hieratic script usually on both sides of the papyrus sheet. Several of them also include traces of palimpsest. The letters were usually folded horizontally several times, then folded vertically in half and strung

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<sup>40</sup> The first preliminary edition of the Berlin material was published by Schäfer in 1924. The collection was later catalogued by Ursula Kaplony-Heckel in 1971.

<sup>41</sup> BM EA 10864. Grdseloff 1949, 59. In addition, several small fragments in the Petrie Museum can be connected to the area. They are mainly small, individual fragments and seem to be recovered during the field work at the Fayum by G. Caton-Thompson, and they were edited recently by Stephen Quirke. Quirke 2016.

<sup>42</sup> For the description of the physical appearance of each of the letters quoted in this study, see the editions by Collier & Quirke 2002 (2004 for the model letters pUC 32196); Luft 1992a, 2006; Grdseloff 1949.

<sup>43</sup> The Egyptian letters were typically written on sheets of papyrus cut from a larger roll. For a general overview of the use of papyrus as a medium for letters, see e.g. Eyre 2013, 22–27.

<sup>44</sup> For a general description of the layout of the letters, see Brose 2013, 472–474.



with a piece of string after the address column of the letter was written on the part visible. Most of the address columns of the letter include the name of the sender and of the addressee as in the following example:<sup>45</sup>

(1) Address column of the letter by Neni written on verso reads:

*nb ꜥ.w.s. mr pr ii-ib ꜥ.w.s.*

*m-ꜥ nni*

The lord, l.p.h. overseer of the house Iibi, l.p.h.<sup>46</sup>

From Neni (pUC 32199, vs.)

Most of the letters appear to be written between the reigns of Senusret III and Amenemhet IV (1837–1764 BC). The chronology of the UCL letters has not been separately studied, but based on the general dating of the site and the references made to the kings in the letters themselves,<sup>47</sup> most of the papyri seem to be written during that time. The dating and chronology of the letters in the Berlin collection have been studied in detail by Luft.<sup>48</sup>

Most of the letters in the Lahun collection appear to be written by officials conducting their duties or by the members of the higher socio-cultural level of the community managing the daily affairs of the estate in their charge. One of the letters in the collection is from a woman (pUC 32203), and two of the letters are addressed to a woman (pUC 32200, pUC 32209).<sup>49</sup> In addition, the letters written by the three adjacent local governors (*h3ty-ꜥ (i)m(y)-r hwt-ntr* ‘the mayor, overseer of the temple’) form a distinctive group of their own. Most of them are written to the temple scribe and future temple overseer Horemsaef.

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<sup>45</sup>The person who delivered the letter is mentioned in some instances, as well as the date of the correspondence. See also Brose 2013, 470–471.

<sup>46</sup> The expression is the conventional abbreviation of the expected greeting ‘life, prosperity and health’.

<sup>47</sup> For the list of them, see Collier & Quirke 2002, 201.

<sup>48</sup> See e.g. Luft 1982; 1998. See also Luft 1992b.

<sup>49</sup> The question of whether the letters were actually written by their senders is a question of its own and is not addressed in this study. For a general discussion on the subject, see e.g. Wente 1990, 6–9. A common assumption is that at least the mayor usually dictated rather than wrote his own letters, and that an illiterate person could ask someone to write a letter for him. It should, however, be kept in mind that the literate world was probably completely out of reach for most of the members of the community (see also chapter 6).

#### 4. Lahun letter formula

Although it is generally acknowledged that the letters in the Lahun collection represent a highly stylised and conventionalised manner of writing, the meaning of the concept of ‘letter formula’ and how it is featured in the Lahun letters has not been discussed in detail. It appears that the use of expression *swd3-ib* (a message, communication. lit. to make heart at ease, to please heart) can be seen as a feature that is connected to a specific mode of addressing the recipient to a degree that it can be seen as the defining feature of a particular letter formula,<sup>50</sup> meaning in this instance a specific mode of addressing the correspondent and formulating the text.

##### 4.1. Function of the expression *swd3-ib pw*

The most prominent characteristic of these letters is the use of the expression *swd3-ib pw* (This is a message/This is to inform) to physically structure the letter and generally formulate the text. In all of the letters in the collection in which the expression *swd3-ib* is used, the letters are structured in a specific, conventionalised manner using conventional sentence patterns and expressions. All these expressions can also be listed separately, but it seems best to interpret them as variations of the expression *swd3-ib pw* that can be seen to act as a ‘core element’ in all of the discussed sentence patterns.

The function of the expression *swd3-ib pw* is a subject that has been noted in previous studies, yet relatively briefly discussed. Brose has paid attention to the manner in which the expression is used to divide the letter into separate ‘paragraphs’ and subjects.<sup>51</sup> He lists all the variations of the expression *swd3-ib pw n nb ʕ.w.s. r-ntt* (This is a message to the lord l.p.h. as follows), and describes the way they are used in order to begin a new paragraph and subject matter of the letter.<sup>52</sup> This can be seen in the following letter from the temple scribe Horemsaef.

(2) Temple scribe Horemsaef begins his letter to the mayor.

*b3k n pr dt [hr-m-s3=f] dd*

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<sup>50</sup> It appears that this aspect is at least partly recognised in previous studies, although it is not explicitly stated. The use of the expression *swd3-ib* (especially the use of the expression *swd3-ib pw n nb ʕ.w.s* and its variations (see below) are included in all of the lists of the fixed expressions used in the letters. See e.g. Brose 2013, 468–471; Luft 2006, 19 and Collier & Quirke 2002, 194–195.

<sup>51</sup> Brose 2013, 468–469. See also list of formulaic keywords in Collier & Quirke 2002, 194–195.

<sup>52</sup> Brose 2013, 468. Similar note can be found also in Collier & Quirke’s index Collier & Quirke 2002, 194–195. For the list of the abbreviated forms of the expression, see e.g. Brose 2013, 468; Luft 2006, 19.

*swd3-ib pw n nb* <sup>ε</sup>.[w.s. r-ntt h3w nb] n nb <sup>ε</sup>.w.s. <sup>ε</sup>d wd3 m s.wt=s n nb.t

Servant of the estate [Horemsaef] says:

This is a message to the lord l.p.h. as follows: All the concerns of the lord l.p.h. are safe and prosperous in all their places.

[swd3-ib pw n nb [<sup>ε</sup>.w.s. r-ntt h]np-<sup>ε</sup>š<sup>ε</sup> r hpr m 3bd 2 3h.t sw 6 mnht r hpr [m] 3bd 2 [...]  
ih di nb <sup>ε</sup>.w.s. p3 tm3/h3r 4 knw (?) r p[3...] n hnp-<sup>ε</sup>š<sup>ε</sup> mnht  
hn<sup>ε</sup> rdit in.t(w) w<sup>ε</sup>h <sup>ε</sup>nn.t 100 n hnp-<sup>ε</sup>š<sup>ε</sup> [mitt-]iry n mnht

This is a message to the lord l.p.h. [as follows] hnp-<sup>ε</sup>š<sup>ε</sup>-festival will take place in the second month of inundation, on day 6, and mnht- festival will take place in the second month [...]. May the lord l.p.h. give 4 sacks of fat for the hnp-<sup>ε</sup>š<sup>ε</sup> and mnht and have 100 <sup>ε</sup>nn.t-measures of earth almonds to the hnp-<sup>ε</sup>š<sup>ε</sup> and similarly to the mnht.

hn<sup>ε</sup> swd3-ib ir hsb 100 m snb3 n w<sup>ε</sup>b-nsw sn-wsrt s3 sn-wsrt

In addition, a message: 100 workers have been delivered as/for the snb3 of the royal priest Senusret son of Senusret. (pBln 10018, 1–4; 8)

A new subject matter to the text can also be introduced with the pattern *swd3-ib pw n nb* <sup>ε</sup>.w.s. hr. In this case, the expression specifies the matter of the message more directly with the pattern: This is a message to the lord l.p.h. about X.<sup>53</sup> If the matter of the message is specified only later in the same paragraph, the expression *h3b b3k-im m swd3-ib hr=s hr* can be used (The servant-there is writing a message about this; about X).<sup>54</sup> The expression is used frequently in the letters; see e.g. the following passages:

(3a) Lady of the house Irer has not heard of the recipient for some time and inquires:

*swd3-ib pw n nb* <sup>ε</sup>.w.s. hr p3y <sup>ε</sup>m-ib n nb <sup>ε</sup>.w.s. (i)n iw=tn <sup>ε</sup>d[ty ny wd3.ty ny]

This is a message to the lord l.p.h. about the forgetfulness of the lord l.p.h. Are you safe [and sound?] (pUC 32203, 2–3)

(3b) Temple scribe Horemsaef continues his letter:

hn[<sup>ε</sup> swd3]-ib hr rdit in.t(w) p3 k3 n nfrw wr n w3gi inn.w h3ty-<sup>ε</sup> mr hwt-ntr m htr  
hn[<sup>ε</sup> rdit in.]tw=f n p3 hb

<sup>53</sup> The use of this pattern will be returned later in chapter 5.1.

<sup>54</sup> See also Brose 2013, 468–469; Collier & Quirke 2002, 195.

In addition, a message about having the bull of ‘great beauty’ of the *w3gi*-festival which the mayor, temple overseer brought as revenues, and having it delivered to the festival.

*hn<sup>c</sup> sw[d3-ib hr] k3.w n sisnt htr m inn hr htp-ntr i[...]nt.w nfr-pw inn.t(w) hn<sup>c</sup> p3 [...] tp-<sup>c</sup>.fy (?)*  
*m mit-iry h3b pw hr swd3-ib [hr=s hr] rdit in.t(w) k3 n3-n [...]*

In addition, a message about the *sisn.t*-festival revenues as brought as/for offering [...] which have not been brought and the [...] similarly. A message is written about this; about having the bulls brought, those [...] (pBln 10018, 4–8)

This ‘structuring function’ of the expression appears to be working on two levels. On the one hand, the expression functions as an element that acts as a ‘marker’ or a signpost for the beginning and ending of a new subject matter of the letter; it can be seen to guide the attention of the reader and create the letter a cohesive inside structure. On the other hand, it functions as an element that determines several aspects of the formulation of the text in general and affects e.g. the manner in which requests tend to be formulated (see chapter 5.1.).

The function of the expression *swd3-ib pw* in physically structuring the letter is exemplified also in the use of the expression *swd3-ib pw n nb <sup>c</sup>.w.s. hr=s* (This is a message to the lord l.p.h. about this.). Brose notes how the expression is used at the end of the discussed matter.<sup>55</sup> Usually, the expression is not used between two subject matters of the letter, as the following subject matter begun with the expression *swd3-ib pw* inherently marks also the end of the previous subject. It is in most cases used only at the end of the last subject of letter, before the so called end greeting *nfr sdm nb <sup>c</sup>.w.s.* (It is good if/that the lord l.p.h. listens (see below).

However, the expression can also be used to mark the end of the discussed chapter more specifically. In these cases, the expression can be used in order to ‘highlight’ the importance of the discussed subject to the reader (see example 4a). In example 4b, the author of the letter uses the expression to separate a particular passage of the letter. The passage appears to act as an ‘introductory paragraph’ reporting briefly what the following letter is about.

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<sup>55</sup> Brose 2013, 469. See also Collier & Quirke 2002, 195.

(4a) Servant of the estate Irysw asks the addressee to write about the matter concerning the delayed delivery of wages:

*ir grt wnn ḥḥ p3 ḥsb 11 ḥ3 r tbt=sn bw nb nfr  
ntk ḥ3b=k ḥr md.t m ḥr=k snb.t(i) ḥnh.t(i)  
mk in g3w n wpwty ḥ3 ḥnḥ=i iw 3 rdi-n=i iwt=f r int n=i smi m rh=k  
n-in.tw m tb.t n.t p3 ḥsb 11 k3 ḥ3b=k n=i ḥr=s n-in.tw m tb.t iry k3=k n=i ḥr=s gr  
swd3-ib pw ḥr=s*

If the eleven workers are waiting there for their provisions in good order, you are the one who could write about the matters at your sight, you being healthy and living.

Look, through lack of a messenger here with me: I did send him to bring me a reply with your opinion, because the provisions of the eleven workers have not been brought.<sup>56</sup> Then you should write me about it, for the provisions have not been brought thereof. Tell me about it as well.<sup>57</sup> This is a message about this. (pUC 32201, vs. 3–17)

(4b) The servant of the estate Irypersen has delayed in his task and starts his letter to the addressee:

*swd3-ib pw n [nb ḥ.w.s. r-]ntt mr s.t ḥri sb[.w] m ḥd r t3-mḥw iw b3k-im ḥ3 wḥy ḥ3b b3k-im m swd3[-  
ib] ḥr=s ḥr rdit ḥs.tw n b3k-im m p3 nkt n ḥm.t<sup>58</sup> dd-n nb ḥ.w.s. ink rdi=i ir.tw=f n=k r-s3 sḥt n3-n  
d3iw swd3-ib pw ḥr=s*

This is a message to the lord l.p.h. as follows: The store overseer Heri has been sent downstream to Lower Egypt. The servant-there is alone here, and the servant-there is writing a message about it; about having the servant-there favoured with some ḥm.t-stone. The lord l.p.h. said: I will personally have it delivered to you after the bolt of cloth has been woven. This is a message about this.

*mk grt sš ḥr ḥtm nn-nḥty ḥd ḥnḥ ḥ3t[...] w n-rdi ḥ3ty-ḥ sm=i m [...] n3-n sš wnn [...]*

Look, the scribe of the seal of Nennehty has sailed downstream with the mayor [...]w but the mayor did not order/allow me to leave [...] the papyri which [...]<sup>59</sup> (pUC 32197, 1,5–1,18)

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Collier & Quirke 2002: ‘Look, because of the lack of a messenger here with me, I could hardly have him sent to bring me a report with your opinion’.

<sup>57</sup> He has asked the addressee also to write about the amount of the workers in the previous paragraph. (pUC 32201, vs. 1–2)

<sup>58</sup> For the reading of this sign, see Collier & Quirke 2002, 91.

<sup>59</sup> The letter continues with a detailed report of the matter(s) presented at the beginning.

This manner of formulating the text is attested in all of the letters in the collection that refer to the communication as *swd3-ib*. This habit can be followed in slightly varying degrees, but the existence of a highly structured pattern is evident.<sup>60</sup> It suggests that there existed a concept or an idea of appropriately formulated letter, a manner with which one becomes accustomed to with scribal training and as a member of the ‘official class’ of the community.<sup>61</sup>

The existence of a specific letter formula is supported with the fact that the use of this so called *swd3-ib*-formula seems to be restricted to specific situations. This subject will be returned later in chapter 6, but it appears that the formula is used only in situations when one is writing to one’s superior.<sup>62</sup> The question on the relative social hierarchy of the correspondents is, however, difficult to ascertain in most cases, and reflects the complex socio-cultural hierarchical structures in the community, which are in many ways yet poorly known. However, it is clear that the concept of *swd3-ib* includes a cultural connotation of an official/hierarchical status, and that the letter formula is not used when one is writing to his subordinate, or the matter of the correspondence is explicitly private in nature.

#### 4.2. Fixed expressions used in greeting, ending and closing

In addition to the expression *swd3-ib pw*, most of the letters make use of various other fixed expressions that serve as greetings.<sup>63</sup> The most frequently used of these expressions is the familiar ‘opening greeting’ *h3w nb n nb ʕ.w.s. ʕd wd3 m s.wt=sn nb.t* (All the concerns of the lord l.p.h. are safe and prosperous in all their places). The expression is used in the beginning of most of the letters that refer to the manner of communication as *swd3-ib*, but not in all of them.<sup>64</sup>

The greeting is expressed in the form of a report of a good overall state of affairs in all the ‘places’ under the lord’s care and supervision i.e. in the destination of the author. An interesting parallel of the use of the expression is in the *Duties of the Vizier*, in which it

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<sup>60</sup> The so called satirical letter being perhaps the example in which it is most economically used (pUC 32204).

<sup>61</sup> See chapter 6.

<sup>62</sup> See Brose who notes that expression *swd3-ib* is used when one is writing to someone in a superior status.

<sup>63</sup> Most of these are familiar from the previous descriptions of the Lahun letter formula, in which they are typically seen as different formulaic sections of the letter. For the list of different terms and divisions used, see Brose 2013, 457.

<sup>64</sup> See e.g. pUC 32211; pUC 32128.

is described as a feature of the formal morning ceremonial at the vizier's palace in which the officials individually report of the state of affairs at the department in their charge.<sup>65</sup>

In the Lahun letters, the expression seems best to be understood as a greeting without a more specific administrative or 'reportive' value, as it is used in almost all of the letters, and not, for instance, exclusively by people who would be in a disposition to report such matters. Eyre notes that the expression is attested also in the 'end-of month' reports in the temple day-book from el-Lahun, in which it possibly marks the completion of the regular temple inventory.<sup>66</sup> The expression seems, then, best understood as an idiom which gives an overall sense relatively similar to 'all is well'.

