Everyday Communication in Antiquity: Frames and Framings

Book of Abstracts

1. **Serena Causo – '"The medium is the message": understanding material strategies in administrative documents from Oxyrhynchus'**

In the words of McLuhan: "*The medium is the message, because it is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and actions.*"

What if the papyrus roll had never become an affordable commodity? In such a scenario, private letters would have been a luxury reserved only for the elite, Roman administration would have struggled to develop its tight system of bureaucratic control over its provinces and the Byzantine people would have likely adopted a more concise language and modest handwriting for their contracts. The medium and its material features, in fact, do play an integral role in the development and organization of a society, as significant as the message they carry. However, while the message conveyed through content is easy to comprehend, the message conveyed by the medium itself may not be so apparent.

In this regard, the recent interest of papyrologists in the material and visual properties of ancient documents represents a noteworthy shift in the investigation of ancient writing practices. This approach expands the study of documents beyond the mere content of the document to include the meaning conveyed by the written object itself. This focus on the medium, format, and producer of the written object prompts new questions related to the technology of the writing support, the production milieu of the documents, and the meaning of the material and visual qualities of the documents in relation to their purpose.

These questions are particularly significant in the context of the Roman administration and bureaucracy, where standardization was an indispensable requirement for efficient communication and the circulation of information. In this presentation, I will investigate the impact of material practices in the administrative context and to what extent they were shaped on and contributed to the functioning of the Roman state. In order to do so I will investigate (i) the materiality of the production of administrative documents – the choice of writing support and the qualification of size and format – and (ii) the materiality of their circulation – the material intertextuality when two texts become linked together (e.g. *tomoi synkollesimoi*), reproduced (secondary or authenticated copies) or altered in transmission (attachments). For this purpose, I will use a specific group of bottom-up administrative documents addressed by citizens to the authorities and written in a *hypomnematic* form, among which declarations (ἀπογραφαί), applications, petitions and a peculiar subset of contracts. The analysis aims at presenting for the first time an over-view of the material practices adopted in the Oxyhrynchite administration and disclose their semiotic potential for a comprehensive interpretation of ancient documents.

2. **Gianluca Bonagura/Serena Causo– ῾τὸ ἀντίγραφον ὑπόκειται: degrees of linguistic and visual integration in multi-level documents'**

The larger an administrative system becomes, so does its need to facilitate a steady flow of information between all parties involved. The vast Roman Empire had succeeded in creating a broad and efficient network of officials, trained to ensure that every matter

concerning the state was duly recorded and passed on, up or down the administrative chain. Communication had to be efficient, concise and exhaustive at the same time, with up-to-date information granting access to the chain of exchanges for all colleagues and superiors involved. This kind of communicative accountability was achieved by sending the main document together with copies of one or more previous messages related to it as attachments. The practice of attaching supporting documents was not only common within the bureaucratic practice of administrative bureaus, it was also frequently adopted by citizens in official requests to the authorities.

While today an attachment is a physically separated and self-standing document, often sent as an independent object, the practice seems to have been quite different on papyrus. There, an attachment was not only copied on the same sheet with the main document, but often also embedded within its text. The result was a multi-layered document in which more than one typology of document was integrated within one textual frame.

These documents would require specific attention, as their language, structure and materiality is often shaped according to their textual and structural complexity. The writers, in fact, could adopt several expedients for attaching a document, both linguistic (e.g. deictic verbs, such as ὑπόκειμαι, πρότασσω and συζεύγνυμι or specific locutions, such as ἐστι δέ) and visual (i.e. separating the main document from the attachment by use of a *vacat*, a line spacing or a column).

In this presentation we will explore the various degrees of integration that were adopted by the writers, according to the types of documents involved, the hierarchy of the messages or the chronology of the communication. In addition, we will address some of the struggles that we encountered while dealing with the annotation of the structure and the materiality of multi-level documents, by presenting some of the more complex cases.

