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HOW TO SAY 'PLEASE' IN CLASSICAL LATIN

ELEANOR DICKEY

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HOW TO SAY ‘PLEASE’ IN CLASSICAL LATIN

When asked to translate into Latin an English word that had different Latin equivalents at different periods, a well-trained Classicist normally produces the Ciceronian term; coming up with a Plautine word that was superseded or even largely superseded by the first century B.C. is the mark of a specialist in early Latin.¹ But the word ‘please’ is different: when asked to give the Latin for ‘please’, Classicists have a tendency to think first of the Plautine terms *sis* and *amabo*, both of which are rare in the works of Cicero and indeed everywhere except in early Latin. This tendency has several causes. There is a striking morphological similarity between *sis* (contracted from *si vis*, ‘if you want’) and English ‘please’ (shortened from ‘if you please’); although in extant texts Latin *sis* does not really mean ‘please’ at all (see e.g. Adams [1984], 67; Dickey [2006]), this point of usage is often overlooked because of the morphological similarity to English ‘please’. *Amabo* is equally striking for other reasons: its literal meaning ‘I shall love’ makes no sense in context, and therefore readers of Plautus are forced to think about its ‘please’ meaning. Moreover, the Plautine ‘please’ words are very interesting both linguistically and socially, and much excellent work has been done on them.² All these factors have led to a lack of attention to the Classical Latin polite request formulae; such lack of attention is a pity, for the Classical equivalents of ‘please’ present a subtle system of usage that amply repays further investigation.

In his detailed study of politeness in Cicero’s letters, Jon Hall (2009) discusses a wide variety of different strategies that Cicero and his correspondents used to make requests polite: as in English, politeness is often conveyed by indirect phrasing or other means that do not involve the use of ‘please’ equivalents at all. Hall’s study is most enlightening, but he avoids discussion of the meaning and usage of particular words in favour of concentration on when, how and why politeness was deployed in Roman letters. As a result, his work offers no answer to the question of how Cicero or one of his contemporaries would have said ‘please’.

Rodie Risselada has written extensively on requests and commands in Latin (1989), (1993), which she analyses using speech act theory; although much of her corpus comes from early Latin she also looks at usage in later authors. Risselada provides much useful information on the words and constructions that Romans used to make requests polite, but because the focus of her work is elsewhere she does not address the basic question of how a first-century B.C. Roman would have said ‘please’.

A ‘please’ equivalent can be defined as a word or phrase commonly attached to requests to make them more polite.³ By this definition there is of course a

¹ I am grateful to Philomen Probert and J.N. Adams for their assistance with this project.

² Best known is the discussion of Adams (1984), 55–67 on *amabo* and *obsecro* as women’s language, but see also Carney (1964), Núñez (1995) and Lech (2010), 87–117.

³ It is of course also possible to have a syntactic definition of ‘please’ as being an inherently parenthetical term that can be added to a request without changing its syntax. This definition is difficult to use meaningfully in Latin, as the common ‘please’ words can be used in a variety

sliding scale of frequency, and no absolute cut-off point can be named. In English one expression, ‘please’, is by far the most frequent, but the same cannot be said of Classical Latin: there is no one word or phrase that is overwhelmingly more common than all the others. Instead there are four common terms that complement each other by being used in slightly different ways; these four terms are *velim* (‘I would like’), *rogo* (‘I ask’), *peto* (‘I seek’) and *quaeso* (‘I ask’).⁴

Among English speakers it is often observed that some people are less polite than others, and that more politeness is appropriate in some genres of communication than in others; similar observations are made in many other cultures and were no doubt also made among the Romans. In order to study something as socially variable as politeness it is safest to start from a corpus containing as few variables in speaker or genre as possible, to facilitate isolation of the effects of other, more important variables. In the case of polite requests the obvious such corpus is the letters of Cicero, all of which were written by the same person⁵ and belong to the same genre. All four of the terms that interest us are common in this corpus, which thus offers an ideal source for determining how and when they were used.⁶

Perusal of a few typical passages suggests that there were wide differences in the types of requests that each term might accompany:

illud tamen quod scribit animadvertas **velim**, de portorio circumvectionis; ait se de consili sententia rem ad senatum reiecisse. nondum videlicet meas litteras legerat ... (*Att.* 2.16.4)

But [in reading my brother’s letter] please pay attention to the point about excise duty on transferred goods. He says that he has referred the question to the Senate on the advice of his council. Evidently he had not read my letter . . .⁷

da igitur, **quaeso**, negotium Pharnaci, Antaeo, Salvio ut id nomen ex omnibus libris tollatur. (*Att.* 13.44.3)

So pray commission Pharnaces, Antaeus and Salvius to delete that name in all the copies.

of different constructions (e.g. *rogo ut facias*, *rogo facias* and *fac, rogo*) with no obvious difference in meaning, and those constructions can be analysed in a variety of different ways – see Halla-aho (2010) – so only considerations of meaning will be taken into account here.