(5a) Official Hekaittef begins his letter on the delivery of work-force:

*b3k n pr-dt hk3-it-tf dd*  
*swd3-ib pw n nb Ꞁ.w.s. r-ntt h3w nb n nb Ꞁ.w.s. Ꞁd wd3 [m s.]wt=sn nb.t*

Servant of the estate Hekaittef says:

This is a message to the lord l.p.h. as follows: All the concerns of the lord l.p.h. are safe and sound in all their places. (pBln 10038C, 1–4)

(5b) A sketch of a letter on a large sheet of papyrus reads:

*b3k n pr-dt whm msw.t dd n hk3-ib Ꞁ.w.s*  
*swd3-ib pw n nb Ꞁ.w.s. r-ntt h3w nb n nb Ꞁ.w.s. Ꞁd wd3 m s.wt=sn nb.t*  
*nn di.t nb.t nb Ꞁ.w.s. ib=f m gs (?) ury wp-hr snb Ꞁnh m hst nt inpw nb miw*

Servant of the estate Wehem-meswt says to Hekaib l.p.h.

This is a message to the lord l.p.h. as follows: All the concerns of the lord l.p.h. are safe and prosperous in all their places. There is nothing for the lord l.p.h. to be worried about other than health and well-being in the favour of Anubis, lord of Miu (pUC 32196, 7–10)

In these letters, the greeting is usually followed with a varying list of deities and sometimes with the name of the past or present ruler. The choice of the deities and sovereigns varies greatly, but the meaning behind the choices made is not known. The

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<sup>65</sup> Eyre 2013, 62. The text is known from the tomb inscriptions of the Theban viziers from the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasties, but the literary composition describing the duties of the vizier and the correct administrative practices appears to be of later date.

<sup>66</sup> Eyre 2013, 62; Luft 1992b, 31–34. pBln 10003A, 13: *dd.t-n=sn pw h3w=k nb Ꞁd wd3* 'What they say is all your affairs are safe and prosperous'.

meaning of the greeting would suggest that the deities reflect the home place or the current destination of the author and/or the addressee, but the subject would need a specific study of its own. It may also refer to the addressee's titles and social status or have varied even according to the subject at hand.<sup>67</sup>

(6) The servant of the estate Wah begins his letter:

*swd3-ib pw n nb [c.w.s.] r-ntt h3w nb [n nb c.w.s.] c d wd3 [m s.wt=sn nb.t]  
m hs.t n.t sbk šdty hr hr-ib šdt ntr.w nb.w mi mrr b3k[-im]*

This is a message to the lord l.p.h. as follows: All the concerns [of the lord l.p.h.] are safe and prosperous [in all their places;] in favour of Sobek Shedty, Horus amongst Shedet, and all the gods, just as the servant-there wishes. (pUC 32123, fr.i. 1–6)

The greeting can also include the expression *mi mrr b3k-im* (just as the servant-there wishes) used to end the greeting,<sup>68</sup> but it seems reasonable to presume that it could have been used also in other communicative situations of similar kind in order to add a sense of benevolent nature of the social communication.<sup>69</sup>

(7) Servant of the estate Iimiatib begins his letter:

*swd3-ib pw n nb c.w.[s]. r-n[t]t h3w nb n nb c.w.s. c d wd3 m s.wt=sn nb.t m hs.t n.t tm nb iwnw  
hn c psd.t=f r c-hr-3hty spd w nb i3bt.t hn c psd.t=f ntr=k nw.ty mrr tw m hr.t-hrw n.t r c nb [...] im r  
hrw pn ntr.w nb.w mi [mr]r b3k im*

This is a message to the lord, l.p.h. as follows: all the concerns of the lord, l.p.h. are safe and prosperous in all their places; in favour of Atum, lord of On, together with his Ennead, Ra-Herakhty, Sepdu, lord of the East, together with his Ennead, your local god, who loves you in the course of every day [...] down to this day, and all the gods, just as the servant-there wishes. (pUC 32198, 1–8)

In the form discussed above, the greeting *h3w nb n nb c.w.s. c d wd3 m s.wt=sn nb.t* is used exclusively in those letters of the collection that refer to the manner of communication as *swd3-ib* and it, then, appears to have a cultural connotation of a superior or shared

<sup>67</sup> A descriptive example of the significance of the choice of these deities is in the so called model letter (a large sheet of papyrus which includes sketches of nine letters), in which the author has marked down the names of the deities, but omits the use of the greeting in all but one of the letters (pUC 32196). It appears that the author has marked down only the sections of the letter that would differ from addressee to addressee.

<sup>68</sup> The expression is traditionally seen as a part of the opening formula of the letter. See e.g. Broes 2013, 465 and Collier & Quirke 2002, 93.

<sup>69</sup> The expression is attested also in the Earlier Middle Kingdom letters, see James 1962, 122.



hierarchical status of the addressee related to the use of formula in general.<sup>70</sup> However, a shorter version of the greeting is also used in a letter from the Lahun collection that does not otherwise follow the ‘*swd3-ib*-formula’.<sup>71</sup> In this case, the content of the letter suggests that the letter is sent from an official to his subordinate of some kind and a member of his own household.<sup>72</sup>

(8) Neni sends instructions concerning his return home:

[...] *dd(=i) di(=i) rh=k r-ntt h3w=k nb ʕd*  
*mk wi r spr [r] shm-sn-wsrt m3ʕ-hrw [...] pw ih di=k gmy=i p3 pr ir m bw nb nfr*  
*hnʕ h3b n=i shr nb n snb ʕnh n mnʕ.t tim3 dd=k grt spr=i ʕ33 iw [p3] pr smʕr*  
*[šms/htm]w nni*

[...] I speak to inform you as follows:/that all your concerns are safe. Look, I will arrive at Sekhem-Senwosret, true of voice, [...] May you let me find the house put in good order (?) and write to me about ‘every circumstance of health and life’ of the nurse Tima. Let me arrive there, (only after/from the moment) the house is prepared/cleaned.

Follower/seal-bearer<sup>73</sup> Neni (BM EA 10864)

As already noted, the normative end greeting used in the letters is the expression *nfr sdm nb ʕ.w.s.* (It is good if the lord l.p.h. listens).<sup>74</sup> The expression is usually preceded with the expression marking the end of the discussed matter *swd3-ib ib pw n nb ʕ.w.s.* (see above). Most of the letters lack the end part of the text, and it is difficult to say how many of the letters which refer to the manner of communication as *swd3-ib* would originally have included the greeting. Nevertheless, the greeting *nfr sdm nb ʕ.w.s.* is not used in the letters in the collection which do not refer to the manner of communication as *swd3-ib*.

(9) Author ends his letter to the temple scribe Horemsaef:

[...] *fʕhnʕ rdit h3b.t(w) n b3k-im hr ʕ.w.s. nb ʕ.w.s. swd3-ib pw n nb [ʕ.w.s. hr=s swd3-ib pw n nb ʕ.w.s. nfr sdm nb ʕ.w.s.]*

<sup>70</sup> See chapter 6. Also e.g. Luft and Grdseloff note that the expression is used when writing to one’s superior. Luft 1992b, 33; Grdseloff 1949, 61.

<sup>71</sup> See also Grdseloff 1949, 61.

<sup>72</sup> Grdseloff 1949, 61.

<sup>73</sup> Grdseloff sees the title *htm*w more likely judging by the traces on the original. The photograph is in this case very unclear.

<sup>74</sup> This is traditionally referred to as the ‘end formulae’ of the letter. See e.g. Brose 2013, 463.

[...] And have someone write to the servant-there about the well-being of the lord, l.p.h. This is a message to the lord about this. This is a message to the lord, l.p.h. It is good if the lord, l.p.h. listens. (pBln 10025, 14)

Besides the fact that expressions *h3w nb n nb ʕ.w.s. ʕd wd3 m s.wt=sn nb.t* and *nfr sdm nb ʕ.w.s* are used as greetings, they also have an ‘inherent’ function in structuring the letter marking the beginning and ending of the communicative situation. In the same manner as the expression *swd3-ib pw*, they add to the sense of an internal structure of the letter.<sup>75</sup> In addition, the expression *nfr sdm nb ʕ.w.s.* can be used in the same manner as the expression *swd3-ib pw n nb ʕ.w.s. hr=s* in ending the discussed subject matter. In the following passage, the sender of the letter uses the expression to end the first passage of her message probably to emphasise its importance (see example 4a).

(10) The mistress of the house Irer writes about problems at home:

*swd3-ib pw n nb ʕ.w.s. hr p3y ʕm-ib n nb ʕ.w.s. (i)n iw=tn ʕd[tyny wd3.tyny]*  
 [...] *sp.t(i) r t3 hr int=n wšb.w [hr-]ntt n-sdm.tw wpwt=tn nb.t nfr sdm [nb ʕ.w.s.]*

This is a message to the lord l.p.h. about the forgetfulness of the lord l.p.h: are you safe [and prosperous?...] abandoned (?) concerning our bringing of supplies (?),<sup>76</sup> because no-one has heard any messages of yours. It is good if the lord l.p.h. listens.

*swd3-ib pw n nb ʕ.w.s. hr [n]3-n hm.wt nty ʕy nn gmt šht [...] hr [...]nw n šsm*

This is a message to the lord l.p.h. about the female servants who are here not being able to weave [...] the (some kind of threads needed for weaving). (pUC 32203, 1–6)

Letters also include other expressions that are used to give the letter an internal structure and opening and closing the discussed matter. Some of the letters make use of the sentence *sdm-n b3k-im md.t n.t šš pn iny n b3k-im* (the servant-there has listened the content of this document which was brought to the servant-there). It is used in replies after the opening greetings before going to the actual matter and marks the beginning of the following report. It is often followed with a quotation of the letter received,<sup>77</sup> as in the following example.

<sup>75</sup> The sense of the end greeting *nfr sdm nb ʕ.w.s.* as ‘It is good if the lord l.p.h. listens/takes note’ is in this sense fitting. See e.g. how Collier & Quirke translate the greeting ‘It is good if the lord l.p.h. takes note’ reflecting the wide semantic scope of the expression *sdm* (to listen).

<sup>76</sup> Collier & Quirke 2002, 115.

<sup>77</sup> The use of quotations from letters received is a prominent feature of the Lahun letters in general. The quotations are most frequently introduced with several particles e.g. *r-dd*, *m-dd*, and the end of a quote is

(11) Servant of the estate Mershenet writes confirmation for a receiving of an official order and delivery:

*b3k n pr d.t m-šnt dd*

*swd3-ib pw n nb Ꞁ.w.s. r-ntt sdm-n b3k-im md.t n.t sš pn iny n b3k-im r-dd*

Servant of the estate Mershenet says:

This is a message to the lord l.p.h. as follow: the servant-there has listened the content of this document which was brought to the servant-there, saying:

*iri n3-n Ꞁnhw-nsw m-Ꞁ sšrw nb n htp-sn-wsrt m3Ꞁ-hrw hw.t n.t s3t-nsw nfrw-ptḥ m3Ꞁ-hrw tp-ihw  
ntt m ww iri m inw šnwt tn n mr 3ḥt wdꞀ=sn ryt im*

‘The royal food supplies have been organised by every grain supply of Hetep-Senusret, true of voice, the dwelling of the king’s daughter Neferuptah, true of voice, Tp-ihw, which are in the districts, made as ‘products of this barn/grain supply’ to the overseer of the field. They have been ordered to be distributed (?) there.’

*wdꞀ sš pn iny n b3k-im*

This document which was brought to the servant-there was ‘officially decreed (?)’<sup>78</sup>. (pUC 32212, a.c, 1–9)

In addition to the opening and end greetings, many of the letters include inquires after the health of the addressee and greetings to other members of the household. These are common in all of the letters in the collection, and their use appears not to be connected to the relative social hierarchy between the correspondents, but should rather be seen as a feature that reflects the wider socio-hierarchical structures in the community build around complex patronage structures and relationships (see chapter 6).

The following extract is the one usually regarded as one of the fixed parts of the letter formula.<sup>79</sup> It includes a question and an implied wish for the welfare of the addressee formulated in the normative manner of expressing requests in general (see chapter 5.1.). The request is sometimes ended with the expression *hr-ntt nfr ib n b3k-im sdm-n=fꞀ.w.s.*

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usually marked with the expression *hrw.fy X, X* marking the source of the quotation. See e.g. *nfr-pw rdit=f n=i st gr hrw.fy sw* (‘He has not given me that either’, said he.) pBl n 10074, 10–11.

<sup>78</sup> *wdꞀ*, lit. ‘judge’. Collier & Quirke translate it in this instance ‘officially decreed’. The expression appears to mean that the official document quoted in this letter has been ‘appropriate acknowledged’ leading, then, into appropriate actions. See chapter 6.2.

<sup>79</sup> See e.g. Brose 2013, 457; Collier & Quirke 2002, 93.

*nb* 𐎎.𐎗.𐎍. (as the heart of the servant-there is content once he has heard about the well-being of the lord l.p.h.) attested e.g. in the following example:<sup>80</sup>

(12) Servant of the estate Iimiatib continues his letter:

*swd3-ib pw n nb* 𐎎.𐎗.𐎍. *hr rdit h3b.t(w) n b3k-im hr* 𐎎.𐎗.𐎍. *nb* 𐎎.𐎗.𐎍. *hr-ntt nfr ib n b3k-im*  
*sdm-n=f* 𐎎.𐎗.𐎍. *nb* 𐎎.𐎗.𐎍.

This is a message to the lord l.p.h. about having one write to the servant-there about the well-being of the lord l.p.h. as the heart of the servant-there is content once he has heard about the well-being of the lord l.p.h. (pUC32198, 9–12)

The following two examples include greetings addressed to other members of the household. In the first example, the author sends his greetings to specifically named members of the household. The latter example includes an answer to the letter that has been previously sent to the author.

(13a) Servant of the estate Irypersen ends his letter with greetings:

*hn* 𐎎.𐎗.𐎍. *nd-hrt. nb.t s3.t tp-ihw m* 𐎎.𐎗.𐎍. *mr pr hmm nb.t pr bbw mr rhty s3 dhwty nb.t pr snbi*

In addition, greetings to the lady of the house Satepihu with l.p.h., the overseer of the house Khemem, lady of the house Bebw, overseer of the washermen Sa-Djehuti and to the lady of the house Senbi. (pUC 32197, 2.11–2.17)

(13b) Author ends his private letter about a missing official:

*hn* 𐎎.𐎗.𐎍. *nd-hrt nb.t pr kbs [...]* *ty nb-sw-mnw nb.t pr ikw r-ntt sdm-n=i n3 h3b-n=t hr=s r-dd [i]mi in.tw*  
*n=i nkt mrht m[t rdi-n=i] in.tw n=t mr[ht]*

In addition, greet the lady of the house Kebes [...] Nebsumenu, lady of the house Iku as follows: I have listened what you wrote about saying: ‘Send me some merhet-oil.’ Look, I have sent you mer[heth-oil.] (pUC 32209, vs. 1–3)

#### 4.3. Use of the expressions *b3k-im* and *nb* 𐎎.𐎗.𐎍.

One of the prominent characteristics of the letters is the use of specific conventional addressing words to refer to the correspondents. In the letters that refer to the manner of communication as *swd3-ib*, the writer of the letter refers to himself as *b3k-im* (the servant-there), and accordingly, refers to the addressee as his master *nb* 𐎎.𐎗.𐎍. (the lord, life,

<sup>80</sup> Attested in letters pUC 32109B, 2.5–2.7; pUC 32198, 11–12; pUC 32214, 7–8. See also other expressions used in requests to express gratitude and give them a ‘softer’ tone in chapter 5.3.

prosperity and health).<sup>81</sup> In addition, the author of the letter refers to himself with the title *b3k n pr-dt* (servant of the estate) when beginning his letter to the addressee in the following manner:<sup>82</sup>

(14a) Official Iuseneb begins his letter with the conventional manner:

*b3k n pr dt iw-snb dd n mr-pr km3w* [c.w.s.]  
*[swd3-ib pw n nb c.w.s. r-ntt h3w nb n nb c.w.s. c d wd3] m s.wt=sn nb.t [...]*

Servant of the estate Iuseneb says to the overseer of the estate Kemaw:

[This is a message to the lord l.p.h. as follows: All the concerns of the lord l.p.h. are safe and sound] in all their places [...] (pBlIn 10030A, 1–2)

(14b) The servant-of the estate Iibi writes to the overseer of the estate Sehetepib:

*swd3-ib pw n [nb c.w.s.] r-ntt sk3 nhw 3h.t n b3k-im m w n htp-snwsrt m3c-hrw sp3t m hr h[3]b b3k-im [s]wd3-ib hr=s hr] rdit di.tw [...]*

This is a message to the lord l.p.h. as follows: a piece of land has been ploughed of the field of the servant-there in the district of Hetep-Senwosret, true of voice, in the nome of Horus. The servant-there is writing a message about this: about having [...]. (pUC 32202, fr. 1.)