3. Kyriaki Giannikou – 'Palaeographic annotations for the EVWRIT corpus: Results and promising prospects for further research'

The palaeographic features of documentary papyri, such as handwriting characteristics and the identification of different hands, have not been consistently addressed in traditional editions. As a consequence, databases in the field of Digital Papyrology that rely on these editions perpetuate the issue by making palaeographic characteristics unavailable for queries, rendering the implementation of such data in research on papyrological corpora inaccessible. This is what the 'Database of Everyday Writing in Antiquity' aims to address by implementing a 'Handwriting' section for combinational queries, based on Fournet's idea of a 'paléographie signifiante'.

Based on the establishment of objective criteria by Amory (forthc.) for the description of palaeographic features, a handwriting annotation framework was developed. All Greek papyri in the corpus with available scanned reproductions (around 3,500 out of 5,000) were annotated in terms of their *Script Type*, *General Handwriting Characteristics* (*Lineation, Slope, Curvature, Connectivity, Expansion, Orientation, Degree of Formality,*

Regularity) and *Other Handwriting Characteristics* (P*unctuation, Accentuation, Word splitting, Abbreviations, Corrections*). In each case, the handwriting was attributed a number based on its sequence of appearance in the document and, where possible, connected to a *Person_Attestation*, identifying the person behind the hand.

The aim of this presentation is to display the results of the handwriting annotation process and the distribution of the different values in graph form, categorizing them first by genre and further by century. In this way, I intend to provide a first look into the research prospects that become available through the systematic description and incorporation of palaeographic characteristics in the 'Everyday Writing' database.

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4. Ezra la Roi – 'Your wish is my command: towards a social syntax of wish strategies in the papyri'

Wishing someone well (e.g. Good luck! Bless you! I hope that you are well) and sharing this thought in various ways is part of the social glue of linguistic interaction. Though many scholars have pointed out the large degree of variation in *directive* strategies that we find in the Post-Classical Greek papyri (e.g. Leiwo 2010, Logozzo 2015, Dickey 2016, Bruno 2020, 2022), very few scholars have assessed the social dimension of *wish* strategies in the papyri (see la Roi 2021, in prep. for historical background on changes in the wish system). A notable exception is the work of Delphine Nachtergaele (esp. 2023), who has collected a large amount of observations on wish strategies in a corpus of *private letters*. Therefore, I assess the social dimensions of wish strategies in Post-Classical Greek papyri (I – VI CE), going beyond her corpus of private letters.

To do so, I first briefly outline the major changes in the wish system of Post-Classical Greek and its reflections in the data from the papyri, such as the persistence of the wish optative, the spread of performative strategies and insubordinate wish strategies (e.g. the insubordinate infinitive χαίρειν, la Roi forthc.). Next, I conduct three case studies of wish strategies, (1) χαίρ- variants, (2) performative wish strategies, and (3) wish optatives, in an attempt to assess the social dimensions of wish strategies. In particular, I aim to assess the correlations of these wish strategies with (i) text type, (ii) text segment, and (iii) social identity variables such as age, gender, social rank and the agentive role of the speaker. To that end, I use the EVWRIT database, where writers' socio-pragmatic identity has been annotated.

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5. Marianna Thoma/Klaas Bentein – 'Postscripts in private letters: Comparing male and female afterthoughts'

In a now - in linguistic spheres - famous article, entitled 'Opening Up Closings', the sociologists Emanuel Schegloff and Harvey Sacks first approached the issue of conversational closings, outlining a.o. some of their component parts as well as linguistic strategies to initiate a closing (Schegloff and Sacks 1973). An interesting feature of such closings is that 'there are procedures at any point in a closing section for reopening topic talk' (Schegloff and Sacks 1973, 92), which one could arguably compare to the use of a 'postscript' – a paratextual terminal framing – in modern-day written conversation.

When it comes to antiquity, closings have been well-studied, for non-literary but also for literary texts, though attention has mostly gone to their formulaic components (such as the farewell greeting, the salutations, etc., on which see e.g. Nachtergaele 2015). Postscripts have been recognized (Luiselli 2008; Sarri 2018), particularly in the form of marginal writings (Homann 2012), but overall we have little understanding of their precise communicative nature. In this contribution, we want to zoom in on three aspects.