⁴ Each of these four terms is found more than 100 times in prose of the first century B.C. Some rarer expressions are also interesting, but space forbids discussion of these. They include *oro* (‘I beg’), *obsecro* (‘I beg’), *amabo* (‘I shall love [you]’), *si me / nos amas* (‘if you love me / us’), *(per)gratum mihi erit si* (‘it will be [very] pleasing to me if’), *(per)gratum mihi feceris si* (‘you would do something [very] pleasing to me if’), *nihil gratius mihi facere potes* (‘you can do nothing more pleasing to me’), *si tibi videtur* (‘if it seems good to you’) and *si tibi erit commodum* (‘if it will be convenient for you’). In earlier and later Latin, of course, some of these terms are much more common: *obsecro* and *amabo* are commonly used with requests in early Latin, and *oro* is common in Pompeian graffiti.

⁵ Letters preserved with the Ciceronian corpus but not written by Cicero himself have been excluded from this analysis; their evidence will be discussed separately below.

⁶ The data on which this study is based were initially collected with an electronic search of the *Bibliotheca Teubneriana Latina* database (conducted November 2005 to January 2006); after collection of the raw data every passage was analysed individually to exclude examples of the relevant terms in contexts other than requests. (All the major ‘please’ words are also frequent in other uses, so the figures given in no way represent complete totals for the usage of the terms concerned.)

⁷ Unless otherwise noted, translations of Cicero’s letters are taken from Shackleton Bailey’s Loeb edition (1999, 2001, 2002); other translations are my own.

magno opere a te **peto** ut operam des efficiasque ne quid mihi fiat iniuriae neve quid temporis ad meum annu>m munus accedat. quod si feceris, magnus ad tua pristina erga me studia cumulus accedet. (Fam. 15.12.2, to L. Paullus)

To that end I earnestly beg of you to use your best efforts and prevent any unfairness to me or any extension of my year’s term [in Cilicia]. If you do that, you will generously crown your past tokens of good will.

The first request, that the addressee pay attention to something, requires very little effort on his part; the second, that he oversee the correction of an error in one of Cicero’s books, is somewhat more onerous; the third, that he involve himself in a political controversy, is a major imposition. And while the first and second requests are not presented as mattering greatly to Cicero, the third is clearly very close to his heart. In fact we have here a graded hierarchy of requests, from minor (requiring little sacrifice on the part of the addressee and bringing little benefit to the writer) to major (requiring significant sacrifice on the part of the addressee and bringing significant benefit to the writer). This hierarchy appears to be matched to a graded hierarchy of linguistic expressions: *velim* with the minor request, *quaeso* with the intermediate one and *peto* with the most significant one. To what extent does this pattern hold across the body of Cicero’s letters as a whole?

In order to get a broad overview of the distribution of these terms among different types of request, one can look at all the examples of a particular type of request in the letters. Two especially common types of request that differ greatly in terms of the amount of burden placed on the addressee and the seriousness with which Cicero normally treats them are requests that the addressee respond to the letter (including not only straightforward requests for letters, but also requests for advice and for information, which would have been conveyed by letter) and requests that the addressee do a favour for someone Cicero recommends. Each category admits of some internal variation in the importance of the requests, but in general requests in the first group are minor and those in the second group are major. The distribution of the terms under investigation with requests of these two types is shown in Table 1; this distribution suggests that *velim* and *quaeso* are far more common for minor requests than for major ones, while *rogo* and *peto* have the opposite tendency. To confirm this statistical evidence, one needs to look at individual passages representative of each type of request and examine the use of *velim*, *quaeso*, *rogo* and *peto* in those passages.

TABLE 1: USAGE WITH TWO COMMON TYPES OF REQUEST

Term	Request for response	Request for favour for friend
<i>velim</i>	154 (79%)	14 (12%)
<i>quaeso</i>	27 (14%)	1 (1%)
<i>rogo</i>	12 (6%)	54 (47%)
<i>peto</i>	1 (1%)	46 (40%)
Total	194	115

REQUESTS FOR A RESPONSE

The requests for a response are varied in character. Most ask for information or advice that Cicero would like to have but about which he expresses no pressing urgency. These passages can use *velim* or *quaeso* or, occasionally, *rogo*. For example:

plane hoc mihi explices **velim** in primis, maneatne in sententia ut mittam ad eum quae scripsi an nihil necesse putes. (Att. 13.18)

The point above all which I should be really glad if you would make clear to me is whether you hold to your opinion that I should address my work to him [Varro] or whether you see no need.

Novi si quid erit atque etiam si quid prospicies quod futurum putes, scribas ad me quam saepissime **velim**. (Att. 15.26.5)

If anything new turns up and also if you foresee anything you think likely to happen I hope you will write to me as often as you can.

qua re, etsi, cum tu haec leges, ego iam annum munus confecerō, tamen obviae mihi **velim** sint tuae litterae quae me erudiant de omni re publica, ne hospes plane veniam. (Fam. 2.12.1, to Caelius Rufus)

When you read this, I shall already have completed my year's assignment, but I hope that a letter from you will meet me on the road to tell me about the whole political situation, so that I don't come to Rome as a complete foreigner.

qua re **velim** pro tua perpetua erga me benevolentia scribas ad me quid videas, quid sentias, quid exspectandum, quid agendum nobis existimes. (Fam. 15.15.4, to Cassius)