In fact, it appears that the formula has two ‘core’ characteristics that should be regarded as the most prominent features of this specific, manner of addressing: the use of the expression *swd3-ib pw* in physically structuring the letter (see above) and the use of the expressions *b3k-im* and *nb c.w.s.* to refer to the correspondents. All the letters that refer to the manner of communication as *swd3-ib* follow the same manner of structuring the letter, and all of them make use of the same conventional addressing words to refer to the correspondents.<sup>83</sup> In addition, the expressions *b3k-im* and *nb c.w.s.* are used exclusively in these letters.

The relationship between the use of the expressions *b3k-im* and *nb c.w.s.* and the *swd3-ib*-formula can also be seen when comparing the form of the fixed expressions in the letters

<sup>81</sup> The expressions *b3k-im* and *nb c.w.s.* are included in all of the lists of formulaic features, see e.g. Brose 2013, 472; Collier & Quirke 2002, 188, and James in relation to early Middle Kingdom letters 1962, 128.

<sup>82</sup> For discussion on the expression *b3k n pr-dt*, see Luft 1982, 118–121; 1983, 127–128.

<sup>83</sup> Although the fixed expressions and greetings described in the previous chapter are frequently used in the letters, none of them is used in all of these letters. See e.g. letter pUC 32211 in which the author tries to sort out a happened confusion concerning a delivery. The letter lacks the opening greeting and other ‘formulaic parts’ of the letter, but it is perfectly formulated according to the expected customs. Interesting example is also the letter pUC 32128 that lacks the opening greeting (example 26c).

which follow the *swd3-ib* -formula to the rest of the letters in the collection. In those instances when the letter follows the discussed formula, the fixed expressions of the letter are usually written using the expressions *b3k-im* and *nb ʕ.w.s.*,<sup>84</sup> and in the letters which do not follow the normative pattern, the same, conventionalised modes of addressing are used with the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> singular pronouns respectively. This connection is partly a reflection of the ‘official/hierarchical connotation’ attached to both of these features, but the conventionalised manner of formulating the letter proves that there also existed a specific, learned manner of addressing, the use of which shows conformity to the socially expected customs and knowledge of these specific cultural practices. These aspects become especially important in a society in which the socio-economic structure of the community is highly stratified and build around complex socio-hierarchical structures (see chapter 6).

However, although this feature certainly is a prominent characteristic of the normative discourse of the letters, the expressions *b3k-im* and *nb ʕ.w.s.* are not necessarily attested throughout the letter in which they are used, but can vary in the course of the text. The conventionalised form and nature of the fixed expressions is reflected in the fact that the expressions *b3k-im* and *nb ʕ.w.s.* are more regularly used in the fixed expressions of the letter than in the other parts of the text. The greeting *h3w nb n nb ʕ.w.s. ʕd wd3 m s.wt=sn nb.t* is never used with personal pronouns. Same holds e.g. for the expression *mi mrr b3k-im* and, indeed, the expression *swd3-ib pw*. Also the fixed expressions used in requests (see chapter 5.3.) are usually written with the normative addressing words.<sup>85</sup> The only exception is the end greeting *nfr sdm nb ʕ.w.s.*, which is often written in the form *nfr sdm=k*.

In addition, the use of the expressions *b3k-im* and *nb ʕ.w.s.* can in some cases be related to the nature of the communicative situation and the choice of the addressing manner. It appears that the expression can be used to add a ‘softer’ tone to the request in cases when it is otherwise formulated in a manner that differs from the expected style. This question will be returned to in chapter 5 after discussing the more normative manners of formulating a request in these letters.

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<sup>84</sup> With one exception, see below the letter by Neni pUC 32199.

<sup>85</sup> As already noted, with one exception, pUC 32199.

## 5. Requesting in the Lahun letters

As already noted, most of the letters in the Lahun collection appear to be written by officials conducting their duties or by the members of the higher socio-cultural level of the community managing the daily affairs of the estate in their charge. As a consequence, the majority of the letters include requests of various kinds related to the delivery of the duty assigned or in hope of a favour or a ‘reward’ of the conducted practice.<sup>86</sup> The normative formulation of the requests reflects the two core characteristics of the formula, but it also shows a more prominent tendency to several indirect requesting strategies.

### 5.1. Alienating the agentivity of the author

There are two most frequently attested patterns for formulating a request in the Lahun letters. First one of these is to express the wish with the expression *swd3-ib pw n nb ʕ.w.s. hr rdit* (This is a message about having X done).<sup>87</sup> In addition, several of the requests used in the letters are formulated using the particle *ih* with the subjunctive form of the verb with the pattern: *ih di nb ʕ.w.s.* (May the lord l.p.h. have X done).<sup>88</sup> As seen, the new subject matter to the letter is in these cases introduced with the expression *swd3-ib pw n nb ʕ.w.s. r-ntt* or a variation of it.

(15a) A sketch of a letter reads:

*swd3-ib pw n nb ʕ.w.s. hr rdit in.tw n=i r 10 n b3k-im nfr sdm nb ʕ.w.s.*

This is a message to the lord l.p.h. about having 10 geese brought to me, to the servant-there. It is good if the lord l.p.h. listens.<sup>89</sup> (pUC 32196, 1–2)

(15b) Khememy asks the addressee to mark down the catch of fish caught by his subordinate Ita:

[ʕhʕ-n d]bh[-n=f] imw r dʕ rm 10 n nb ʕ.w.s. ʕhʕ[-n] it-n=f rdit-wgs 500 in-n=f st m hʕm  
h3b b3k-im hr swd3-ib hr=s hr r[dit] ip.t(w) r dmi n pr hny in nb [ʕ.w.s.] iw rdi-n b3k-im iwt it3  
hr=s r rdit [...]

[Then he requested] a boat to catch 10 (measures of) fish to the lord l.p.h. Then he caught 500 “rdit-wgs” and brought them as catch. The servant there is writing a message about this; about

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<sup>86</sup> See chapter 6.2.

<sup>87</sup> See also the list of formulaic keywords in Collier & Quirke 2002, 195. *swd3-ib pw n nb ʕ.w.s. hr rdit* (request).

<sup>88</sup> This pattern is frequently used also in the letters from the mayor to his subordinates.

<sup>89</sup> The letter is only a sketch, and the final attestation of the expression *b3k-im* may be intended as a note of some kind.

having (them) counted at the port of the row-house (?) by the lord l.p.h. The servant-there has sent Ita for this to have [...] (pUC 32205, 14–19)

(15c) Temple scribe Horemsaef asks the mayor to deliver some festival products:

*b3k n pr-dt hr-m-s3=f dd*  
*swd[3-ib] pw n nb ʕ.w.s. r-ntt w3gi r hr m rnpt 18 3bd 2 smw sw 17 snw n mddnt*  
*iw hr iw3 k3 m htp-ntr n w3gi in n=i hr htp-sn-wsrt m3ʕ-hrw*  
*ih wd nb ʕ.w.s. rdi.t in.t(w)*

Servant of the estate Horemsaef says:

This is a message to the lord as follows: *w3gi*-festival will take place in year 18, second month of summer, on day 17, on the second of full moon. The revenue bull for the offering of the *w3gi*-festival has been brought to me from Hetep-Senusret, true of voice. May the lord l.p.h. order (it) to be brought. (pBlIn 10016, 1–3)

It is important to note how both of the previous examples can be derived from the two prominent characteristics of the formula: the use of expression *swd3-ib pw* and the conventional addressing words. This reflects the way they determine several aspects of the formulation of the text in general and affect the manner in which the author of the letter expresses himself. However, the use of the above patterns shows also another characteristic of the normative language of the letters. Both of these features appear to comprise an element, a pragmatic function or a feature, that backgrounds the presence of the author. This is done by alienating the author's role as the active agent behind the performed speech acts (e.g. in this case, the request expressed) and by avoiding the direct addressing of the other correspondent.

These aspects (or this aspect, depending whether one wants to see these features as two sides of the same coin) in the formulation of the requests are reflected e.g. in the formulation of the request with the use of the pattern *swd3-ib pw n nb ʕ.w.s. hr rdit*. In a sentence such as 'This is a message to the lord l.p.h. about having the bull of great beauty brought', the author and 'the actual speaker' of the utterance is not present as the agent of the sentence, but his role is backgrounded. Although it is pragmatically clear that the sender of the letter is the one speaking to the addressee, the formulation of the text does not mention it explicitly but 'hides' it from the reader. The effect resembles that of the type of academic English that avoids the use of the 1<sup>st</sup> singular pronoun as the agent of



the sentences. One could say that this manner creates a sense of neutral narrative that happens on a separate level of its own, unattached to the author.

A descriptive example of this manner of alienating one's personal role as the active participant behind the speech acts is the following passage from a letter by temple scribe Horemsaef. Instead of using the conventional pattern *h3b b3k-im hr swd3-ib hr=s hr* (see chapter 4.1.), the author formulates the sentence using the copula element *pw* in place of the expression *b3k-im* or the personal pronoun. In order to capture the impression created, the sentence seems best to be translated into a passive construction.<sup>90</sup>

(16) Temple overseer Horemsaef informs the mayor about a delivery that has been delayed:

*hn<sup>c</sup> sw[d3-ib hr] k3.w n sisnt htr m inn hr htp-ntr i[...]nt.w nfr-pw inn.t(w) hn<sup>c</sup> p3 [...] tp-<sup>c</sup>.fy? m mit-iry h3b pw hr swd3-ib [hr=s hr] rdit in.t(w) k3 n3-n [...]*

In addition, a message about the *sisn.t*-festival revenues as brought as/for offering [...] which have not been brought and the [...] similarly. A message is written about this; about having the bulls brought, those [...] (pBln 10018, 4–8)

On the other hand, in the above sentence ‘This is a message to the lord l.p.h. about having the bull of great beauty brought’ also the addressee of the request is absent as the agent. Although the wish expects actions from him, the request is not addressed to him directly, but with somewhat complicatedly formulated manner. In part, this reflects the role of the addressee as the person giving orders and instructions, not actually delivering anything or doing physical labour, but, in fact, the formulation of the sentence avoids mentioning his role in the process altogether.<sup>91</sup> A perhaps ‘symptomatic’ feature of this manner, similar to the example above, is the use of the passive pronoun *-tw* in cases when one would expect the use of the conventional addressing word *nb* <sup>c</sup>.w.s. or the personal pronoun. This can be seen e.g. in the following passages:<sup>92</sup>

(17a) Servant of the estate asks the addressee ‘to favour’ him with a hin-measure of honey and (possibly) another *ktt*-servant to help in the works of the household:

*[...n]ty [...] phrt n t3 [...rdi-n b3k-]im wd3-ib r-dd iw=s m mh 2?[...] hr=s r=s*

<sup>90</sup> One should note that the passage is poorly preserved. Luft's reading *pw* seems, nevertheless, the most probable reading.

<sup>91</sup> See also Eyre's comment on the formulation of royal decrees, which often use passive forms. Eyre 2013, 90.

<sup>92</sup> See also pUC 32214, 11: *k3 di.tw n=i sm<sup>c</sup> hk3t 20* ‘Then one could give me 20 hekat of barley’.

*k3 ḥs.tw? b3k-im [m?] rdit int.(w) n=s*

[...whi]ch is [...] the medicine for the [... which servant-]there wrote saying: ‘She will fill 2(?) [...] for it.’ Then the servant there could be favoured [by] having (it/them) brought to her.<sup>93</sup>

[...] *nn kt.t nb.t ḥn<sup>c</sup> b3k-im k3 ḥs.tw? [b3k-im] m rdit in[.tw...swd3-ib] pw ḥr=s swd3-ib [pw n nb] <sup>c</sup>.w.s. nfr sdm nb <sup>c</sup>.w.s.*

[...] without any servant-woman here with the servant-there. Then [the servant-there] could be favoured by having [...] brought. [This is a message] about this. This is a message to [the lord] l.p.h. It is good if the lord l.p.h. listens. (pUC 32124, f.ii 1–5, f.i. v.o.)

(17b) Servant of the estate Iuseneb asks the overseer of the estate Kemaw to cancel the transfer of a female-servant:

[*swd3-ib pw n nb <sup>c</sup>.w.s.] r-ntt ḥm-k3 n mr [...] iwt? r-dd [...] iw3y[.t...] iny.t(i) m šḥm-sn-wsrt m3<sup>c</sup>-ḥrw in mr pr km3w ḥrw.fy sw*

[This is a message to the lord l.p.h.] as follows: The ka-priest, overseer of the house [...] has come saying: ‘The *iw3y.t*-workers [...] have been brought from Sekhem-Senusret, true of voice, by the overseer of the house Kemaw’, he said.

*swd3-ib pw n nb <sup>c</sup>.w.s. r-ntt in iw3.t=f s3.t-d3 pw irr.t p3k.t mnt s3 nwty rn-snb dd.t n=s km3 n mr p3k.t ḥtmw šmsw m rnpt 38 3bd 4 pr.t sw 6*  
*iḥ di.tw s3 r t3y=f iw3y.t iny.t m šḥm-sn-wsrt m3<sup>c</sup>-ḥrw*

This is a message to the lord l.p.h. as follows: His *iw3y.t*-servant has been brought. She is *s3t-d3*, one who makes fine linen, Menet, daughter of Menet, Rensoneb, who is called Kema, to the overseer of weavers (?) seal-bearer Shemsw in year 38, fourth month of winter, on day 6. May one cancel (the transfer of) his *iw3y.t* worker brought from Sekhem-Senusret, true of voice. (pBlIn 10030A, 2–14)

(17c) Servant of the estate Neni continues his letter to the overseer of the estate Iibi with an additional argument in favour of his request:

*mk dd-n n=i mr ḥwt-ntr tti mk rdi-n=i wd3 ib=f r=s gr ḥrw.fy sw*  
*k3 ir.tw ḥft-iry<sup>94</sup> r wn k3 n ḥk3 ḥr ḥst=k swd3-ib pw ḥr=s*

Look, the temple overseer Teti said to me: ‘Look, I have written him about it as well’, he said.

<sup>93</sup> Collier & Quirke 2002, 59: *k3 ḥs.w? b3k-im* ‘Hence the servant-there should be favoured’.

<sup>94</sup> pBlIn 10045, 4: *iḥ wšb=k ḥft-ir* ‘May you answer accordingly’.

Then one could act accordingly; the ka of the king will continue to favour you.<sup>95</sup> This is a message concerning this. (pUC 32199, 10–13)

The use of the other core characteristics of the discourse, the expressions *b3k-im* and *nb ʕ.w.s.*, appears to have a similar effect on the text, though perhaps on a slightly more subtle level. T.G.H James makes an interesting comment on the use of one of these expressions and describes the impression created using the term *b3k-im*. He studies different epistolary material from earlier Middle Kingdom, but notes that the use of the conventional addressing word creates and establishes to the letter its ‘impersonal tone’.<sup>96</sup> Although James appears to be giving a little too one-sided a picture of the nature of the normative discourse in general,<sup>97</sup> his comment captures the subtle feature present in the text.

As an example of the impression created with the use of the expressions *b3k-im* and *nb ʕ.w.s.* the correspondence between the official Neni and the overseer of the estate Ii-ib is quoted in full below. In the letter, the author uses the normative addressing words *b3k-im* and *nb ʕ.w.s.* in the beginning and in the end greetings of the letter, but changes into 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> singular pronouns when describing the reason for his correspondence. The use of the personal pronouns gives an impression of the author being more explicitly present as the speaker of the utterances expressing his opinions to the addressee.

(18) Servant of the estate Neni writes to the overseer of the estate Ii-ib:

*swd3-ib pw n nb ʕ.w.s. r-ntt h3w nb n nb ʕ.w.s. ʕd wd3 m s.wt=s nb.t m ʕs.t n.t spd w nb i3bt.t ʕnʕ  
psd.t=f ntr.w nb.w mi mrr b3k im*

This is a message to the lord l.p.h. as follows: all the concerns of the lord l.p.h. are safe and prosperous in all their places; in favour of Sepdu, lord of the East together with his Ennead, and all the gods, just as the servant-there wishes.

*swd3-ib pw n nb ʕ.w.s. ʕr rdit di.tw ib ʕnt pr w3ʕ mi n3 swd3-n=i ib=k ʕr=s  
ʕr-ntt ntk irr nfr.t nb.t  
k3 ʕpr=k p3y=k bw-nfr*

<sup>95</sup>pUC 32204, 4–5: *ir-n k3 n mr ʕwt-ntr n ʕk3.t ppi r=k r mn r w3ʕ* ‘May the ka of the overseer of the temple of Hekat, Pepi act against you permanently and enduringly’.