We will start by discussing the precise definition of postscripts, which is of some importance for a digital annotation environment. We will argue that there are various ways to define postscripts, ranging from very to much less strict. In the strictest sense of the word, postscripts represent visually distinguishable non-formulaic textual segments that occur after the farewell greeting (ἔρρωσο or its longer form) and are not followed by other formulaic components, except, perhaps, for the date; in a less strict sense,

postscripts are textual segments that occur after any formulaic component that initiates the closing; they can occur in between formulaic components (for example between the salutation and closing), and can even include formulaic components, in case the latter do not occur in their typical position (for example a repeated salutation occurring after the farewell).

Adopting the less strict type of definition, one finds hundreds of postscripts in Roman letters, which we will be focusing on. In the second part of our paper, we turn to their communicative function, taking the suggestions made by Jeffrey Weima in his discussion of the closing conventions in ancient Hellenistic letters as our starting point (Weima 1994, 52–55). Weima outlines several functions for postscripts, including (i) giving information that has come to light following the writing of the letter, (ii) giving a final comment or command that has come to the mind of the writer after the letter was finished, (iii) reinforcing a previously given command, and (iv) giving a summary of the main details contained in the body of the letter – various of which relate to the initiator taking control of how the message is received. Based on the epistolary material contained in the EVWRIT database, we discuss which of these functions are attested, and whether additional functions need to be recognized.

In the final part of our paper, we turn to the communicative context in which postscripts occur, and how this can be linked to the communicative functions that we outlined. Weima (1994, 52) argues that 'a postscript is by definition not a normative letter-closing convention', and there are indeed indications that this is a characteristic feature of informal written communication: postscripts are common, for example, on ostraca – a cheap writing material that needed less careful textual planning (Leiwo 2005, 238); they are uncommon, on the other hand, in more formal epistolary subtypes such as letters of recommendation or consolation. Another context in which postscripts have been noted to appear frequently is in women's letters, a corpus that has received a substantial amount of attention in recent years (Bagnall and Cribiore 2006; Thoma 2020). To come to a close, we therefore turn to the question of how to account for this connection between women's letters and postscripts.

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6. Chiara Monaco – 'Atticist prescriptions at work: examples from literary and papyrological sources'

In the second century CE, the production of Atticist lexica reflected a progressive tendency to use language to construct social categories in a continuous attempt to tailor linguistic styles in projects of self-construction and differentiation. The community of educated speakers was defined by selecting linguistic features different from those used by the mass, which became distinctive marks of education and elitism. This process could be described in terms of the so-called 'indexical order' (Eckert 2012): linguistic features are extracted from their linguistic surroundings and become an index of membership and identity. The question I will try to answer in this paper is to what extent the ideological factors expressed in the lexica influenced language usage, namely, what is the relationship between the norms proposed in the lexica and the reception of these norms in speakers' use.

The analysis will be conducted through the investigation of three semiotic processes (Gal-Irvine 1995 and 2000): 1) Iconisation, which displays an inherent link between linguistic features and social groups; it is expressed, for instance, in the link that the Atticist lexicographers create between supposedly pure/correct forms and certain social and ethnic groups (e.g., educated people/Attic writers/the ancients etc.) 2) Fractal recursivity, which involves the projection of an opposition, salient at some level of relationship, onto some other level (e.g., intragroup oppositions onto intergroup relations or vice versa); this is reflected, for instance, in the Atticists' shift from 'Attic vs barbarians' to 'Attic vs non-Attic' 3) erasure, which simplifies the sociolinguistic field by rendering some sociolinguistic phenomena invisible and reducing linguistic complexity to homogeneity, a phenomenon which is represented by the Atticists' disregard for language variation and their interpretation of Attic as a monolithic system. These phenomena are reflected in the use of a specific kind of evaluative language (Bentein-Roumanis 2022) that categorises and further divides the speakers into communities of practice, each one bringing a specific social meaning (οἱ Ἀττικοί, οἱ πολλοί, οἱ Ἕλληνες etc.). These three semiotic processes are

the means by which Atticist lexica construct ideological representations of linguistic differences.