So I would ask you, in virtue of your unfailing kindness toward me, to write to me and tell me what you see and feel, what you think I have to expect and ought to do.

tu, **quaeso**, si quid habebis novi; ego, si quid moliti erimus, ad te statim scribam. (Att. 10.12.3)

Write, pray, if you have any news, and I shall write to you immediately if I put anything in hand.

utrum igitur Asturae? quid si Caesar subito? iuva me, **quaeso**, consilio. utar eo quod tu decreveris. (Att. 13.38.2)

Shall I wait at Astura? But what if Caesar should arrive without warning? Pray help me with your advice. I shall follow your ruling.

quod autem me mones, valde gratum est idque ut semper facias **rogo**. (Fam. 7.25.1, to M. Fadius Gallus)

As for your word of warning, I'm very grateful, and hope you will always so favour me.

Some passages, however, indicate a more pressing need for information or advice. These are much more likely to employ *rogo* than those in the first group, though *velim* and *quaeso* are also used. For example:

sed mehercule **velim** res istas et praesentem statum rei publicae et quo animo consules ferant hunc $\sigma\kappa\upsilon\lambda\mu\delta\omicron\nu$ scribas ad me quantum pote. (Att. 4.13.1)

But I should really be grateful if you would write to me as much as possible about these matters, and the present political situation, and how the Consuls are taking this *tracasserie*.

quaeso, attende et me, quod adhuc saepe rogatus non fecisti, consilio iuva. scio rem difficilem esse, sed ut <in> malis etiam illud mea magni interest te ut videam. (Att. 11.22.2)

Do, pray, put your mind to the problem and help me with your advice, as you have not done hitherto despite repeated requests. I know it isn't an easy matter, but it is of great importance to me (if I can speak so in these evil days) to see you, besides the other considerations.

qua re ut id, quoad licebit, id est quoad scies ubi simus, quam saepissime facias te vehementer **rogo**. (Att. 10.4.1)

And so I do entreat you to do this [write me lots of long letters] as often as you can for as long as you can, i.e. as long as you know my whereabouts.

de re publica ex tuis litteris, ut antea tibi scripsi, cum praesentia tum etiam futura magis exspecto. qua re ut ad me omnia quam diligentissime perscribas te vehementer **rogo**. (Fam. 2.10.4, to Caelius Rufus)

On politics, as I wrote to you earlier, I expect from your letters the present and still more the future. So please write everything to me in full detail.

sed tamen id ipsum scire cupio, quid loquantur, idque ut exquiras meque certiozem facias te vehementer **rogo**.⁸ (Att. 9.2a.3)

Be that as it may, I am anxious for information on this very point, what they are saying, and I particularly request you to find out and let me know.

These passages confirm the impression that *rogo* is used for more major requests than *velim* or *quaeso*. There is clearly a certain amount of overlap between the situations in which the three terms can be applied, but in general *rogo* seems more likely to be attached to the more pressing requests for information and advice than are *velim* and *quaeso*. The difference can be clearly seen in a letter that uses both *rogo* and *quaeso* for the same request, but in such a way that *rogo* is still attached to a stronger appeal:

⁸ The conjunction here of three examples containing *vehementer* may give the impression that it is this adverb rather than *rogo* itself that carries the force of the request. This is not the case; the frequency with which *vehementer* occurs in my examples is atypical of the corpus as a whole and is the result of my having deliberately chosen examples with this modifier, which in my view makes the force of a request easier to see from a small passage of text.

quod si volumus, vereor ne adsequi non possimus nisi mutato loco. hoc quale sit, **quaeso**, considera. nam etsi minus urgeor meque ipse prope modum collegi, tamen indigeo tui consili. itaque te vehementer etiam atque etiam **rogo**, magis quam a me vis aut pateris te rogari, ut hanc cogitationem toto pectore amplectare. (Att. 12.35)

If that is what we [a euphemism for 'I' here] want, I am afraid we cannot get it without changing the locality. Pray think the question over. It is true that the pressure is relaxed and I am almost my own man again, but still I need your advice. So once again I ask you earnestly, more so than you wish or tolerate in a request from me to you, to give your whole mind to this question.

Peto is only once used with a request for a response, and this request is one of the more pressing ones. Cicero had attempted to switch sides in the civil war and was desperate about the fact that Caesar was not welcoming his move, so he wrote to Atticus and pleaded for advice, using both *peto* and *rogo*.

quam ob rem idem a te nunc **peto** quod superioribus litteris, ut, si quid in perditis rebus dispiceres quod mihi putares faciendum, me moneres. si recipior ab his, quod vides non fieri, tamen quoad bellum erit quid agam aut ubi sim non reperio; sin iactor, eo minus. itaque tuas litteras exspecto, easque ut ad me sine dubitatione scribas **rogo**. (Att. 11.16.3)

Therefore I make the same request of you now as in my previous letter, that if in a desperate situation you could perceive any course you thought I ought to follow, you should advise me of it. If I am admitted to grace here, which you see is not happening, I still don't see what to do or where to stay for the duration of the war; if I am spurned, all the less. So I expect a letter, and ask you to write it to me without hesitation.