<sup>96</sup>In XII, 5 the scribe writes *dd=i* so destroying the impersonal tone established by the use of *b3k-im* elsewhere in the letter’. James 1962, 126.

<sup>97</sup>James describes the ‘formulaic parts’ of the letter as relatively strict entities in which there is little room for individual variation, and often characterises the differences in style as mistakes of the scribes. See e.g. James 1962, 125.

*mk dd-n n=i mr hwt-ntr tti mk rdi-n=i wd3 ib=f r=s gr hrw.fy sw  
k3 ir.tw hft iry r wn k3 n hk3 hr hst=k swd3-ib pw hr=s*

This is a message to the lord l.p.h. about paying attention to the house of Wah, as I wrote to you about it, because it is you who can do everything good. Then you would be showing your goodness.<sup>98</sup>

Look, the temple overseer Teti said to me: ‘Look, I have written him about it as well’, he said. Then one could act accordingly; the ka of the king will continue to favour you. This is a message concerning this.

*swd3-ib pw n nb ʕ.w.s. nfr sdm nb ʕ.w.s.*

This is a message to the lord l.p.h. It is good if the lord l.p.h. listens. (pUC 32199)

This manner of alienating the author’s role as the agent behind the speech acts and avoiding the direct addressing of the correspondent seems to be one of the pragmatic functions of several of the normative features in the discourse of the Lahun letters and a prominent feature of the normative language of the letters in general. It is closely connected to another characteristic of the letters: the indirect manner of requesting.

## 5.2. Indirect manners of requesting

The most frequently used example of the indirect manner of formulating a request is the previously seen pattern *swd3-ib pw n nb ʕ.w.s. hr rdit*. (This is a message to the lord l.p.h.). Although it is clear that the expression will be interpreted and understood as a request, the sentence is formulated into a form of a statement: ‘This is a message concerning the requested act’. This manner is to a great degree conventional and reflects the existence of a fixed pattern of expressing a wish of this kind. Its frequency suggests that its use is something that is expected and normative when writing in the normative manner in question.

A similar example is the use of the expression *nfr pw* when requesting a delivery of a produce. In the letters of the Berlin collection, a new request that asks for a delivery of items that have not yet been received is often formulated into a statement which tells that a particular produce ‘has not been brought’ using the expression *nfr pw*. However, the statement can sometimes be continued with a more explicit request to deliver the previously promised items.<sup>99</sup> In the following example of a temple correspondence, the

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<sup>98</sup> lit. to acquire or gather your goodness.

<sup>99</sup> See e.g. example 16 above.

scribe also interestingly avoids saying that it was the addressee who promised to organise the delivery of the items by using the passive participle: ‘about which was said’ in the first passage.

(19) Temple scribe Horemsaef continues his letter:

*swd3-ib r-ntt nfr-pw in.t(w) p3 tr 20 h3b hr=s r-dd  
iw rdi-n=i [in].tw n=k*

A message as follows: 20 white-fronted geese have not been brought about which was said: ‘I have had them brought to you.’

*swd3-ib [r-n]tt 3w-n b3k-im hsb 114 m nhw hnty-š nfr-pw in{t}.t(w) swd3-ib pw hr=s*

A message as follows: The servant-there has organised the transfer of 114 workers in need of *hnty-š*-workers, but (they) have not been brought. This is a message about this. (pBln 10016, 3–4)

This manner of expressing a request in the form of a statement appears to be a common feature in the letters. These kinds of implied requests are, however, difficult to identify e.g. in the letters that appear to be written simply to report an event. Nevertheless, at least two of the letters from Horemsaef to the mayor include requests resembling the two frequently attested patterns above. In the first example, Horemsaef ends his letter by reporting that he has acquired produce for the temple. He does not comment on what he wishes the mayor to do, but the mayor’s reply to the letter reveals that Horemsaef has waited a delivery of an official document that appears to be a list or ‘a receipt’ of the products acquired. The author seems to be wishing actions from the mayor also in the second example. The letter includes a reply from the mayor written between the columns of the original letter, but it contains no comment on the matter.

(20a) Horemsaef tells how he has acquired fans for the reopening of the temple chamber:

*hn<sup>c</sup> [swd3-ib] r-ntt rdi-n b3k-im in.t(w) <sup>c</sup>-hn (?) 12 [...] n hwt-ntr <sup>c</sup>.t špš.t r snt st m-m3wt  
swd3-ib pw hr=s swd3[-ib pw n] nb <sup>c</sup>.w.s.  
nfr sdm nb <sup>c</sup>.w.s.*

And a message as follows: the servant-there has had 12 fans (?) brought [...] to the fine chamber of the temple to open it again. This is a message about this. This is a message to the lord l.p.h. It is good if the lord l.p.h. listens.

Reply:

*in n=k km*

Km-document has been brought to you. (pBln 10023B, 4–6; 5a)

(20b) Horemsaef ends his long letter to the mayor:

*swd3-ib pw n nb ʕ.w.s. r-ntt dd-n b3k-im n mr šnʕ wsir s3 wsir di=i n=k p3 špd n t3 bnr.t n.t imy.t  
ʕhʕ-n dd-n=f nfr-pw ir=i st swd3-ib pw n nb ʕ.w.s. nfr sdm nb ʕ.w.s.*

This is a message to the lord as follows: the servant-there has said to the overseer of Wsir son of Wsir: ‘Look, I will give you the cake of the dates of the daily offerings.’ Then he said that I had not done it.<sup>100</sup> This is a message about this. This is a message to the lord l.p.h. It is good if the lord l.p.h. listens. (pBln 10016, 4–5)

In addition, the use of several fixed expressions and idioms appears to be normative and conventionalised in the formal letter context. These expressions are used in order to refer to the requested act. The use of these idioms is partly a matter of custom, showing knowledge of the expected manners of addressing, but they also act as a means to formulate the request in a more indirect manner. With the use of the conventional idiom, the author does not have to explicitly specify what it is exactly that he would like the addressee to, but the request can be formulated in a manner that backgrounds the author’s active role in the situation.

One of these expressions is the idiom *rdi ib hnt* (‘to pay attention’, lit. to place heart before/in front of). This idiom is attested several times in the letters, some of them, however, in a badly broken context.<sup>101</sup> Its use appears to be a conventional feature of the discourse of the Lahun letters when asking the addressee to take actions in a discussed matter. In the following example, the author uses the expression in order to ask the addressee to show kindness to a troubled royal priest and his estate.<sup>102</sup>

(21a) Servant of the estate Khemny asks the addressee to act on matter concerning the royal priest Wadjhaw.

*swd3-ib [pw n] nb ʕ.w.s. [hr r]dit di.tw ib hnt p3y=k hm-nsw w3d-h3w  
m rdit sš=f nn rdit bt3=f  
mi bw nb nfr irrw nb ʕ.w.s. snb [ʕnh]*

<sup>100</sup> An equally possible translation would be: ‘Then he said: I will not do it’.

<sup>101</sup> See pUC 32198E, iv.2–v.2; pUC 32148A, ii6; pUC 32199, 6; pUC 32210, 10, 14; pBln 10063, 5.

<sup>102</sup> The sense of the expression *m rdit sš=f* (in giving his writing) in this context is unknown.

*hn<sup>c</sup> rdit di.tw ib hnt p3y[=f?] pr  
mi bw nb nfr irrw nb <sup>c</sup>.w.[s.] snb <sup>c</sup>nh  
hr-ntt in nb <sup>c</sup>.w.s. irr h.t nb.t m hs n b3k-im*

This is a message to the lord l.p.h. about having attention paid to your royal servant Wadjhaw in ‘giving his document’ without having him evade (?) in accordance with all the goodness that the lord l.p.h. does, he being healthy and living, and about having attention paid to his estate, in accordance with all the goodness that the lord l.p.h. does, he being healthy and living, as it is only the lord, l.p.h. who can do everything as a favour to the servant-there. (pUC 32210, 9–17)

The expression is used in a similar manner in the following letter from Sasepdu to the temple overseer Horemsaef. The letter is fragmentary, but it appears that the author asks the addressee to settle a problem concerning an unfinished matter connected to the local council.

(21b) Servant of the estate Sasepdu writes to Horemsaef:

*swd3-ib [pw n nb <sup>c</sup>.w.s. r-ntt h3w nb n <sup>c</sup>.w.s. <sup>c</sup>d wd]3 m [s.wt]=sn nb.t  
swd3-ib pw n nb <sup>c</sup>.w.s. r-ntt rdi [...b3]k-im r-dd sdm t3 s<sup>c</sup>t iny.t n=i m-<sup>c</sup> t3w n s3tw <sup>c</sup>nh-rn=i nty  
rdi n [...]*

This is a message to the lord l.p.h. as follows: all the concerns of the lord l.p.h. are safe and prosperous in all their places.

This is a message to the lord l.p.h. as follows [...] has been given [...]to] the servant-there saying: ‘The letter which was brought to me by the bearer of lands Ankhreni who has been placed [...] has been noted.

*d3d3.t ntt im n-ir.t(w) m mitt iry i[h] h3b=k hr=s hrw.fy sw h3b [b3k-im hr swd3-ib hr=s...]103 hr  
rdit di.tw ib hnt [...] n-<sup>c</sup>h3[...]=f sr [...]*

[...] the council which is there. It has not been done (accordingly). You should write about it’, he said. The servant-there is sending a message about it [...] about paying attention to [...] not fighting? [...] an official [...] (pBlIn 10063)

<sup>103</sup> It is difficult to say how large a portion of the letter is lost.

In addition, the use of the expression *rdi hr n b3k-im* (to give an order to the servant-there) appears to be part of the normative language use in the official, administrative context.<sup>104</sup> In the following letter by Horemsaef to the mayor, the author tells how he has been asked to acquire a larger number of workers than he had previously anticipated. In order to ask the mayor to decrease the number of the workers, he comments that the increasing of the labour force is ‘difficult’ (*ksn*) and quotes the letter he has received.<sup>105</sup> The exact meaning of his request is clear to the addressee, but the wish is expressed in an indirect manner using a fixed, normative expression.

(22) The temple scribe Horemsaef ends his long letter to the mayor with the following request:

*hn<sup>c</sup> swd3-ib ir hsb 100 m snb3 n w<sup>c</sup>b-nsw sn-wsrt s3 sn-wsrt*  
*h<sup>c</sup>-n in-n hry-hb s3w-snt s3 sn-wsrt snn m-dd kmt [pw?] n w<sup>c</sup>b-nsw sn-wsrt s3 sn-wsrt nw 120*  
*m irt n hsb 100 [n] hry-hb s3w-snt s3 sn-wsrt*  
*ih tm=k d3 t3 r=f hrw.fy p3 snn*  
*h3b b3k-im hr [swd3-ib] hr=s hr rdit di.t(w) hr n b3k-im*  
*ksn ip hsb [n snb3 n] w<sup>c</sup>b-nsw*

In addition, a message: 100 workers have been delivered as/for the *snb3* of the royal priest Senusret’s son Senusret.<sup>106</sup> Then the lector priest Ashawsenet son of Senusret brought a copy saying: ‘The amount to the king’s priest Senusret son of Senusret is 120. Do not deliver 100 workers [to] the lector-priest Ashawsenet son of Senusret. You should not ‘put ground against it’, said the letter. The servant-there is writing a message about this; about having an order given to the servant-there. It is difficult to acquire the workers to the *snb3* of the royal priest. (pBln 10018, 8–11)

Also the use of the expression *hs n b3k-im* ‘to favour the servant-there’ appears to be appropriate and expected. Instead of asking the addressee to ‘deliver’ the requested items, the author asks him to ‘favour’ him with the discussed produce. The use of the idiom acts as a means to formulate the request in a more indirect manner by alienating the exact nature of the wish.

(23a) Servant of the estate asks the addressee ‘to favour’ him with a hin-measure of honey:

<sup>104</sup> The expression is attested e.g. in pUC 32098A, 2; pUC 32112, f.ii 5–6; pUC 32271D, fr.i. 1; pBln 10024A, 4: *ih di nb s.w.s. in.t(w) wd hr=s* ‘May the lord l.p.h. have an order brought concerning it’. pBln 10024B, 5.

<sup>105</sup> It is possible that Horemsaef is also not pleased to the tone of the letter.

<sup>106</sup> Luft 2006, 36: „Gemacht wurde die Auflistung über die Verfehlung des königlichen *w<sup>c</sup>b*-Priesters S-n-wsrt’s Sohn S-n-wsrt.“



[...n]ty [...] *phrt n t3 [...rdi-n b3k-]im wd3-ib r-dd iw=s m mh 2?[...] hr=s r=s*  
*k3 hs.tw? b3k-im [m] rdit int.(w) n=s hft-ntt ir p3 bit hnw 1 rdy n b3k-im gm-n b3k-im swri-n sw*  
*p3 3m dd=f smi n b3k-im m-dd mk in bnr.t rdi iry=i st n-gm b3k-im ir.t-n=f [...]*

[...whi]ch is [...] the medicine for the [... which servant-]there wrote saying: ‘She will fill 2(?) [...] for it.’ Then the servant there could be favoured [by] having (it/them) brought to her, because, concerning the one hin of honey which had been given to the servant-there, the servant-there has discovered that the Asiatic had drunk it, and he said as an explanation to the servant-there: ‘Look, it was the sweetness that made me do it!’ The servant-there did not find what he did [...]

[...] *nn kt.t nb.t hn<sup>c</sup> b3k-im k3 hs.tw? [b3k-im] m rdit in[.tw...swd3-ib] pw hr=s swd3-ib [pw n nb]*  
*<sup>c</sup>.w.s. nfr sdm nb <sup>c</sup>.w.s.*

[...] without any servant-woman here with the servant-there. Then [the servant-there] could be favoured by having [...] brought. [This is a message] about this. This is a message to [the lord] l.p.h. It is good if the lord l.p.h. listens. (pUC 32124, f.ii, f.i. v.o.)

(23b) The servant of the estate Irypersen has delayed in his task and begins his letter to the addressee:

*swd3-ib pw n [nb <sup>c</sup>.w.s. r-]ntt mr s.t hri sb[.w] m hd r B-mhw iw b3k-im 3 w<sup>c</sup>y h3b b3k-im m swd3[-*  
*ib] hr=s hr rdit hs.tw n b3k-im m p3 nkt n hm.t<sup>107</sup> dd-n nb <sup>c</sup>.w.s. ink rdi=i ir.tw=f n=k r-s3 sht n3-*  
*n d3iw swd3-ib pw hr=s*

This is a message to the lord l.p.h. as follows: The store overseer Heri has been sent downstream to Lower Egypt. The servant-there is alone here, and the servant-there is writing a message about it; about having the servant-there favoured with some *hm.t*-stone. The lord l.p.h. said: I will personally have it delivered to you after the bolt of cloth has been woven. This is a message about this. (pUC 32197, 1.8–1.14)

In addition, the expression *dr sdb.w* (lit. to remove the obstacles) can be used in a similar manner. Its exact sense varies depending on the context, but it is usually translated ‘to solve a problem’ meaning in practice a fulfilment of a task assigned or an answer to a request expressed. It is used in the *swd3-ib*-letters and also in the letters from the mayor to his subordinates. The expression is attested also in the previously mentioned Duties of the Vizier.<sup>108</sup>

<sup>107</sup> For the reading of this sign, see Collier & Quirke 2002, 91.

<sup>108</sup> Lines R 13–15. See e.g. in Eyre 2013, 71.

(24a) Servant of the estate asks the addressee to ‘send an order’ concerning the

*sb3w [r] int t3 s.t m [...] t3y=s htm [...] hwt-ntr ih di nb c.w.s. di.tw [hr] n d3d3.t n.t nb c.w.s. m  
dr sdb p3 sb3w m t3 [...] hni*

[...] the instructor [to] bring the woman from [...] her mistake [...] the temple. May the lord l.p.h. have [an order] sent to the council of the lord l.p.h. about ‘removing the obstacles’ for the instructor from the [...] musical group (?). (pUC 32112, fr.ii)

The following passage offers another descriptive example of the use of the idiom. The writer seems to be in a situation in which he has asked additional labour force for a task several times, but his wish has not been fulfilled. However, the way the author emphasises his argument with a notion that he has written ‘several times’ and gives a colourful description of the number of the letters sent appears to slightly break the ‘impersonal tone’ of the letter formula.<sup>109</sup>

(24b) Servant of the estate Hekaitef writes about a lack of workers:

*swd3-ib pw n nb c.w.s. r-ntt h<sup>c</sup> n3-n h3w n 3bd 4 pr.t sw 25 ih di nb c.w.s. in.t(w) n=i t3 dmdy.t*

This is a message to the lord l.p.h. as follows: the surplus of the day 25 of the fourth month of winter has been stored. May the lord l.p.h. have the list of the total sum brought to me.