Once established the ideological constructions of the lexica and the way they deal with variations, I will analyse how these phenomena are reflected in usage. In other words, to what extent did the lexica contribute to the distribution of language variation into different registers by creating so-called 'register shibboleths', namely features that are immediately recognisable as salient within a certain register. To do so, I will take into account three main cases relating to lexicon (compositional formations), morphology (-θη futures in place of middle futures) and syntax (μέλλω and infinitive), and I will analyse the prescribed and proscribed variants and their distribution in different types of non-literary texts, seeing whether the use of these forms reflects a specific register choice. Literary sources will be taken as terms of comparison. This analysis aims to better understand the influence of ideological factors in driving specific communicative choices.

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7. **Antonia Apostolakou – 'The complexity of script choices in late antique Egypt: Exploring possibilities and motivations'**

The diversity of the linguistic milieu of late antique Egypt, with the use of Greek, Egyptian, and Latin, in combination with the rich documentary material preserved, offers fertile ground for the study of bilingual phenomena. As these languages were graphically represented with the use of different or divergent alphabets, the preserved material attests to not only language but also script contact. The result is numerous language-script combinations, that nonetheless remain understudied. Careless or inconsistent transcriptions of script choices, either in printed editions or online databases and tools often hinder data collection and discourage the analysis of such phenomena.

This paper proposes a linguistic-visual approach that takes into account both linguistic and paleographic features of documentary texts with more than one language and/or script, using theoretical concepts from bilingualism and contact linguistics, historical sociolinguistics, and socio-semiotics. The demanding corpus building is facilitated by special tools developed in the frame of the EVWRIT project's database and website (e.g. "character recognition tool"). Focusing on writing phenomena (digraphia, transliteration,

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script-mixing) and their interpretation, results from three main case studies where the described approach was applied are summarized, namely: i) Greek notary signatures transliterated into Latin, ii) Coptic-only characters in Egyptian names otherwise written in Greek, iii) Greek formulae in Coptic legal documents. These studies illustrate that script choice from the fourth to the eighth centuries in Egypt was highly complex. The first case study shows that using a non-standard language-script combination could be intentional, reflecting functional differences assigned to specific languages and their graphic representation (cf. diglossia). It is, however, critical to remember that it may also be involuntary, as exemplified in the second study, as the outcome of *ad hoc* cognitive processes induced by the simultaneous knowledge of two languages and graphemic options available. Finally, as becomes even clearer in the third investigation, explaining script choice can have multiple layers, as it might vary depending on the structural parts of the document and the perception of writers about the "otherness" of foreign lexical items (code-switching vs. borrowing).

The paper shows that script choice should be interpreted in a customized way, by taking into account both broader and narrower frames: the socio-historical context, as well as individual perception, training, and skills of writers. "Non-standard" language-script combinations should not readily be attributed to factors such as poor linguistic competence, as confirmed by their presence in formulaic documents of legal significance, penned by professional scribes. This study sheds new light on the different standards about the language-script relationship in late antiquity, and the use of script as an additional meaning-making device.

8. Fokelien Kootstra/Klaas Bentein – 'Requests in the Qurra archive. A cross-cultural pragmatic approach'

Arabic was catapulted onto the world stage by the Arab-Islamic conquests of the 7th century CE. Within a few centuries it became an international medium of science, communication, and bureaucracy. This did not happen in a vacuum, and through its expansion Arabic came into contact with other written cultures, an important one of which was Greek. Especially in Egypt, there is robust documentary evidence of contact between Greek and Arabic written culture, which has inspired several studies focusing on formulation and language choice (e.g., Richter 2010; Luiselli 2008).

Within this context of the emerging Arabic bureaucratic writing culture in contact with the long-established Greek one, we will perform a cross-cultural pragmatic analysis of the speech act Request (as coined by Austin 1962; Searle 1969; 1979; here following the definition by House and Kádár 2021, 108) within Arabic and Greek letters in the bureaucratic correspondence of the Qurra archive (709-715 CE). This corpus contains Greek and Arabic letters written to Basil, the pagarch of *kōmē Aphrodito* (*ṣāḥib Ishqawh* in Arabic), on behalf of Qurra b. Sharīk, who was the governor of Egypt at the time (Bell 1928; Tillier 2017; Sijpesteijn 2013). Because we know the power relation between the two interlocutors in this corpus and have access to several letters that make similar

requests in each language, this allows us to contextualize some of the social dimensions of the interactions, which makes this corpus ideal for a comparative study.