At the other end of the spectrum of requests for responses are those requests that, rather than being burdens on the addressee for Cicero's benefit, are in themselves gestures of politeness. For example, when he requests information about the addressee's life, his family, or other personal matters, Cicero normally does not need the information, and in some cases it is doubtful whether he even wants it. The request is made as a gesture of politeness, being flattering to the addressee in so far as it indicates the writer's interest in him. Such passages almost always use *velim*, and the only other possibility is *quaeso*. For example:

quibus in locis et qua spe hiematurus sis ad me quam diligentissime scribas **velim**. (Q. fr. 3.3.4)

Do write to me in full detail where you will be spending the winter and with what prospects.

tu me de tuis rebus omnibus et de Lentuli tui nostrique studiis et exercitationibus **velim** quam familiarissime certiolem et quam saepissime facias (Fam. 1.9.24, to Lentulus Spinther)

I hope you will keep me abreast, as intimately and as often as you can, of all your own affairs and of your (and my) dear boy's studies and exercises.

ubi sis hibernaturus et qua spe aut condicione perscribas ad me **velim**. (Fam. 7.17.3, to Trebatius)

Please send me full details as to where you will be spending the winter, in what expectations or under what conditions.

tu **velim** et quid agas et quid acturum te putes facias me quam diligentissime certiore.
(*Fam.* 4.14.4, to Cn. Plancius)

I hope you will keep me informed as fully as possible of your activities and plans.

tu **velim** scribas ad me quid agas et ubi futurus sis ut aut quo scribam aut quo veniam scire possim.
(*Fam.* 6.2.3, to A. Torquatus)

Please write and tell me of your doings and your future whereabouts, so that I may know where to write or where to go.

quod quidem ipsum scribe, **quaeso**, ad me ut, dum consisto in Tusculano, sciam quid garriat, sin rusticatur, quid scribat ad te ...
(*Att.* 12.1.1)

Do pray write to me about her [your daughter] so that while I am at Tusculum I shall know what she is chattering about, or if she is in the country what she says in her letters to you.

These passages offer further confirmation that *rogo* and *peto* tend to go with more major requests than *velim* and *quaeso*, since the requests that are themselves gestures of politeness are both those in which the writer is least likely actually to care about whether the request is fulfilled and those that cost the addressee the least amount of sacrifice to fulfil. These requests, with which *rogo* and *peto* are never used, are therefore the opposite of the more pressing requests in which *rogo* is most likely to occur. The examples above also suggest that there is a distinction between the usage of the terms *velim* and *quaeso*. Though *velim* is generally more common than *quaeso* with requests for a response, it is overwhelmingly more common in precisely those types of request in which Cicero is unlikely to care about fulfilment. Thus, as suggested by the three examples with which our study began, *velim* seems to go with more minor requests than *quaeso*.

On one occasion Cicero uses both words in the same letter for the same request, but this letter, rather than being an exception to the distinction posited above, provides a particular illustration of this relationship between *velim* and *quaeso*:

tu **velim** litteras Cephalioni des de omnibus rebus actis, denique etiam de sermonibus hominum, nisi plane obmutuerunt. ego tuis consiliis usus sum maximeque quod et gravitatem in congressu nostro tenui quam debui et ut ad urbem non accederem perseveravi. quod superest, scribe, **quaeso**, quam accuratissime (iam enim extrema sunt) quid placeat, quid censeas; etsi iam nulla dubitatio est. tamen si quid vel potius quicquid veniet in mentem scribas **velim**.
(*Att.* 9.19.4)

Please give Cephalio a letter [for me] about all proceedings, even down to what people are saying, unless they have lost their tongues. I have followed your advice, especially in maintaining a fitting dignity during our interview and in holding out against going Romewards. For the rest, pray write with all care (we have now reached the final stage) what course you favour, what you advise – not that there is now any doubt. Still I should like you to write anything, or rather everything, that occurs to you.

Here Cicero starts with a completely routine request for information, then adds a more important request for advice, which he intends to follow and which he

therefore wants Atticus to give with great care. Then Cicero realizes that he already knows what Atticus is likely to advise, so he closes by producing a more general request that almost verges on the polite-gesture type. The initial routine request and the general one at the end use *velim*, while the more important one in the middle uses *quaeso*.