*swd3-ib r-ntt b3k-im hr rdit in[t(w)] n=i rmt m nhw n p3 mny cš3 sp.w nfr-pw dr.tw sdb im iw grt  
min nb c.w.s. hr m33 n3-n snn.w nty w<sup>c</sup> h3-tp w<sup>c</sup> ih h[3]b nb c.w.s. hr s[m]i n n3 h3by b3k-im hr=s*

This is a message as follows: the servant-there has asked people to be brought to me for a lack of *mny*-workers several times, but ‘the obstacles have not been removed’ here.<sup>110</sup> Today, then, the lord l.p.h. will be looking at the letters which are (placed) one above the other.<sup>111</sup> May the lord l.p.h. send a report about these matters that the servant-there is writing about. (pBln 10038C, 5–19)

As seen, the normative manner of making a request in the Lahun letters appears to favour these kind of indirect requesting strategies. Simultaneously, it reflects how several of the normative features of the letters have a pragmatic function or an element in them that

<sup>109</sup> The expression *iw grt min nb c.w.s. hr m33* is not used in any other of the letters in the Lahun collection, and it seems not to be one of the fixed expressions frequently used in the letters. Its general tone is difficult to interpret, but the way the author emphasises the number of the letters he has sent gives an impression of exaggeration and, perhaps, a sense of slight frustration to the situation.

<sup>110</sup> i.e. the problematic situation has not been resolved. See also Brose 2013, 421. „die Missstände dort nicht ausgeräumt worden sind“.

<sup>111</sup> Luft 1992a: „Heute ist es, daß der Herr, l.h.g., die Schriftstücke sieht.“

backgrounds the author's active role as the agent behind the speech act performed. This is especially prominent in relation to requests and is probably connected to the nature of requesting in general as something that is potentially a difficult and harmful situation for the author.<sup>112</sup>

The previously seen passage of the letter by Horemsaef offers a good example. Although his long letter includes several requests, it is not until the final passage of his letter in which he uses the more indirect manner of requesting.<sup>113</sup> In the passage, Horemsaef has to inform the mayor that he is not able to or otherwise inclined to carry out the requested acquisition of work force, and has to ask the mayor to alter the planned order. It appears that this manner of formulating a request is something that is felt appropriate for the situation and a feature that shows cultural knowledge of the socially expected customs. At the same time, the use of this indirect manner of requesting can be explained with its ability to alienate one's own, personal role in the difficult situation.

(25a) The temple scribe Horemsaef ends his long letter to the mayor with the following request:

*hn<sup>c</sup> swd3-ib ir ḥsb 100 m snb3 n w<sup>c</sup>b-nsw sn-wsrt s3 sn-wsrt  
<sup>c</sup>h<sup>c</sup>-n in-n ḥry-ḥb <sup>c</sup>s3w-snt s3 sn-wsrt snn m-dd kmt [pw?] n w<sup>c</sup>b-nsw sn-wsrt s3 sn-wsrt nw 120  
 m irt n ḥsb 100 [n] ḥry-ḥb <sup>c</sup>s3w-snt s3 sn-wsrt  
 ih tm=k d3 t3 r=f ḥrw.fy p3 snn  
 h3b b3k-im ḥr [swd3-ib] ḥr=s ḥr rdit di.t(w) ḥr n b3k-im  
 ksn ip ḥsb [n snb3 n] w<sup>c</sup>b-nsw*

In addition, a message: 100 workers have been delivered as/for the *snb3* of the royal priest Senusret's son Senusret. Then the lector priest Ashawsenet son of Senusret brought a copy saying: 'The amount to the king's priest Senusret son of Senusret is 120. Do not deliver 100 workers [to] the lector-priest Ashawsenet son of Senusret. You should not 'put ground against it', said the letter. The servant-there is writing a message about this; about having an order given to the servant-there. It is difficult to acquire the workers to the *snb3* of the royal priest. (pBln 10018, 8–11)

A similar example is in the letter by official Neni, who asks the addressee to act on a previously discussed matter concerning the house of Wah. It appears that, although the author has written to the addressee about the same matter in another occasion, he has not

<sup>112</sup> This is a question discussed in pragmatics from various different aspects.

<sup>113</sup> See examples 2, 3b and 22.

received a reply for his first letter, and has to return to the subject at hand. Although it is, of course, impossible to know the actual thoughts of the author, it appears probable that this kind of situation is difficult for someone who is dependent on the decision of the other party and has to hope for the addressee's favourable view on the matter. Instead of explicitly commenting what the author wishes the addressee to do, he asks him to 'pay attention' to the matter leaving the exact nature of his request unmentioned and thus backgrounding his own role in the situation.

(25b) Neni asks the addressee to pay attention on the matter concerning the house of Wah:

*swd3-ib pw n nb ʕ.w.s. hr rdit di.tw ib hnt pr w3h mi n3 swd3-n=i ib=k hr=s*  
*hr-ntt ntk irr nfr.t nb.t*  
*k3 ʕpr=k p3y=k bw-nfr*  
*mk dd-n n=i mr hwt-ntr tti mk rdi-n=i wd3 ib=f r=s gr hrw.fy sw*  
*k3 ir.tw hft iry r wn k3 n hk3 hr hst=k swd3-ib pw hr=s*

This is a message to the lord l.p.h. about paying attention to the house of Wah, as I wrote to you about it, because it is you who can do everything good. Then you would be showing your goodness.

Look, the temple overseer Teti said to me: 'Look, I have written him about it as well', he said. Then one could act accordingly; the ka of the king will continue to favour you. This is a message concerning this. (pUC 32199, 5–13)

However, this tendency of the normative language of the Lahun letters in aiming to alienate the author's personal role as the agent of the speech acts performed should also be studied as a feature of the normative, *swd3-ib* letter formula. The manner seems to be highly conventionalised, as seen e.g. in the use of the pattern *swd3-ib pw hr rdit*. In fact, it can be generally noted that features that would explicitly emphasise the personal role of the author are a rarity in the letters following this particular normative discourse. It appears that when this kind of tradition, or expected addressing manner, is broken, it often correlates with the personal relationship of the correspondents (see chapter 6). On the other hand, the 'break in the impersonal tone' of the letter can sometimes explain the use of the normative addressing words *b3k-im* and *nb ʕ.w.s.* as an element that 'balances' the otherwise 'informal' addressing manner.<sup>114</sup>

<sup>114</sup> The fixed expressions of gratitude can be used in a similar manner (see chapter 5.3).

The following letter by Khememi gives an interesting example. It appears that the author is in a situation in which he has been left without a cargo boat, and he has to ask the addressee to visit the port nearby. Instead of formulating his request with a manner that would be more conventional, alienating his personal presence, he emphasises how important it is for him personally to know about the expected actions of the addressee and his future return. It appears that, in this kind of situation, the use of the expressions *b3k-im* and *nb* <sup>c.w.s.</sup> acts as a feature that softens the tone of the request and backgrounds the presence of the author in an otherwise exceptionally formulated request. It is possible that the felt urgency of the situation and the lack of correspondence offer a cause for the author to write and make this, perhaps slightly demanding yet understandable request. The fact that he is alone (Ita notwithstanding) without a means of transport act as extra arguments in favour of his request.<sup>115</sup>

(26a) Servant of the estate Khememi writes to the interior overseer about his future visit:<sup>116</sup>

*swd3-ib pw n nb* <sup>c.w.s.</sup> *r-ntt n h3b-n.tw n b3k im hr shr nb [n] nb* <sup>c.w.s.</sup> *r irt hs n nb* <sup>c.w.s.</sup> *n snb* <sup>c.nh</sup>  
*iw 3 b3k-im [ib=f] r rh*<sup>117</sup> *shr nb n nb* <sup>c.w.s.</sup>  
*in-ntt it.tw t3 m<sup>c.t</sup>*<sup>118</sup> *in shtp-ib-r<sup>c</sup> m hnt iw b3k-im w<sup>c</sup>w nfryt r p3 šmsw n nb* <sup>c.w.s.</sup> *it3*

This is a message to the lord l.p.h. as follows: no-one has been writing to the servant-there about any of the plans of the lord l.p.h: about making a return of the lord l.p.h., he being healthy and living. The servant-there does wish to know about some of the plans of the lord.<sup>119</sup> Because the ferry has been taken north by Sehetepibre, the servant-there is alone down to the follower of the lord Ita.

*iw ir [...]* *h3w [c<sup>h</sup>-n d]bh[-n=f] c<sup>h</sup>[-n] it-n=f rdit-wgs 500 in-n=f st m h<sup>c</sup>m*  
*h3b b3k-im hr swd3-ib hr=s hr r[dit] ip.t(w) r dmi n pr hny in nb [c.w.s.] iw rdi-n b3k-im iwt it3*  
*hr=s r rdit [...]*

[...] labour-duty [Then he requested] a boat to catch 10 (measures of) fish to the lord l.p.h. Then he caught 500 “rdit-wgs” and brought them as catch. The servant there is writing a message

<sup>115</sup> A similar example is in the letter from a woman pUC 32203.

<sup>116</sup> For the translation of the titles, see Quirke 2004.

<sup>117</sup> For the use of this pattern *ib=f r sdm*, see Polis & Stauder 2013. See also pUC 32118D, 4: *dd=k w<sup>c</sup> im nb hr-ntt ib=k r=s* ‘you give every one of them just because you wish’.

<sup>118</sup> *it m<sup>c.t</sup>* = to take/sail a boat, collocation used. See also pUC 32202, fr.ii. 3.

<sup>119</sup> Cf. Collier & Quirke 2002. ‘How else will the servant-there be able to find out any decision of the lord l.ph.’ For the use of the particle 3, see also pUC 32201, 14; vs. 10; pUC 32203, 6.

about this; about having (them) counted at the port of the row-house (?) by the lord l.p.h. The servant-there has sent Ita for this to have [...] (pUC 32205, 6–19)

On the other hand, there is another subtle, indirect element in Khememy's request. The visit of the overseer appears to be the main reason for his letter, but instead of directly saying that he would like him to come, he says that it would be important for him to 'know about the plans of the lord'. The use of this expression acts as an element that alienates the author's active role in the request act, the formulation of which is otherwise a rarity in the letters following the *swd3-ib*-formula.

(26b) Servant of the estate Khememi writes to the overseer of the chamber [...]. After the conventional greeting, he continues his letter:

*swd3-ib pw n nb ʕ.w.s. r-ntt n h3b-n.tw n b3k im hr shr nb [n] nb ʕ.w.s. r irt hs n nb ʕ.w.s. n snb ʕnh  
iw 3 b3k-im [ib=f] r rh shr nb n nb ʕ.w.s.  
in-ntt it.tw t3 mʕ.t in shtp-ib-rʕ m hnt iw b3k-im wʕw nfryt r p3 šmsw n nb ʕ.w.s. it3*

This is a message to the lord l.p.h. as follows: no-one has been writing to the servant-there about any of the plans of the lord l.p.h: about making a return of the lord l.p.h., he being healthy and living. The servant-there does wish to know about some of the plans of the lord. Because the ferry has been taken north by Sehetepibre, the servant-there is alone down to the follower of the lord Ita. (pUC 32205, 6–13)

In addition, familiarity with this 'impersonal' characteristic of the formula can help to identify and interpret the background context and implied wishes in the letters.<sup>120</sup> An example is the following letter from an official Senbubu. The letter is fragmentary, but it seems to discuss misconduct or a problem concerning an incident at the *hnrt*-enclosure of the magistrate of the district.<sup>121</sup> In this case, the knowledge of the normative manners of requesting offers a means to identify the implied wish in the letter. The fragmentary state of the papyrus gives little information about the circumstances, but the promise at the end of the letter in which the author convinces that he will 'personally' carry out the orders

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<sup>120</sup> As already noted, the epistolary material in the Lahun collections may be full of implied requests of this kind, but due to a lack of contextual information, the implied requests are difficult to identify (see e.g. the letters by Horemsaef pBln 10016; pBln 10018 quoted above).

<sup>121</sup> For a discussion on this institution, see Mazzone 2017.

of the addressee implies that at least a reply containing new instructions or some kind of reassurance is wanted.<sup>122</sup>

(26c) Servant of the estate Senbubu writes:

*b3k n pr-dt sn-bwbw dd*  
*sw[d3 ib p[w] n nb ʕ.w.s. r-ntt [...] b3k-im r-dd*  
*ii-n=i r in[.t t3] hb.t n=f-imy*  
*gm-n[i] b3k-im m hnr.t n knbty n w htm-n=f(?) r hnw*  
*h3b=i hr swd3-ib hr=s r-dd in b3k-im ir=f dd.t nb.t nb ʕ.w.[s....]*

Servant of the estate Senbubu says:

This is a message to the lord l.p.h. as follows: [...] servant-there saying:

‘When I came to bring his deduction-dues, [I] found the servant-there in the ‘enclosure’ of the district-councillor after he had sealed the residence (?). I am writing a message about this saying: ‘The servant-there will personally do everything that the lord l.p.h. says [...] (pUC 32128, 1–9)

### 5.3. Fixed expressions of gratitude

Epistolary material from el-Lahun includes also several fixed expressions of gratitude. They are usually expressed after the request in order to generally mark the acknowledgement of the nature of the situation and ‘soften’ the tone of the request made. Most of these are not used exclusively in the *swd3-ib*-letters of the collection. In the letters that do not follow the formula, they are used in a similar manner but without making use of the expression *swd3-ib pw* or the conventional addressing words.

The most frequently used of these expressions is the idiom *snb(.w) ʕnh(.w)* (lit. he being healthy and living).<sup>123</sup> Collier & Quirke translate it accordingly as ‘if he pleases’.<sup>124</sup> It is used in order to give the request a softer tone. The expression is sometimes used in connection to other fixed expressions of gratitude (see below), but it can also be used individually especially in situations in which the request is otherwise formulated in a manner that differs from the more frequently attested, expected manners of formulating a request.

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<sup>122</sup> One should note that the rest of the passage may, of course, have altered the interpretation had it been preserved.

<sup>123</sup> See also pUC 32109B, 2, pUC 32117A, 2; pUC 32123 fr.ii. 2; 2.2; pUC 32196, 6; pUC 32210, 13; 16; pUC 32215, 5.

<sup>124</sup> Collier & Quirke 2002. See also Hekanakht III, 5: *mi nfr=k snb.t ʕnh.t*. ‘if you please lit. like your goodness, as you are healthy and alive’. Allen 2002.

A good example of this is in the following letter from an official. The author formulates his wish in a manner that differs from the normative manners discussed in its direct manner of addressing the recipient. Instead of formulating his wish using the indirect manners of requesting studied in the previous chapter, the author addresses his request directly to the other correspondent.<sup>125</sup>

(27a) Servant of the estate Irypersen asks the addressee to write concerning the problem with the delivery of wages for the work-force:

*ir grt wnn ḥḥ p3 ḥsb 11 ḥ3 r tbt=sn bw nb nfr  
ntk ḥ3b=k ḥr md.t m ḥr=k snb.t(i) ḥnh.t(i)*

If the eleven workers are waiting there for their provisions in good order, you are the one who could write about the matters at your sight, you being healthy and living. (pUC 32201, vs. 3–7)

A similar example is in the previously seen letter from Khememi who asks the addressee to write about his plans concerning his expected arrival. In this case, it is perhaps a little unclear whether the expression *snb ḥnh* is used as a fixed expression of gratitude after the request, or whether it should be understood as an additional element in the normative addressing term in the form *nb ḥ.w.s. n snb ḥnh* (the lord l.p.h. of health and life). However, the use of the expression acts as an element that softens the otherwise exceptional tone of the request in both of these cases.

(27b) Servant of the estate Khememi writes to the interior overseer:

*swd3-ib pw n nb ḥ.w.s. r-ntt n ḥ3b-n.tw n b3k im ḥr šhr nb [n] nb ḥ.w.s. r irt ḥs n nb ḥ.w.s. n snb ḥnh  
iw 3 b3k-im [ib=f] r rh šhr nb n nb ḥ.w.s.  
in-ntt it.tw t3 mḥ.t in šhtp-ib-rḥ m ḥnt iw b3k-im wḥw nfryt r p3 šmsw n nb ḥ.w.s. it3*

This is a message to the lord l.p.h. as follows: no-one has been writing to the servant-there about any of the plans of the lord l.p.h.: about making a return of the lord l.p.h., he being healthy and living. The servant-there does wish to know about some of the plans of the lord. Because the ferry has been taken north by Sehetepibre, the servant-there is alone down to the follower of the lord Ita. (pUC 32205, 6–13)

Another fixed expression that is used in requests is the expression *mi bw nb nfr irrw nb ḥ.w.s.* (in accordance with all the goodness that the lord l.p.h. does).<sup>126</sup> It is sometimes

<sup>125</sup> The letter will be discussed in more detail in chapter 6.