In our analysis, we will focus on requests both from a formal linguistic perspective (i.e., what linguistic forms are used to perform requests, how are they modified, etc.), as well as from a broader, pragmatic perspective, taking into account which sorts of supportive acts are used in the letters, whether *mitigating*, such as 'Appeasement', or *aggravating*, such as 'Threat' or 'Moralising' (following the coding scheme proposed by Juliane House and Dániel Kádár 2021, 125–27).

Our intention is to analyze whether indeed, as already suggested by Abbott (1938, 40), the employment of specific linguistic and pragmatic strategies is correlated to the nature of the request that is being made (e.g. when the request relates to 'gross neglect of duty' or to 'dire results on entire districts of perhaps the whole country', to quote Abbott). More broadly, by highlighting the similarities and differences in realization of this speech act, we hope to come to a better understanding of the cultural specificity of the way in which Greek and Arabic requests were framed – both linguistically and pragmatically – in the Qurra archive. Situating our findings in the wider context of Greek and Arabic official correspondence, we hope to take a first step towards understanding how these two linguacultures in contact (House and Kádár 2021, 5) negotiated differing cultural expectations and how they potentially influenced each other.

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9. Marieke Dhont – 'Framing Requests: The Complementation Structures of Directive Downtoners'

This study looks at the complementation structures of directive downtoners in private letters from the Middle and Late Post-Classical Greek. One common way to express a polite request in Greek is the use of the formula καλῶς ποιέω, "you do well to," often translated in English as "please." This formula can be used primarily in the aorist optative or the future indicative, indicating a request for a future action. I will first look at the background of the use of the phrase καλῶς ποιέω as "please" itself, before discussing in detail its complementation structures attested in private letters from the 1st to the 8th century. We see a variety of possible complementation patterns in Post-Classical Greek of an extent that has not previously been recognized. For comparison, I will also look at the alternative, but less frequently used formula εὖ ποιέω. Finally, I will consider various explanations for the variation in complementation structures to directive downtoners in post-classical Greek, considering both the possibility of language change and language variation. This study ties in with recent trends in pragmatics in general and in ancient Greek in particular to analyze politeness phenomena and to see whether syntactic variation is linked to diachronic developments or synchronic considerations of register.

10. Eleonora Cattafi – 'Framing the bad guys: strategies of relativization in the depiction of the wrongdoer in papyrus petitions'

Petitions constitute one of the most common text types among documentary papyri from Egypt, typically involving a request, made by a social inferior to a social superior, in order to redress a crime through punishment or financial compensation, or to give assistance in a situation of injustice. While the analysis of these texts has often been motivated by historical interests about the administrative and legal context of ancient Egypt, less attention has been drawn so far to their linguistic variation. Papyrus petitions generally exhibit a distinctive formal structure (White 1972), consisting of an opening, a background, a request and a closing. In this study, I analyse the variation of relative clauses in a specific unit within the text, namely the 'background', where the petitioner presents the details of the injustice which was suffered, and in particular of its responsible.

Both the personal features identifying the wrongdoers and their acts in the concrete case of the petition can be expressed by a participial relative clause (e.g. SB XX 14404, ll. 6-10 – II AD) or by a finite relative clause (e.g. P. Sakaon 36, ll. 8-11 – III AD). In this case, also the choice of the relative marker introducing the clause can vary between ὅστις and ὅς, which is frequently accompanied by the particles καὶ and δέ. Moreover, this section of the document presents a concentration of continuative clauses, a type of relative constructions recently investigated in the New Testament (Du Toit 2022) but still

unexplored in Greek papyri. These clauses establish a 'coordinate' rather than a 'subordinate' relationship, carrying on the narrative of the text, and can therefore assume the role of discourse connectives (Tabachovitz 1943: 11), linking different textual units.

I will therefore look at the different options of relativisation (Perna 2013) attested in petitions from the 1st to the 8th century and at the functions that these relative clauses perform within the background (e.g. descriptive, narrative) and in the broader context of the petition (e.g. with respect to the identity of the sender and addressee and the communicative goal), in order to investigate how a linguistic choice can be meaningful in the construction of the text as a rhetorical and social instrument.