REQUESTS FOR FAVOURS FOR FRIENDS

The requests for favours for friends (letters of recommendation) also vary among themselves in intensity. Most treat the requests as of major importance; just as nowadays it sometimes seems as though every student for whom one reads a letter of reference is the best one the writer has ever taught, in Cicero's day it sometimes appeared that every friend on whose behalf he sought help was the one whose interests most mattered to him. This large group of strongly worded requests can use either *rogo* or *peto*, or indeed both. For example:

te, mi Plance, pro paterna necessitudine, pro nostro amore, pro studiis et omni cursu nostro totius vitae simillimo **rogo** et a te ita **peto** ut maiore cura, maiore studio nullam possim, ut hanc rem suscipias, meam putes esse, enitare, contendas, efficias ut mea commendatione, tuo studio, Caesaris beneficio hereditatem propinqui sui C. Capito obtineat.
(*Fam.* 13.29.5, to Plancus)

Now, my dear Plancus, I appeal to you in the name of my friendship with your father and our mutual affection, of our studies and the whole tenor of our lives in which we are so much alike: I beg you with all possible earnestness and urgency to take this matter up and regard it as mine. Press it with all your strength. Bring it about that by dint of my recommendation, your active support, and Caesar's good favour C. Capito enjoys his relative's estate.

commendo tibi hominem sic ut intellegis me <eum de> quo ea supra scripserim debere commendare, a teque vehementer etiam atque etiam **peto** ut quod habet in tua provincia negoti expedias, quod tibi videbitur rectum esse ipsi dicas. hominem facillimum liberalissimumque cognosces. itaque te **rogo** ut eum solutum liberum confectis eius negotiis per te quam primum ad me remittas. id mihi fratricum meo gratissimum feceris.
(*Fam.* 13.63.2, to P. Silius)

I recommend him [M. Laenius] as you will understand that I am bound to recommend a person of whom I have written the foregoing. And I most earnestly request you to expedite the business he has in your province, and to tell him in person what you consider to be proper. You will find him the soul of good nature and generosity. So I beg you to send him back to me as soon as you can, free and unencumbered, with his affairs settled thanks to you. My brother and I will be very much beholden.

nu<tus> tuus potest hominem summo loco natum, summo ingenio, summa virtute, officiosissimum praeterea et gratissimum, incolumem in civitate retinere. quod ut facias ita a te **peto** ut maiore studio magisque ex animo petere non possim.
(*Fam.* 11.22.2, to D. Brutus)

A nod from you can retain in the community a man [Appius Claudius] of the highest birth, abilities, and character, one moreover with a strong sense of obligation and gratitude. Let me request you to do so in all possible earnestness and sincerity.

igitur, mi Plance, **rogo** te et etiam **rogo** sic me dius fidius ut maiore studio magisque ex animo agere non possim, ut totum hoc negotium ita agas, ita tractes, ita conficias ut, quod sine ulla dubitatione apud consules obtinuimus propter summam bonitatem et aequitatem causae, id tu nos obtinuisse non modo facile patiare sed etiam gaudeas. qua quidem voluntate <te> esse erga Atticum saepe praesens et illi ostendisti et vero etiam mihi. quod si feceris, me, quem voluntate et [quem] paterna necessitudine coniunctum semper habuisti, maximo beneficio devinctum habebis, idque ut facias te vehementer etiam atque etiam **rogo**. (Att. 16.16b.2, to Plancus)

Accordingly, my dear Plancus, I ask of you – and I assure you I do so with the most earnest and sincere concern – that you handle and conduct and conclude this whole business in a spirit not merely of ready acquiescence but of positive satisfaction at our having gained our point with the Consuls, as gain it we did without any hesitation on their part through the unquestionable strength and justice of our case. That you are indeed so disposed towards Atticus you have often shown both in his presence and in mine. If you do this, linked as I have always been to you by feeling and hereditary friendship, you will bind me by a signal obligation. I beg you once more most earnestly so to do. [The request is on behalf of Atticus.]

a te hoc omni contentione **peto**, sic ut maiore cura, maiore animi labore petere non possim, ut ad ea quae tua sponte sine cuiusquam commendatione faceres in hominem tantum et talem calamitosum aliquem adferant cumulum meae litterae, quo studiosius eum quibuscumque rebus possis iuves. (Fam. 13.66.1, to P. Servilius Isauricus)

May I request you with all urgency – I could ask nothing with more earnestness and concern of mind – to let my letter add a little extra to what you would have done of your own accord, without anybody's recommendation, for so eminent and worthy a person in distress [A. Caecina], hoping that on this account you will assist him all the more actively in any way you can?

ego te plane **rogo**, atque ita ut maiore studio, iustiore de causa, magis ex animo rogare nihil possim, ut Albanio parcas, praedia Laberiana ne attingas ... quod ut facias te vehementer etiam atque etiam **rogo**; maius mihi dare beneficium nullum potes. id mihi intelleges esse gratissimum. (Fam. 13.8.3, to M. Rutilius)

I am simply making a request of you (and I could make none with more earnestness and sincerity, or in a juster cause) to spare Albanus and not to touch the properties formerly belonging to Laberius ... Allow me to ask you most pressingly to do so. You can confer upon me no higher favour, and you will find me most grateful.

Occasionally, however, a request for a favour for a friend is phrased in less urgent terms, and it is in these situations that *velim* and *quaeso* are likely to be used instead of *rogo* or *peto*. For example, the one passage in which *quaeso* is used with a recommendation of a friend comes in the context of the hypothesis that the introduction has been made already and the letter is not necessary:

quem si tu iam forte cognosti, puto me hoc quod facio facere serius. ea est enim humanitate et observantia ut eum tibi iam ipsum per se commendatum putem. quod tamen si ita est, magno opere a te **quaeso** ut ad eam voluntatem, si quam in illum ante has meas

litteras contulisti, quam maximus potest <m>ea commendatione cumulus accedat.
(*Fam.* 13.17.2, to Servius Sulpicius Rufus)

If you happen to have made Curius' acquaintance already, I imagine that this letter comes too late; for he is so agreeable and attentive that I expect he will have recommended himself to you by now. If that is so, I would none the less earnestly request of you that any measure of good will you have bestowed upon him prior to this letter of mine may be supplemented as largely as possible by my recommendation.