<sup>126</sup> See also pUC 32109B, 2.1–2.2; pUC 32156B, fr.ii 3; pUC 32271C, 2; pUC 32123 fr.ii. 2; pUC 32199.



followed with the expression *ḥr-ntt in nb irr nfr.t nb.t* (as it is only the lord l.p.h. who can do everything good) or a variation of it.<sup>127</sup> Both of these expressions are used after the request to give it a softer tone. In addition, the expression *snb ḥnh* can be used as an additional element as in the following example:

(28) Servant of the estate Kemny asks the addressee to act on matter concerning the royal priest Wadhaw:

*swd3-ib [pw n] nb ḥ.w.s. [ḥr r]dit di.tw ib ḥnt p3y=k ḥm-nsw w3d-h3w  
m rdit sš=f nn rdit bt3=f  
mi bw nb nfr irrw nb ḥ.w.s. snb [ḥnh]  
ḥnḥ rdit di.tw ib ḥnt p3y[=f?] pr  
mi bw nb nfr irrw nb ḥ.w.[s.] snb ḥnh  
ḥr-ntt in nb ḥ.w.s. irr ḥ.t nb.t m ḥs n b3k-im*

This is a message to the lord l.p.h. about having attention paid to your royal servant Wadjhaw in ‘giving his document’ without having him evade (?) in accordance with all the goodness that the lord l.p.h. does, he being healthy and living, and about having attention paid to his estate, in accordance with all the goodness that the lord l.p.h. does, he being healthy and living, as it is only the lord, l.p.h. who can do everything as a favour to the servant-there. (pUC 32210, 9–17)

The expression *k3 ḥpr=k p3y=k bw-nfr* is used in a similar manner in the following two examples: The latter example is from a letter that does not follow the so called *swd3-ib*-formula.

(29a) Servant on the estate Neni asks the addressee to act on a previously discussed matter concerning the house of Wah.

*swd3-ib pw n nb ḥ.w.s. ḥr rdit di.tw ib ḥnt pr w3ḥ mi n3 swd3-n=i ib=k ḥr=s  
ḥr-ntt ntk irr nfr.t nb.t  
k3 ḥpr=k p3y=k bw-nfr*

This is a message to the lord l.p.h. about paying attention to the house of Wah, as I wrote to you about it, because it is you who can do everything good. Then you would be showing your goodness. (pUC 32199, 5–9)

<sup>127</sup> pUC 32199, 8; pUC 32210, 16.

(29b) The author of the letter asks the addressee to deliver him various items:

*hn̄ rdit in.t(w) n=i snw nb nt[y...] snb.t(i) ʕnh.t(i) dbh[...k3] mn=k p3y=k bw-nfr*

And have all the snw-bread that [...] brought to me, you being healthy and living [...] requested [...Then] you would complete your goodness.<sup>128</sup> (pUC 32215, 4–7)

## 6. Normative language as a sociocultural phenomenon

As seen, the normative language of the Lahun letters favours several indirect requesting strategies and features that aim to background the presence of the author. It appears to be connected to the fact that the *swd3-ib*-formula is used in situations when one is writing to someone in a superior hierarchical status. At the same time, the use of the formula reflects the complex socio-cultural structures in the community, though yet in many ways poorly known.

### 6.1. Question of social hierarchy

As already commented on briefly, the use of the *swd3-ib*-formula seems to include a degree of cultural knowledge of what kind of communicative situations it should be used. It appears that the *swd3-ib*-formula is used when the author is writing to someone in a superior hierarchical status. This subject has been previously studied in relation to the Lahun letters by Brose. The author sees the relative social hierarchy of the correspondents as one of the most important factors for the style of the letter formula.<sup>129</sup>

Perhaps the best example to give as a proof in favour of this argument are the letters sent by the mayor to his subordinates. None of the letters written by the ruling mayor refer to the communication as *swd3-ib* or use the two ‘core’ characteristics of this letter formula: the use of the expression *swd3-ib pw* and the normative addressing words *b3k-im* and *nb ʕ.w.s.*. Accordingly, they lack several of the features seen as the prominent features of the normative discourse of the letters. The fixed greetings studied in chapter 4.2. are not used, and, most importantly, the characteristics of the letter formula that were seen to alienate the author’s role as the agent of the speech acts (particularly prominent in requests) are absent.

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<sup>128</sup> A more literate translation would be ‘to establish’ your goodness.

<sup>129</sup> Brose 2012; 2013, 456–475.

(30a) The mayor Senusret writes to Horemsaef:

*h3ty-<sup>c</sup> mr hwt-ntr sn-wsrt dd n sš [hwt-ntr] hr-m-s(3)=f*  
*dd(=i) di(=i) rh=k r-ntt spr-n n=i iry-<sup>c3</sup> n hwt-ntr snt s3 imny r-dd*  
*iw3.kwi hr s3=i k3wty n hwt-ntr im[...] r-dd iw=f m nhw n h3w hrw.fy sw*  
*mk p3y=f s3 km ir wnn [...]*

The mayor, overseer of the temple Senusret says to the temple scribe Horemsaef:

I speak to inform you as follows:<sup>130</sup> the door-keeper of the temple has approached me saying: ‘I have been deprived of my son, temple labourer there [...] saying: ‘he is in need of h3w-workers’, said he. Look, his son has been listed. If [...] (pBl n 10023A)

(30b) The mayor replies to Horemsaef’s letter concerning the future festivities:

*[h3ty-<sup>c</sup> mr] hwt[-ntr] sn-wsrt dd n mr [pr hr-]m-s(3w)=f*  
*dd(=i) [di(=i) rh=]k r-ntt sdm-n=i [n3] h3b-n=k hr=s r-dd iw hnt r hpr m 3bd 3 prt sw 11 di[.t]w*  
*hr [...] hrw.fy [n3] h3b[-n=k hr=s...] imi hr n wnw[.t...] mi <sup>c3</sup> hry[-hbt...] w<sup>c</sup>b hn<sup>c</sup> h<sup>c</sup> m hby.t*  
*nb.t h<sup>c</sup>.t im=s nfr.t r irr.t r tnw rnpt*

The mayor, overseer of the temple Senusret says to the overseer of the estate Horemsaef:

I speak to inform you as follows: I have listened what you wrote saying: ‘the water-procession will take place in the third month of winter on day 11. May an order be sent [...]’, so [you] wrote [about it...] instruct the temple staff [...] as several lector [priests...] w<sup>c</sup>b-priests and gather all the festival-offerings stored, the ones that are better than the ones done every year. (pC 71583, 1-x+6)

However, it is important to note that Brose’s analysis is based on a different description of the letter formula and cannot be borrowed straight into this study. Although Brose’s notion on the significance of the social hierarchy to the style of the letter is generally correct, his analysis is mainly based on the comparison between the formulaic features of the letter and the other parts of the text concentrating on their relative quantity to each other.<sup>131</sup> He refers to formulaic features as a general term without an explicit definition, but the term appears to refer to the ‘parts of formulae’ and the other conventional expressions in his description, including e.g. the expression *swd3-ib* and the conventional

<sup>130</sup> For the use of this pattern *dd(=i) di(=i) rh=k*, see Luft 1984.

<sup>131</sup> Note that Brose does not define the letter formula in the following manner, but uses the traditional model of the letter consisting of separate parts by James (1962, 119). Brose 2012, 39–40; 2013, 455–479.

addressing words *b3k-im* and *nb ʕ.w.s.*<sup>132</sup> However, the amount of normative features does not in itself reflect the difference in the social hierarchy, but the question appears to be much more complex.

The following examples offer a possibility to study the aspects affecting the style of the formula in more detail. The collection includes a couple of letters in which the *swd3-ib-* formula is used, but the discussion between the correspondents suggests at least an approximately similar level of official/social status.<sup>133</sup> Clearest example of this is the letter by official Neni concerning a female member of his household.<sup>134</sup> The letter starts with the normative greeting, but the tone of the letter including statements that criticize the acts of the correspondent and address him with the direct manner shown suggests that the letter is not written from a subordinate to his master; it rather appears to represent a discussion between persons who know each other well and/or share that kind of socio-cultural status in the community that the author has a possibility to challenge the other person's argument.

(31) Servant of the estate Neni says:

[*swd3-ib p*]w [*n nb*] ʕ[.w.s. r -]n[t]t h3w nb n [*nb ʕ.w.s. ʕd*] wd3 m s.wt=sn nb.t [*m ḥs.t*] n.t spdw nb i3bt.t ntr.w nb.w [*mi*] mrr b3k-im

[This is a message to the lord] l.[p.h. as follows:] all the concerns [of the lord l.p.h. are safe] and sound in all their places; [in the favour] of Sopdu, lord of the East, and all the gods, [just as] the servant-there wishes.

*swd[3-ib] pw n nb ʕ.w.s. ʕ r-ntt spr[...]* snb ḥr By=i sn.t [name of the sister]  
[...] mk tw rh[.ti ...]ntt sy mn.ti ḥr wp.t n.t [gs-]i3b ir p3y=k mḥ-ib m-dd [i]w=s iw=s ḥr ḥwt-k3-ptḥ iw? s3w nḥm s(y) m-ʕ=i i[r?...] p3 wʕb n h3w?=i [...]

This is a message to the lord l.p.h. as follows: [...]seneb petitioned about my sister [name of the sister] [...] Look, you are aware that she is attached to the *wpt*-listing of [Ges-]iab. As for your persistence saying: ‘She is coming to Hwt-ka-ptah.’ Look out not to take her from me.<sup>135</sup> If the wab-priest in my time [...]

<sup>132</sup> Brose 2012; Brose 2013, 455–479.

<sup>133</sup> See also Brose, who notes that the several formulaic features are used between officials. Brose 2012, 35–36.

<sup>134</sup> It is possible that the author is the same person as in the previously quoted letter concerning the House of Wah (pUC 32199). See Collier & Quirke 2002, 63; Collier 2009.

<sup>135</sup> Collier & Quirke: *in? s3w nḥm s(y) m-ʕ=i* ‘It was the guard who took her from me.’

*mk [...] š3<sup>c</sup> [...] ni-nn [...]m]k ir d3i tp ir [...] iry m hdb=f k3 [...]t}3y=i sn.t r irt nfryt s[t?...s]3w  
mh-ib=k m h.t nb.t [...]*

Look, [...] from the beginning of [...]ninen [...]L]ook, if the *tp*-person (?) is subdued [...] by killing him (?). Then [...] my sister can do (it) till its end (?) [...] Look out not to fill your heart with all kinds of things [...] (pUC 32126)

There is also another letter in the collection that seems to be written between two members of the community who share at least approximately the same level of social status. The letter seems to be written between two colleagues who are discussing several subjects concerning the delivery of the collected produce and work force, and duties yet to be completed. The letter is written by an official Irysw to the interior overseer Sakainw. Although Irysw's letter starts as an appropriately formulated *swd3-ib*-letter and employs several of the features connected to it, the discourse of the letter and the addressing manner of the other party of the correspondence differs from that of the more conventional and expected style. The author starts his letter with the expected greeting using the conventional expressions *b3k-im* and *nb ʕ.w.s.*, but gradually omits their use and changes into personal pronouns when explaining his matter to the addressee.<sup>136</sup>

(32a) Servant of the estate writes about several matters assigned in his charge:

*b3k n pr-d.t iry-sw dd n mr ʕhnwty s3-k3-inw  
swd3-ib pw n [nb ʕ.w.s. r-ntt h3w] nb n nb ʕ.w.s. ʕd wd3 m [s.]wt=sn nb.t [...] nb.t  
m hs.t n.t[...] nb [...] hnʕ psd.t=f*

The servant of the estate Irysw says to the overseer of the interior Sakainw:

This is a message to the lord, l.p.h. as follows: all the concerns of the lord l.p.h. are safe and prosperous in all their places; in favour of [...] lord of [...] together with his Ennead.

*swd3-ib pw n nb ʕ.w.s. r-ntt wi spr.kwi r dmi n hwt-nbs m 3bd 4 šmw sw 5 hr tr n dw3  
gm-n=i nb ʕ.w.s. hnt dd-n n=i hrp impw iw rdi-n=i n=f hsb 3  
imy-rn=f iry*

This is a message to the lord, l.p.h. as follows: I arrived at the port of Khutnebes at dawn on the fifth day, in the fourth month of summer and learned that the lord, l.p.h. had sailed north. The director Impw said to me: 'I have assigned him three workers.' Name list of them: (List of the workers)

<sup>136</sup> The context behind the letter seems to be that Irysw has not been able to arrive at the expected place in time.

ḥḥ-n sb-n=i n=k ḥrp ḥnḥt m imw gm-n=i r dmi n ḥwt-nbs  
rdi-n=i int=f n=k 3tpw rdi n p3 imw h3.in b3kt sw 3tp

Then I sent the director Henat to you by boat, which I found at the port of Hutnebes, and ordered him to bring you the cargo which was placed in the boat. Then Baket sent it off loaded.

iw 3 rdi-n=i int=f n=k k.t ḥ.t  
mk grt rdi-n=i int=f n=k p3 ḥsb n šn-rpḥ.t  
rdi-n=k ʕ3  
mk grt dd-n n=i rn=f snb s3 nb iw rdi-n=i n=f it-mḥ ḥk3t 20 bty ḥk3t 30 [...]  
ḥnḥ rdit iwt n=i šmsw snb int=f n=i kmt m n3 n ḥsb(w)

(But) I did order him to bring you other things (as well).<sup>137</sup> Look, I ordered him to bring you the workers of Shen-repat, which you had placed there. Look, also, Renefsonb's son Nb (?) said to me: 'I have given him 20 hekat of northern barley and 30 hekat of emmer. ('List of the cargo assigned to the director Henat') And have the follower Seneb come to me so that he can bring me the list of the workers. (pUC 32201, a.c., 1–16; vs. 1)

Especially Irysw's request when he asks Sakainw to write about the delayed wages of the workers differs from the expected manner; instead of avoiding the direct addressing of the recipient, he, in fact, emphasises how it is exactly him who could (and should) write about the matter. Note, however, the use of the expression *snb(.w) ḥnh(.w)* to 'soften' his demand.<sup>138</sup>

(32b) Irysw continues his letter:

ir grt wnn ḥḥ p3 ḥsb 11 ʕ3 r tbt=sn bw nb nfr  
ntk h3b=k ḥr md.t m ḥr=k snb.t(i) ḥnh.t(i)  
mk in g3w n wpwty ʕ3 ḥnḥ=i iw 3 rdi-n=i iwt=f r int n=i smi m rh=k  
n-in.tw m tb.t n.t p3 ḥsb 11 k3 h3b=k n=i ḥr=s n-in.tw m tb.t iry k3=k n=i ḥr=s gr  
swd3-ib pw ḥr=s

If the eleven workers are waiting there for their provisions in good order, you are the one who could write about the matters at your sight, you being healthy and living.

Look, through lack of a messenger here with me, I did send him to bring me a reply with your opinion, because the provisions of the eleven workers have not been brought.<sup>139</sup> Then you should

<sup>137</sup> Collier & Quirke 2002, 105: 'I could hardly have had him bring you anything else'.

<sup>138</sup> Note also the use of the expression *swd3-ib pw ḥr=s* to mark the end of the discussed subject matter.

<sup>139</sup> Cf. Collier & Quirke 2002: 'Look, because of the lack of a messenger here with me, I could hardly have him sent to bring me a report with your opinion.'

write me about it, for the provisions have not been brought thereof. Tell me about it as well.<sup>140</sup>  
This is a message about this. (pUC 32201, vs. 3–17)

The correspondents appear to be discussing how to sort out a difficult situation concerning a delay in the rations to the workers. The context behind the conversation about the delayed wages seems to be that the men are discussing which one of them should write about the matter to a third party, and the author hopes that Sakainw would do it and then report the matter to him. The above discussion suggest that the correspondents are colleagues rather than in a clear master and subordinate relationship, which appears to explain the free, unproblematised style of the letter.<sup>141</sup>

It appears that the question of the significance of the social hierarchy and its impact on the style of the letter can be analysed in more detail. Instead of studying the amount of formulaic features, it appears that especially the use of those features that have a pragmatic function, or a feature in them, that alienates the author's active role as the agent behind the speech acts are more common in situations when the correspondent is writing to his superior.<sup>142</sup> This kind of definition takes into account the prominent use of indirect requesting strategies in these kind of situations (see chapter 5) and takes into account the impact of the personal relationship of the authors that can be seen, in some cases, to affect the 'strictness' of the formula and decrease the use of these kind of features.