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11. Yasmine Amory – 'Intervisuality in Greek documentary papyri. Observations on the relationship between texts and images'

Among the thousands of papyri that have been preserved from the sands of Egypt, only a small percentage is illustrated. Some categories of texts are more often supplemented by illustrations than others: this is the case for scientific and magical texts, but also a few literary papyri. In these circumstances, their main function is to support and facilitate the understanding of the text, or, in magical texts, to 'enhance their pragmatic efficacy' (Martín-Hernández 2020: VIII). While the interplay between text and image in magical texts has recently received great attention, this aspect is still understudied in documentary papyri.

As scholars have usually focused their attention on the actual text and its socio-historical implications, the relative inattention toward drawings *et similia* in papyri is also reflected in the editions: they are rarely interpreted, their description is sometimes limited to a simple caption such as 'drawing', and, when in combination with a text, they are not usually represented in the transcription, but are often confined to the commentary section. As a result, the drawing is rarely taken into account, preventing so far a multi-layered analysis of the artefact and of its relation with the text. This paper aims to fill this gap and to consider the significance of non-textual elements in Greek documentary papyri. After gathering the evidence, I will first pass them in review and will then focus on selected and significant examples. For their analysis, I will apply the theory of Intervisuality, whose potential to examine ancient Greek sources has recently been disclosed (see Capra and Floridi 2023). This new theoretical approach provides an ideal

framework for investigating the function of drawings, their contribution to the text – when there is one –, as well as the circumstances in which a person would make use of them.

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12. Marta Capano/Klaas Bentein – 'Spacing out speech acts: strategies for organizing textual units in Greek letters on papyrus'

Greek letters from the Roman period provide valuable insights into the pragmatic nature of communication. In this paper, we will show the methods and some of the results of the annotation of textual units in Greek non-official letters, illustrating how letters were both linguistically and visually framed, and the way in which such framings are related to each other. We want to focus on linguistic framings in particular, reporting on a pilot project that was conducted by Marta Capano on the textual organization of non-literary documents, as applied to the Greek private and business letters from the Roman period contained within the Everyday Writing project.

We will start by introducing the pragmatic typology that we developed to distinguish between different types of generic segments in letters (compare Buijs 2005 for Classical literary texts), recognizing textual *units*, *subunits*, *elements*, and *modifiers*. We will zoom in in particular on units and subunits, which are intimately connected to the much-debated concept of 'speech acts' (Levinson 2016). Adopting the terminology introduced by House and Kádár (2021), we recognize the existence of different types of speech acts in our corpus, such as 'complaint', 'description', 'greeting', 'request', 'suggest', 'statement', 'wish well' etc., and argue that these correspond to specific grammatical constructions in the Greek language. For example, suggestions are often expressed using the optative mood, while statements typically use the indicative mood. Descriptions, on the other hand, can involve participles and adjectives to convey attributes and qualities of a subject. Requests, rather than using plain imperatives, more often rely on the lexical component of the verb (such as employing verbs such as δέομαι or ἀξιόω, see Koroli 2016).

To some extent, the types of modifiers that are used also provide a cue to the sort of speech act we are dealing with: for instance, depending on the level of directedness, requests heavily rely on downgraders (e.g., ἐάν δοκεῖ) and upgraders (e.g., πρὸ πάντων, or ἐν τάχει), which are our best formal clue for identifying the presence of the speech act "request" (on requests and their modifiers, compare Soler, Flor, and Jordà 2005). Interestingly, though, we also see a tendency to express certain speech acts through formal components from other speech acts. The modifier γινώσκειν σε θέλω, for example,

is used in descriptions, but it shares certain features that we find associated with the speech act request.

In the final part of our paper, we want to explore the way in which generic segments of all sorts – but particularly units and subunits and their associated speech acts – are visually marked. While non-literary texts are generally written in *scriptio continua*, with little attention to the sort of visual highlighting we find in modern-day texts, some letter writers did make use of visual cues, horizontal and vertical spacing in particular, as a way of engaging in visual framing, too. By way of conclusion, we analyze in a select corpus of texts whether such visual cues tend to be more often associated with one or the other speech act.

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