Only two recommendations are addressed to Atticus. Part of the reason for this scarcity is undoubtedly that Atticus was in less of a position to bestow favours than the officials to whom most of Cicero's letters of recommendation were addressed. It is possible, however, that another factor may also have been at work: Cicero may have been unwilling to importune on behalf of distant acquaintances a man like Atticus who was genuinely a close friend of his. Certainly the recommendations addressed to Atticus are phrased in notably less pressing terms than most others. Indeed one is so feeble that its identification as a recommendation is debatable and rests chiefly on its reference to the convention that the recommended person should be told about the letter by its recipient. It is therefore notable that these recommendations to Atticus never use *rogo* or *peto*, only *velim*:

A. Torquatum amantissime dimisi Minturnis, optimum virum; cui me ad te scripsisse aliquid in sermone significes **velim**.
(*Att.* 5.1.5)

I parted very amicably from A. Torquatus at Minturnae, an excellent person. You might intimate to him in conversation that I have written something to you.

sane **velim**, sive Plancus est rogandus sive qua re potes illum iuvare, iuves. pertinet ad nostrum officium. si res tibi forte notior est quam mihi aut si Plancum rogandum putas, scribas ad me velim, ut quid rei sit et quid rogandum sciam.
(*Att.* 12.52.1)

I should be very grateful if you would help him by putting in a word with Plancus or any way you can. I feel duty in the matter. If you happen to know more about it than I do or if you think I ought to ask Plancus, would you please write so that I know what it's about and what I ought to say?

When Cicero uses *velim* to addressees other than Atticus with requests for favours for friends, the recommendations are normally stronger than in these two examples. On average, however, they are weaker than the ones accompanied by *rogo* or *peto*. For example:

est praeterea, quod apud te valet plurimum, a nostris studiis non abhorrens. qua re **velim** eum quam liberalissime complectare operamque des ut in ea legatione quam suscepit contra suum commodum secutus auctoritatem meam quam maxime eius excellat industria.
(*Fam.* 13.12.1–2, to M. Brutus)

Furthermore, a point to which you attach special importance, he [Q. Fufidius] is not without a leaning towards our favourite pursuits. So I hope you will give him the most generous of welcomes, and do your best to ensure that his activity in a mission which he undertook contrary to his own convenience in deference to my wishes may shine as conspicuously as possible.

qua re **velim** quicquid habent negoti des operam, quod commodo tuo fiat, ut te obtinente Achaia conficiant. (Fam. 13.27.3, to Servius Sulpicius Rufus)

I hope you will try as far as you conveniently can to see that they settle whatever business they have on hand while you are governor of Achaia.

Occasionally *velim* and one of the other terms are both used in the same letter for the same request. As we saw earlier when *velim* and *quaeso* occurred in similar proximity, such usage can serve to illustrate the difference between the terms. For example, a letter to Dolabella begins with elaborate thanks for the addressee's assistance in response to an earlier request. Halfway through the letter, Cicero shifts gradually from thanks to making the further request that Dolabella continue to protect the recipients of his aid; at first this request is very gently phrased using *velim*, but by the end of the letter the request is being strongly pressed, and at that point *rogo* is used:

quod reliquum est, Buthrotiam et causam et civitatem, quamquam a te constituta est (beneficia autem nostra tueri solemus), tamen **velim** receptam in fidem tuam a meque etiam atque etiam tibi commendatam auctoritate et auxilio tuo tectam velis esse. satis erit in perpetuum Buthrothiis praesidi magnaue cura et sollicitudine Atticum et me liberaris, si hoc honoris mei causa susceperis ut eos semper a te defensos velis; quod ut facias te vehementer etiam atque etiam **rogo**. (Att. 15.14.3)

For the rest, you have put the cause and the community of Buthrotum on a secure footing, and we generally stand by the kindnesses we confer. Even so, may I express the hope that you will wish to regard them, taken as they now are under your wing and repeatedly recommended to you by me, as sheltered by your countenance and aid. The people of Buthrotum will have a lasting and sufficient bulwark and you will relieve Atticus and myself of no light trouble and anxiety if for my sake you consent to take responsibility so far as to consider them under your perpetual patronage; and once again I sincerely request you so to do.