The following letter is another example of the significance of the personal relationship to the style of the letter formula. The author seems to be writing to someone from his own estate/household and writes about a difficult situation in which he is in.<sup>143</sup> The letter is fragmentary, but it seems that the writer has been accused of removing a vessel from its original place, and he wishes to mend the situation in some way. Although the letter includes several characteristics of the formula, the manner in which the author describes his personal feelings on the subject breaks 'the impersonal tone' of the letter.

(33a) Servant of the estate Imm[...] writes:

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<sup>140</sup> He has asked the addressee also to write about the amount of the workers in the previous paragraph. (pUC 32201, vs. 1–2)

<sup>141</sup> Note also the comment at the end of the letter *mk h3b-n=i hr hn=k n mr pr htw k3 wn=k hn<sup>c</sup>=f m s w<sup>c</sup>* (Look, I have written about your task to the overseer of the estate Hetw. Then you could meet him in person/privately lit. 'as one man') (pUC 32201, vs. 19–21)

<sup>142</sup> This view is supported e.g. with the fact that these features are especially prominent in the letters written by the temple scribe Horemsaef to the mayor, i.e. in those letters in the collection in which the relative social hierarchy between the correspondents can be most securely established.

<sup>143</sup> See example 37a.

[swd3-]ib pw nb ʕ.w.s. r-ntt h3w nb n nb ʕ.w.s. [ʕd wd3] m s.wt=sn nb.t m ʕs.t n.t ʕnt-ʕty [nb km-wr] nsw-bity ʕʕ-ʕpr-rʕ m3ʕ-ʕrw ntr.w [šmʕ] mʕw  
mi mrr b3k-im

[...swd3-ib?] pw n nb ʕ.w.s. ʕr [...]y=k [...]n=i p3 [...] ʕbsw ʕr=i m [...]in?-n [...]  
mk swrd [...] st [...] p3 dd r b3k-im  
ir p3 [ʕn]w [...]n=f sw r dr=f ʕrw[.fy n3] ddw n=k

This is a message to the lord l.p.h. about [...] your [...] to me the [...] clothes which are due from/to me in/from [...] Look, it is wearying to [...] it [...] what is said against the servant-there. Concerning the ʕnw-vessel [...] he has [...] it to take it', was said to you. (pUC 32213, 4–9)

Similar example is in a letter written by a woman who is complaining about the fact that the addressee has not been present in the affairs of the household. Instead of avoiding the direct addressing of the other correspondent, the author confronts him with direct questions and exaggerated comments that bring the active role of the author as the agent of the speech acts more explicitly present.

(33b) Mistress of the house Irer writes about problems at home:

swd3-ib pw n nb ʕ.w.s. ʕr p3y ʕm-ib n nb ʕ.w.s. (i)n iw=tn ʕd[tyny wd3.tyny]  
[...] sp.t(i) r t3 ʕr int=n wšb.w [ʕr-]ntt n-sdm.tw wpwt=tn nb.t nfr sdm [nb ʕ.w.s.]

This is a message to the lord l.p.h. about the forgetfulness of the lord l.p.h: are you safe [and prosperous?...] abandoned (?) concerning our bringing of supplies (?),<sup>144</sup> because no-one has heard any messages of yours. It is good if the lord l.p.h. listens.

swd3-ib pw n nb ʕ.w.s. ʕr [n]3-n ʕm.wt nty ʕy nn gmt šht [...] ʕr [...]nw n ššm  
iw 3 b3k-im ii ds=f in-ntt b3k-im [...] ʕk r hwt-ntr m sw 20 r wʕb 3bd  
[nn] int st nb ʕ.w.s. m-ʕ=f  
sp pw rdit ʕr n t3 k[t]t hr-m-ʕb ʕr iit [...]m3w  
wnn nb ʕ.w.s. r irt hrw ʕ3  
mk [...] ʕbsw nb ʕr=i r ʕwt-ntr [...]nw w3ʕ nn gmt šht st  
swd3-ib pw n nb ʕ.w.s. nfr sdm nb ʕ.w.s.

This is a message to the lord l.p.h. about the female servants who are here not being able to weave [...] the 'lead' threads. The servant there had to come by himself! Because the servant-there entered the temple on day 20 to the 'pure month', and the lord l.p.h. will not bring it with him. It is time to give orders to the female-servant Heremheb about [...]maw's coming. The

<sup>144</sup> Collier & Quirke 2002, 115.



lord really should spend some time here. Look, [...] there are no clothes here with me at/for the temple [...] the threads are laid down but cannot be woven. This is a message to the lord l.p.h. It is good if the lord listens. (pUC 32203, 2–6; vs. 1–3)

However, the question of the relative social hierarchy and its effect on the style of the letters is in many ways problematic. It would be misleading to say that the phenomenon reflected in the impersonal style of the letters would simply be a result of the difference in the social status, in itself a complex, difficult concept. What superficially appears to be a reflection of the difference in the social hierarchy can, in fact, describe e.g. the difficulty or the exceptional nature of the request: either due to the hierarchical relationship between the correspondents or to other circumstantial factors.<sup>145</sup> As a consequence, it is important not to take this as a general rule, but all aspects affecting the style of the formula should be studied individually for each of the letters.

Another important feature in relation to the relative social hierarchy and the style of the formula are the various greetings used to show interest to the welfare of the addressee and the greetings (*nd-ḥrt*) sent to the acquaintances of the recipient of the letter (see chapter 4.2). The letters of the el-Lahun collection do not support the idea that the amount of greetings and wishes shared between the correspondents would correlate with the distance in the relative social hierarchy between the correspondents. In fact, it appears that the changing of greetings is a feature that is regarded something relatively personal. Their use is not restricted to the *swd3-ib*-formula, and they are attested e.g. in the previously seen letters sent between the correspondents who appeared to know each other well.<sup>146</sup> On the other hand, the letters from Horemsaef to the mayor do not include similar kind of greetings, perhaps something that would be regarded too personal and out-of-place in their mutual correspondence.<sup>147</sup> The previously quoted letter from the official who was worried about the missing vase reflects the importance given to the changing of greetings.

(33c) Servant of the estate continues his letter:

*n ḳsn pw m r dd iw=k [...] p3 tm h[3]b ḥr nd ḥr.t=i [...]*

It is not difficult for the mouth to say: you [...] not sending me greetings.

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<sup>145</sup> See e.g. the letter by Neni (pUC 32199) in chapter 5.

<sup>146</sup> See e.g. pUC 32200, a.c.; pUC 32209, vs. 1–3. pUC 32201, vs. 17–18; pUC 32213, vs. 13–17. For the list of attestations of the greetings, see chapter 4.2. and Brose 2013, 463–471.

<sup>147</sup>Cf. Brose, who suggests that a small amount of 'phraseology' in the letters between the temple administrators is due to the fact that they have been seen unnecessary in an official temple context. Brose 2012, 40–41.

*hn<sup>c</sup> nd-hrt mr hwt-ntr [...]w m<sup>c.w.s.</sup> mr pr [s3-]k3[-inw] m<sup>c.w.s.</sup> p3=n pr r-dr=f m msdd=i swt swd3-ib pw hr=s nfr sdm nb<sup>c.w.s.</sup>*

And greet the overseer of the temple [...]w in l.p.h., the overseer of the estate [Sa]ka[inw] in l.p.h. and our entire household. But do not (greet) the one I dislike.<sup>148</sup> (pUC 32213, 17; vs. 13–17)

## 6.2. Private affairs and the importance of personal relationship

The use of the *swd3-ib* formula in situations in which the correspondents (appear) to share the same level of social hierarchy suggests that there exists some kind of idea of a difference between official and private affairs. It appears that besides the fact that the *swd3-ib*-formula is used in situations when someone in lower socio-hierarchical status is writing to his superior, the formula includes a cultural connotation of some kind of official status of the correspondence.<sup>149</sup> This would explain why the formula is used also between members of the official class who appear to share at least relatively similar hierarchical status. In fact, there is a letter in the collection that is written between two ‘brothers’ who both have an official title, but they do not use the *swd3-ib* formula when writing to each other. It is not exactly clear whether the term brother refers to members of the extended family or whether it could also mean friends, but it can be safely presumed that the term indicates a personal relationship between the correspondents.

(34) Renefib writes to his brother:

[...] *dd n sn=f rn=f-ib dd n mr hwt-ntr [iw=f<sup>c</sup>.w.s.]*

[...s] *h3-n=i n=k r dd*

*ir g3 n3-n tp.w? r mhy hr=k di=k di.tw [...]*

[...] says to his brother, Renefib says to the temple overseer [Iuf, l.p.h.]

[...] I reminded you to say if the group of *tp*-workers (?) is lacking for flax, you should have [...] given [...]

Verso:

*m<sup>c</sup> mr hbsw rn=f-ib n [m]r hwt-ntr iw=f<sup>c</sup>.w.s.*

From the overseer of the field-workers Renef-ib to the temple overseer Iuf l.p.h. (pUC 32113B, a.c. 1–5; vs.)

<sup>148</sup> Equally possible translation would be: ‘even the one I dislike’. Collier & Quirke 2002.

<sup>149</sup> Brose notes that the professional/personal relationship between the correspondents affects the use and choice of formulae. Brose 2012, 35.

In addition, the collection includes two letters that are explicitly private in nature. The letters are addressed to a woman, and they do not follow the *swd3-ib* formula.<sup>150</sup> The correspondents are discussing a serious incident that has a personal interest to the author.<sup>151</sup> The first letter does not include requests or instructions of any kind, but appears to be a reply to the addressee's letter telling about new developments in the situation. Both letters lack the core characteristics of the *swd3-ib*-formula, and the normative features that would alienate the author's role in the discourse.<sup>152</sup>

(35a) The author answers to a letter concerning a serious incident:

*dd ppw nn nb.t-pr htp-sbk ̣.w.s.t h3 smd.t m nd-hr.t m hs.t n.t hw.t -hr nb.t tp-ihw*

Given by Pepu to the mistress of the house Hetep-Sobek l.p.h. Thousand wishes in greeting in the favour of Hathor, the mistress of Tep-Ihw.

*ir n3 h3b-n=t hr=s [...n3] ir-n p3 whmw r p3 it3 mt hr-iry pw mt ksn irr.t m hnw r h.t nb.t*

Concerning what you wrote about it [...] what the reporter has done to the thief.

Look, that is the order (?). Look, what has been done in the palace is more serious than anything else.

*mt (i)n iw wd sdm it3 in rmt nb.t wpw-hr mr-ṣn.t n grt sdm-n m-r ṣn.t it3 n is ndr.t(w) m-̣=f  
ir grt tw3.tw hr dd st r-gs p3 hm-nsw mh=f sw m k.t h.t nn nty r nht-hr r=f*

Look, has it been ordered that the thief can be heard/judged by anyone except by the overseer of disputes? But the overseer of disputes cannot judge a thief if he has not been arrested/taken into his charge. If, however, one complains saying that to the royal priest, he 'fills himself with other things'. There's no-one who will stand up to him.

*ir p3 dd wrš=i hr rm hr=s n ii-n m [...]fpṛr=i m [...] (i)n iw[...] r gmt=i k3 nfr n-gm=f m [...]*

As for what has been said; that I would spend my day crying over it: [...] cannot come [...] I come out [...] In case [...] to find me (?), it would be good not to find [...] <sup>153</sup> (pUC 32200)

<sup>150</sup> See also Brose, who comments that the letters written to a woman lack most of the conventional phraseology. Brose 2012, 42–43.

<sup>151</sup> The letters do not belong into the same lot, but that does not necessarily mean that the papyri could not come from approximately the same place (see chapter 3.1.)

<sup>152</sup> For the letters, the choice of formula can be explained also with the difference in the social hierarchy.

<sup>153</sup> Collier & Quirke read the passage: *(i)n iw.tw r gmt=i k3 nfr n gm.tw m t3* (If I am going to be found, then that's good, but one has not found), but the reading appears unlikely. The passage is badly damaged and difficult to read. For the expression *k3 nfr* (Then that would be good.), see pUC 32128, 2.3.

(35b) The author tells the addressee what has happened and asks her help in the matter:

*mt wn dd [...] wd3 [...] mt wi 3b3b.kwi mt [g]m-n=i hm-nsw sbk-m-hb mt wnn=f w<sup>c</sup>r mt rdi-n=i  
sw r hnr<sup>t</sup> n sdm mt dd[...] n[...] hr b3k n=i n3-n? [...] <sup>c</sup>nh-imm-m-h3t m3<sup>c</sup>-hrw r s[...] hn<sup>c</sup> [...]*

Look, it has been said [...] prosperous (?) [...] Look, I am exited. Look, I found the royal servant Sobekemheb. Look, he had really fled. Look, I handed him over to the judgement enclosure. Look, [...] said [...] about working for me, the [...] Ankh-Amenemhet, true of voice, [...] and [...]

*[...] rdi.t-n=i in.tw=s n sš 3h.t sry hr dd.t-n=i nb.t mt grt pw mt k3 di.t(w) mwt=f m h3 n whmw  
imi spr.tw r=f m B 3.t hr dd rdi=f n=t [...] k3 di=t in.tw [...sm]i nb ir [...r-]dd imi iwt=f [h3]b-  
n.tw n=f [...]*

[...] I had it brought to the scribe of the field Sery concerning everything that I had said. Look, it is over/That is it.<sup>154</sup> (?) Look, then he will be sentenced to death at the office hall of the reporter. Have someone go to him at this moment saying that he has [...] Then you should have every [report...] brought. As for [...] saying have him come when someone writes to him (?) [...]

*hn<sup>c</sup> nd-hrt nb.t pr kbs [...] ty nb-sw-mnw nb.t pr ikw r-ntt sdm-n=i n3 h3b-n=t hr=s r-dd [i]mi in.tw  
n=i nkt mrht m[t rdi-n=i] in.tw n=t mr[ht]*

In addition, greet the lady of the house Kebes [...] Nebsumenu, lady of the house Iku as follows: I have listened what you wrote about saying: ‘Send me some merhet-oil.’ Look, I have sent you mer[h<sup>c</sup>et-oil.] (pUC 32209, 1.1.–1.10; 2.1–2.10; vs. 1–3)

However, it is difficult to say to what degree this use of the *swd3-ib*-formula should be seen as a reflection of the unofficial nature of the correspondence or whether it reflects the personal relationship of the persons writing to each other (these aspects are, of course, closely intertwined). As seen, there are letters the content of which suggests that the correspondents know each other well in some respects, but use the formula in question. It appears that when there exists a difference in the relative social hierarchy of the correspondents, the *swd3-ib*-formula is used, but in cases when the author and the addressee of the letter are members of the same social class, the nature of the correspondence can require the use of this specific addressing manner.

<sup>154</sup> Collier & Quirke 2002: *mt grt pw m-<sup>c</sup>=t k3 di=t m(w)t=f* ‘Look, moreover, this means it is in your hands so you seem to be letting him die/languish’. (pUC 32209, 2.3–2.4)

On the other hand, it is possible that the use of the formula in situations when the correspondents are colleagues is related to the fact that the correspondents are members of the same social, or professional class, which, in turn, expects the use of the letter formula. However, this aspect of the use of the formula cannot be analysed in this study, but the aspect should be examined further. As previously noted, the discussion on the cultural connotations attached to the *swd3-ib*-formula is problematic due to a lack of knowledge of the socio-cultural and administrative structures in the community. Although various studies have discussed these aspects also in the context of the el-Lahun papyri, the study of the socio-cultural structures in the community is in need of future research.

On the other hand, the characteristics of the *swd3-ib*-formula, and the problems in defining the cultural connotations attached to the use of the formula reflect the nature of the socio-cultural structures in the community. Eyre discusses the nature of the administrative and social structures in the pharaonic society.<sup>155</sup> He emphasises the importance of personal relationships in a society build upon complex patronage and client structures, in which the socio-cultural status of the person and his role in the ‘official hierarchy’ is closely connected and in many ways dependent on the personal relationship he has with patron.<sup>156</sup> A descriptive example is the complex use of titles within the administrative circle. Eyre comments how a specific title is usually closely attached to the personal acquaintance the holder of the title has with his patron, and refers to a functional role in the administration or community only in some cases.<sup>157</sup>

The letters in the Lahun collection appear to represent this side of the governmental structures and practices. As noted briefly in the beginning of this study, the authors of these letters are for the most part officials reporting of a completed task assigned to them by their master. The duties carried out seem to be, for the most part, individual tasks, for the completion of which the official expects a recognition or a more concrete ‘favour’ on behalf of his lord reflecting the personal nature of the governmental practices.<sup>158</sup> On the other hand, the content of most the letters creates a picture of society in which in order to guarantee a favourable position for himself or save an acquaintance from trouble, one has

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<sup>155</sup> Eyre 2013.

<sup>156</sup> Eyre 2013, 55–56; 162–163.