Similarly a recommendation of Mescinius to Servius Sulpicius Rufus makes a vague request for general benevolence using *velim*, and then progresses to more urgent specific requests using *rogo*:

quod reliquum est, **velim** augeas tua in eum beneficia omnibus rebus quae te erunt dignae; sed <sunt> duo quae te nominatim **rogo**: primum ut, si quid satis dandum erit amplius eo nomine non peti, cures ut satis detur fide mea; deinde, cum fere consistat hereditas in iis rebus quas avertit Oppia, quae uxor Mindi fuit, adiuves in easque rationem quem ad modum ea mulier Romam perducatur. quod si putarit illa fore, ut opinio nostra est, negotium conficiemus. hoc ut adsequamur te vehementer etiam atque etiam **rogo**. (Fam. 13.28.2)

As for the future, I hope you will increase your benefactions to him by all means befitting yourself. But I have two specific requests. Firstly, if security has to be given in respect of final settlement of any claim, please see that security is given on my guarantee. Secondly, the estate consists, as near as makes no matter, of those items which Mindius' widow, Oppia, has made away with; please assist and find some means whereby the woman may be brought to Rome. It is our opinion that, if she thinks this is going to happen, we shall settle the business. Let me beg you most particularly to gain us this point.

It seems fairly clear from all this that Cicero attached *velim*, *quaeso*, *rogo* and *peto* to requests according to a hierarchy whereby *velim* went with the most minor requests, *quaeso* was slightly stronger, and *rogo* and *peto* were used for major requests – with ‘minor’ and ‘major’ being defined both by the importance of the request from the point of view of the speaker and by the amount of sacrifice being required of the addressee. There was no absolute cut-off point between different terms, and the most major requests with *velim* or *quaeso* are more significant than the most minor ones with *rogo*. Nevertheless the hierarchy holds in general terms.⁹

Within the letters making major requests, there is no clear difference in usage between *rogo* and *peto*. The fact that *rogo* is used for minor requests noticeably more often than is *peto*, however, suggests that *peto* belongs further up the hierarchy than *rogo*.

INDIVIDUAL ADDRESSEES

Many of the passages quoted above come from Cicero’s letters to his close friend Atticus. Such a high proportion of requests to one individual is not surprising, since almost half of Cicero’s surviving letters are addressed to Atticus. What is interesting, however, is that Atticus’ share of the different terms we have considered is very unequal: he is the addressee of 59% of the requests with *velim* and 80% of those with *quaeso*, but only 23% of those with *rogo* and 10% of those with *peto*. Part of this difference has to do with the non-linguistic fact that Atticus was more likely to receive some types of request than others; we have seen that Cicero very rarely sent letters of recommendation to Atticus, and on the other hand Atticus is the only correspondent whom Cicero asks for letters just in order to hear from him.

Non-linguistic factors, however, will not explain all the variation. For example, we have seen that requests for personal information about the addressee are normally accompanied by *velim*, but why are such requests with *velim* normally directed at addressees other than Atticus? Not because Cicero did not request such information from Atticus; requests for information on Atticus’ doings and his family are common in Cicero’s letters, but these requests simply use the bare imperative, without *velim*. For example:

quid agas omnibus de rebus et quid acturus sis fac nos quam diligentissime certiores.
(Att. 1.6.2)

Let me know in full detail about everything you are doing and intending to do.

tu quid agas, ubi sis, cuius modi istae res sint, fac me quam diligentissime certiore.
(Att. 1.14.7)

Let me have an account as full as you can make it of your doings and whereabouts and the shape of things over there.

⁹ The reason it holds seems to be that a term meaning ‘I ask’, like *rogo* and *peto*, puts the writer in the position of actively petitioning the addressee and acknowledges that he will be indebted if the favour asked is granted; ‘I would like’, which does not explicitly acknowledge the petition and the debt, is less suited to major requests. For more detail on this point, and an examination of Cicero’s use of these terms in the context of modern politeness theories, see Dickey (2012).

aliud quid? etiam: quando te proficisci istinc putes fac ut sciam. (Att. 2.6.2)

What else? Oh yes, let me know when you think of leaving Rome.

It seems that sometimes a request that can be made straightforwardly to a close friend takes *velim* when made to someone less close.¹⁰

Similarly, when Cicero asks correspondents other than Atticus to respond to his letters, he is more likely to use *rogo* than when making a similar request to Atticus.¹¹ What these two situations have in common is that in both of them Cicero treats a request as being more major when he directs it to someone other than Atticus.

Since it is intimacy that sets Cicero's relationship with Atticus apart from his relationship with most of his other correspondents, one would expect him to use a similar type of language to two other correspondents with whom he had a particularly close relationship, his wife Terentia and his brother Quintus.¹² Although there is much less information available in these two cases than for Cicero's language to Atticus, what does exist tends generally to match that from the letters to Atticus. For example, Cicero often asks Terentia and Quintus to respond to his letters, but he never uses *rogo* with such requests. And *quaeso*, which is much more common in usage to Atticus than to other correspondents, is also used to Terentia and Quintus, whereas *peto*, which is much less common in usage to Atticus than to other correspondents, is never used to Terentia or Quintus. When investigating the role of the addressee's identity in determining Cicero's language usage, therefore, it is better to class letters to Terentia and Quintus with the letters to Atticus, rather than with those to less familiar correspondents. When this is done we end up with the following results for the use of *rogo* with requests for a response: Atticus, Terentia and Quintus 5% (9 of 179 examples); others 12% (3 of 25 examples). The overall figures for the usage of the four terms come out as follows: Atticus, Terentia and Quintus receive 65% of *velim*, 86% of *quaeso*, 30% of *rogo*, and 10% of *peto*. These figures suggest that in general requests to intimates are treated as more minor than requests to people distant from the writer, as indeed is true in many other languages (Brown and Levinson [1987], 76–84).¹³