<sup>157</sup> Eyre 2013, 55–56. See also Quirke 2004, 1–5.

<sup>158</sup> See e.g. letters pUC 32124 and pUC 32197. See e.g. Eyre 2013, 55.

to be aware of the complex hierarchical structures of the community, in which the government also has at least in part regular system of surveillance and hierarchy.<sup>159</sup> The following examples build a descriptive picture of the personal nature of socio-hierarchical structures in the community.

(36a) Official Hotep-Sobek writes to Horemsaef about a letter he has received:

*ḥḥ-n=i šm.kwi r ip st m-ḥ wḥb-nsu mik[...] nfr-pw rdit=f n=i st  
ir rmt=i hby.t=i n3-n k3p.w=i prr n=i m t3 ḥwt-ntr nfr-pw rdit=f n=i st gr  
ḥrw.fy sw h3b b3k-im ḥr swd3-ib ḥr=s ḥr rdit int n=i p3 wḥb-nsu spry ḥr=f*

‘Then I went to count them for the royal priest Mik[...], but he did not give them to me. As for my people, my festival offerings, my incense (?) that come for me from the temple, he did not give them to me either’, he said. The servant-there is writing a message about this; about letting the royal priest come to me so that he can petition about it. (pBln 10074, 5–14)

(36b) Servant of the estate Khemny asks the addressee to act on matter concerning the royal priest Wadjhaw.

*swd3-ib [pw n] nb ḥ.w.s. [ḥr r]dit di.tw ib ḥnt p3y=k ḥm-nsu w3d-h3w  
m rdit sḥ=f nn rdit bt3=f  
mi bw nb nfr irrw nb ḥ.w.s. snb [ḥnh]  
ḥnḥ rdit di.tw ib ḥnt p3y[=f?] pr  
mi bw nb nfr irrw nb ḥ.w.[s.] snb ḥnh  
ḥr-ntt in nb ḥ.w.s. irr ḥ.t nb.t m ḥs n b3k-im*

This is a message to the lord l.p.h. about having attention paid to your royal servant Wadjhaw in ‘giving his document’ without having him evade (?)

in accordance with all the goodness that the lord l.p.h. does, he being healthy and living, and about having attention paid to his estate,

in accordance with all the goodness that the lord l.p.h. does, he being healthy and living,

as it is only the lord, l.p.h. who can do everything as a favour to the servant-there. (pUC 32210, 9–17)

It appears that the various greetings, and carefully formulated requests should be understood in this socio-cultural context in which the personal nature of ‘official’ practices is emphasised. One could say that in this kind of society, there does not actually exist a matter that would be completely official lacking all the personal aspects of the

<sup>159</sup> For discussion on the institution called *ḥnrt*, see Mazzone 2017. In addition, see discussion on Eyre 2013, 72–77.

social exchange. The aspects related to the use of the formula: i.e. the relative social hierarchy, personal relationship and the difference between official and private affair are so closely connected to each other that clear separation of these features from each other would be anachronistic and misleading.

The following letter is addressed to Horemsaef who seems to have a power to decide about the future actions concerning the author of the letter. The letter is exceptional in its manner of confronting the addressee with direct questions and the strong sense of appeal present in the text. The element of ‘impersonalisation’ is absent, and it is perhaps the gravity of the situation or the sense of injustice felt that explains the style of the letter. The use of the greeting at the beginning of the letter and the inquiry after the health of the addressee in a situation like this should perhaps be seen as an argument in favour of their importance rather than something ‘additional’ the use of which would be merely a matter of custom.

(37) Servant of the estate Imbw writes to the temple scribe Horemsaef:

[*b3k n pr-dt imi*]-*bw dd swd3-ib pw n nb* <sup>ϕ.w.s.</sup> *r[-ntt] h3w<sup>160</sup> nb n nb* <sup>ϕ.w.s.</sup> *ϕd [wd3 m s.wt=sn nb.t m ḥs.t n.t ...] nsw-bity [ḥ<sup>ϕ</sup>-]ḥpr[-r<sup>ϕ</sup> m3<sup>ϕ</sup>-ḥrw mi] mrr b3k-im*

This is a message to the lord, l.p.h. as follows: all the concerns of the lord l.p.h. are safe and properous, in all their places; in favour of [...] the Dual King Khakheperra, true of voice, [...] just as the servant-there wishes.

*swd3-ib pw n nb* <sup>ϕ.w.s.</sup> *r-ntt dd n b3k-im iw 3w-n nb* <sup>ϕ.w.s.</sup> [...] *ḥr b3k-im m nhw ḥn<sup>ϕ</sup> wnn.in nb* <sup>ϕ.w.s.</sup> *ḥr rdi.t h3b.t(w) š<sup>ϕ</sup>w.t [...r] ndnd irr.t ḥm-k3 im (i)n iw nb* <sup>ϕ.w.s.</sup> *ḥr ḥḥ ntt r ir.t r b3k-im [...]* *r b3k-im (i)n iw=i ḳsn.kwi nb* <sup>ϕ.w.s.</sup> *ink šmsw=k pty [st] ntt sw r ir.t r b3k-im n-rdy.t sdm b3k-im ir.t-n=f m mdw [...]*

This is a message to the lord as follows: it has been said to the servant-there: ‘The lord l.p.h. has ordered (the transfer of) the workforce [...] under servant-there in need, and then the lord l.p.h. was ordering a letter to be sent [...] to inquire what the ka-priest does there.

Is the lord l.p.h. wondering what to do to the servant-there? [...] to the servant-there. Am I in trouble, lord l.p.h.? I am your follower. What [is it] that he will do to the servant-there? The servant-there has not yet been allowed to hear what he did to the matter/dictated (?) [...]

<sup>160</sup> Note the exceptional use of determinative in the word *h3w* (dependants).

[...] *šmsw=k m šht hr=i r hrd n nb ʕ.w.s. spr r=i n[...] nb ʕ.w.s. ḥd-n=f iry.t=f iw sr r dd iri-n=f n3 [...] šʕ.t mi ḥf3w.w [...] r-s3 ḥtp-n=i [...]*

[...] your follower. Do not be deaf towards me, towards a dependant of the lord l.p.h., but answer me [...] the lord, l.p.h., because he has failed what he should do. The official will say: ‘He has done the [...] a letter like snakes [...] after I have offered [...]

[...] *b m ḥ.t hrw=k nfr nn ʕh3=k r [...] mk rmt dd=sn m-dd [...] š3ʕ=k hr=i m ir.t nkt [...]*

[...] with offerings on your good day. May you not fight against [...] Look, the people say: [...] May you act for me (?) by doing some [...]

[...] *ḥʕ-hpr-rʕ m3ʕ-hrw imi in.t(w) n=i smi n t3 šʕt [...]*

[...Khakheperra,] true of voice: ‘Let an answer to this letter be brought [...]

[...] *ḥnʕ rdit h3b.t(w) n b3k-im hr ʕ.w.s. nb ʕ.w.s. swd3-ib pw n nb [ʕ.w.s. hr=s swd3-ib pw n nb ʕ.w.s. nfr sdm nb ʕ.w.s.]*

[...] And have someone write to the servant-there about the well-being of the lord, l.p.h. This is a message to the lord about this. This is a message to the lord, l.p.h. It is good if the lord, l.p.h. listens. (pBln 10025)

As seen, showing conformity to normative, epistolary customs appears to be a question that is especially important in an ancient Egyptian society in which the social structure of the community is highly constrained and build upon complex hierarchical socio-economic structures. A descriptive example is the following passage from the letter by official Iemiatib about a completion of a task. It appears that the frequently quoted ‘satirical’ letter written probably for own and others amusement, or relief, should be understood in this slightly difficult, yet varied, socio-cultural context.

(38a) Servant of the estate Iemiatib writes before returning from his task:

*swd3-ib pw nb ʕ.w.s. r-ntt iri-n b3k-im wd.wt nb[.t n.t] nb ʕ.w.s. m n3 rdy hr im n b3k-im m in.t p3 tp<sup>161</sup> n rmt mi p3 hr s3w dd nb ʕ.w.s. iw=f gr hr dd.t-n=i n=f ir m-ḥt iw b3k-im r h3w m 3bd 2[...] 3ḥ.t k3 iw=f m-ʕ b3k-im hr [...] ntt dw3 n3 iw b3k-im [...]*

This is a message to the lord l.p.h. informing that the servant-there has completed all the commands of the lord l.p.h. which had been ordered to him meaning the delivery of the

<sup>161</sup> The expression is used in several instances in the Lahun letters. It probably means a group of people assigned to the labour-duty.



group/sum of female-servants (?) according to the order so that the lord l.p.h. would not say:  
'He is unresponsive to what I said to him.' (pUC 32198, 11–17)

(38b) The letter describes a correspondence between two officials:

*swd3-ib r-ntt dd n b3k-im iw nb ʕ.w.s. spr r shm-sn-wsrt m3ʕ-hrw m 3bd 4 šmw sw 10*  
*bin wy ii=k m ʕd.ti wd3.ti*

A message as follows: The servant-there has been told: 'The lord l.p.h. has arrived at Sekhem-Senwosret in the fourth month of summer, on day 10.' How bad it is that you have arrived safe and prosperous.

*dd=k m bin.t nb.t m hs.t n.t sbk nb r-shwy*  
*rdi.t(y)=fy tw n wh3.t m hs.t n.t k3=f*  
*iri-n k3 n m-r hwt-ntr n hk3.t ppi r=k r mn r w3h [n]hh d.t*  
*bin sdm=k skr.t(i)*

You speak in all evil; in favour of Sobek, lord of Re-Sehwy, who shall take you to *w3h.t* in favour of his ka. May the ka of the overseer of the temple of Hekat Pepi work against you permanently and enduringly, eternally and forever!

It is bad if you listen, for you have been defeated. (pUC 32204)

## 7. Conclusion

As seen in the previous chapters, the letters which define the manner of communication as *swd3-ib* seem to follow a common 'formula' and share several features with each other, the use of which can be seen to be normative in character. There are specific features in the letters which are used exclusively in the so called *swd3-ib*-letters. These include the use of the expression *swd3-ib pw* in structuring the letter and affecting the formulation of the text in general, and the use of specific addressing words *b3k-im* and *nb ʕ.w.s.* to refer to the correspondents. By defining the question of the use of the formula to those letters which refer to the manner of communication as *swd3-ib*, the complex usages of the fixed expressions and other individual features in the text can be analysed in more detail.

It seems that one of the most prominent features of the normative discourse of the letters that use the *swd3-ib*-formula is the aim to semantically alienate the presence of the author as the agent behind the speech acts. This manner can be seen in several characteristics of the discourse and in the use of various indirect requesting strategies. This tendency seems

to be connected to the nature of requesting in general, as something that is potentially a difficult and harmful situation for the author. On the other hand, the use of indirect requesting strategies can in some cases be related to the difference in the socio-hierarchical status between the correspondents.

In addition, it is evident that some of the characteristics of the *swd3-ib*-letters reflect the socio-cultural structures in the community. Eyre has emphasised the importance of personal relationships in a pharaonic administration and society built upon complex patronage and client structures, in which the socio-cultural status of the person is strongly connected to the relationship he has with his patron. It appears that the various greetings, and carefully formulated requests should be understood in this cultural context. In this kind of society, the knowledge of the appropriate addressing manners with normative greetings and wishes would have been an important and expected part of social interaction, an aspect that shows conformity and cultural knowledge of the mutually expected, normative customs.

This study shows how a better knowledge of the epistolary traditions can offer several new insights and possibilities for future research. The normative manner of formulating the text affects on the formulation of the text of the Lahun letter on various levels. In addition, further study of the epistolary customs can play a part also in questions of the wider socio-cultural structures and scribal practices in the community. The existence of a specific *swd3-ib*-formula proves a degree of professionalization in the scribal and/or administrative practices in the community that have not yet been fully researched. The existence of a culturally valued, learned manner of addressing offers potential for research on the complex socio-cultural structures in the community and the identity of its official, literate class.

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#### List of abbreviations

*JEA*            *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*

*JNES*            *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*

*JSSEA*          *Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities*

*LingAeg*        *Lingua Aegyptia: Journal of Egyptian Language Studies*

*ZÄS*            *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde*

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pBln 10025, 14	9	pUC 32200	35a
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pBln 10038C, 1–4	5a	pUC 32201, vs. 3–17	4a
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pUC 32124, f.ii, f.i. v.o.	23a	pUC 32205, 14–19	15b
pUC 32124, f.ii 1–5, f.i. v.o.	17a	pUC 32209, 1.1.–1.10;	35b
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KAHUN P. XXIX

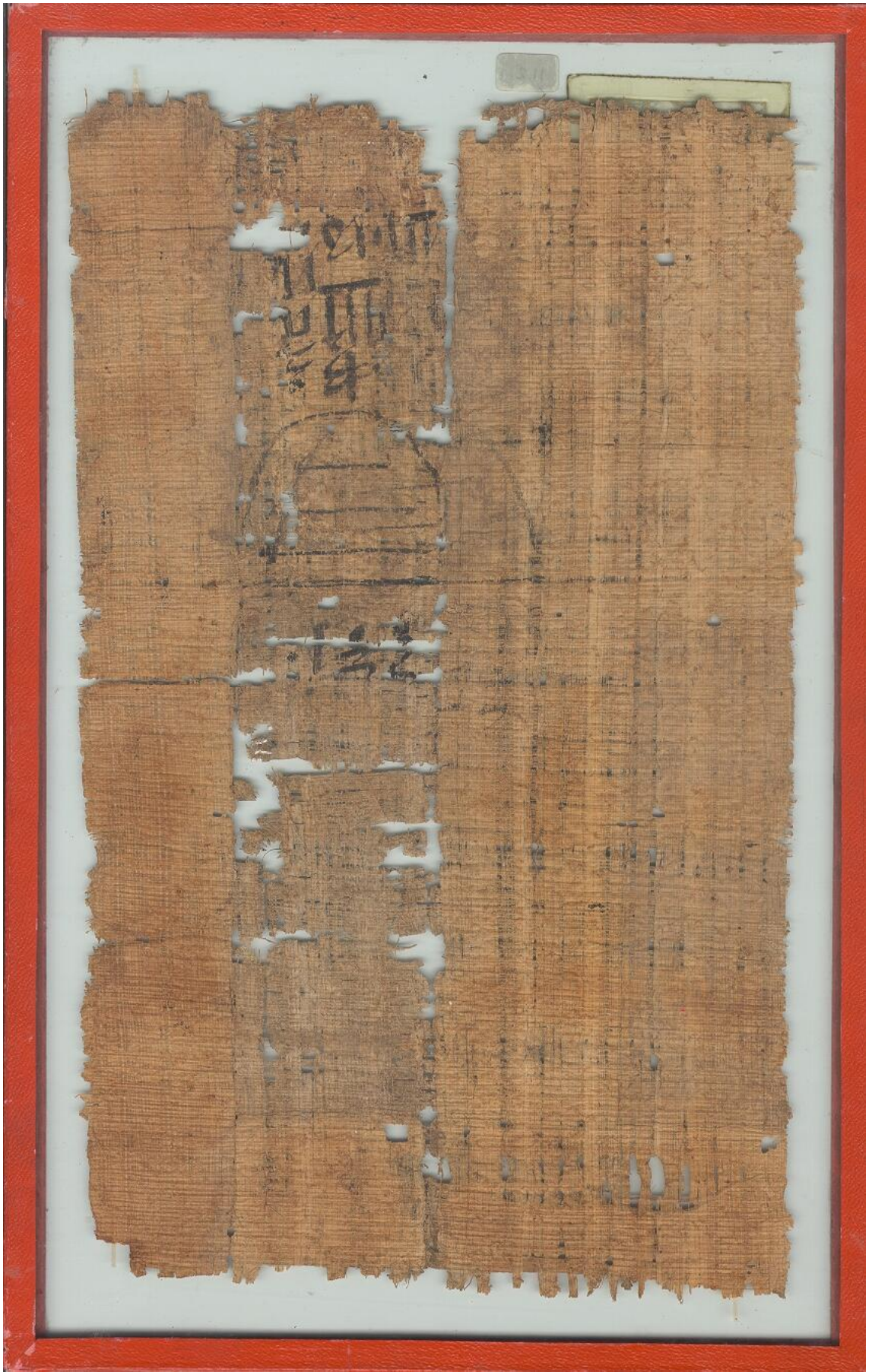
Hieratic script on papyrus, arranged in approximately 12 vertical columns. The text is densely packed and shows signs of significant wear, including numerous holes and tears, particularly in the lower half of the sheet. The script is a cursive form of Egyptian hieroglyphs.

Sheet of papyrus with hieratic letter. h: 29.8; w: 18.4.

pUC 32199 recto

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Sheet of papyrus with hieratic letter. h: 29.8; w: 18.4.  
pUC 32199 verso.

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