The situation with Quintus is also interesting in another way. Unlike Atticus, Quintus receives several full-scale letters of recommendation. These letters never use *peto*, only *rogo* and (once) *velim*.¹⁴ Though the sample is small, the nearly equal representation of *rogo* and *peto* in letters of recommendation addressed to others makes it likely that the avoidance of *peto* here is deliberate. If so, then given the

¹⁰ The Latin imperative is, of course, frequently used without any 'please' word in many types of interaction; the unsoftened imperative was simply not as rude in Latin as it is in English. For an extensive study of this and related phenomena see Risselada (1993).

¹¹ Atticus: 5% with *rogo* (9 of 169 examples); others: 9% with *rogo* (3 of 35 examples).

¹² Cicero's relationship with Terentia eventually soured, and their marriage ended in divorce; language indicative of close relationships is therefore not to be sought in Cicero's last few letters to Terentia. This detail is however irrelevant for our purposes, as those letters do not contain any of the terms under discussion: Cicero's final letters to Terentia are simply devoid of polite expressions. Likewise the eventual estrangement of Quintus from Cicero is not reflected in the use of 'please' equivalents as Cicero ceased to make requests of Quintus after their estrangement.

¹³ Brown and Levinson's theories are of course applicable to the use of the Latin 'please' words in other ways as well; for an analysis of the terms discussed here in terms of Brown and Levinson's framework and some other linguistic theories, see Dickey (2012).

¹⁴ *rogo*: *Q. fr.* 1.2.11 (twice), 1.2.14, 2.13.3; *velim*: *Q. fr.* 1.2.14.

likelihood mentioned earlier that *peto* belongs higher up the hierarchy than *rogo*, this could be a further example of the treatment of similar requests as more major when directed to non-intimate addressees than when directed to intimate ones.

CONTEMPORARY USAGE OUTSIDE OUR CORPUS

Cicero's letters provide the vast majority of evidence for polite requests in Latin prose of the first century B.C. Nevertheless some other evidence can be found, particularly in the letters from Cicero's correspondents preserved in the Ciceronian corpus. As these letters are very similar in date and content to Cicero's own, they provide a useful check on the extent to which his usage was typical for his day. The polite expressions used by Cicero's correspondents to accompany requests are tabulated in Table 2.

TABLE 2: USAGE BY CICERO'S CORRESPONDENTS

Term	Minor ^a requests	Major requests	Total
<i>velim</i>	10	4	14
<i>quaeso</i>	–	–	–
<i>rogo</i>	8	16	24
<i>peto</i>	1	13	14
Total	19	33	52

^a The division of requests into 'major' and 'minor' in this table and the next is necessarily crude, but finer divisions are inappropriate given the level of subjectivity involved in the classification. In general requests for political favours (whether for the writer himself or for his friends) have been classed as major, requests for a response have been classed as minor, and other requests have been allocated based on onerousness for the addressee and urgency on the part of the writer.

There is a significant difference between the social range of Cicero's own letters and those of his correspondents. Whereas more than half of Cicero's own extant letters are addressed to Atticus, Quintus and Terentia, none of the replies comes from any of these three, nor do any come from anyone else on an equivalently intimate footing with Cicero: all the writers whose letters to Cicero are preserved were fairly distant from him. Since the level of intimacy between speaker and addressee has an effect on the usage of 'please' terms, this difference in intimacy levels makes it methodologically unsound to compare the two corpora directly. The problem can, however, be overcome by removing from the corpus of Cicero's own letters all requests to Atticus, Quintus and Terentia; the results of this revised corpus, which is directly comparable to that of Cicero's correspondents, are given in Table 3.

TABLE 3: CICERO'S USAGE IN LETTERS TO NON-INTIMATES

Term	Minor requests	Major requests	Total
<i>velim</i>	126	14	140
<i>quaeso</i>	7	2	9
<i>rogo</i>	5	64	69
<i>peto</i>	–	65	65
Total	138	145	283

There is clearly a difference between these two sets of figures in the use of the two weakest terms, *velim* and *quaeso*, both of which are used much more by Cicero than by his correspondents. It is however difficult to tell whether Cicero's idiosyncrasy here lies in his use of these terms or in his propensity for making minor requests. Cicero's letters, even to non-intimates, contain substantially more minor requests than do those of his correspondents; it is indeed likely that letters making major requests of Cicero had a better chance of preservation than those making minor requests. It is therefore difficult to know how different the usage of Cicero's correspondents would have looked had more such requests been preserved.

A more significant difference concerns the use of *rogo*. In the non-Ciceronian letters *rogo* is by far the most common of the 'please' terms, whereas in Cicero's own letters it is less common than *velim* and approximately equal to *peto*. Writers other than Cicero not only prefer *rogo* to all other terms for major requests (in Cicero's own letters it is approximately equal to *peto*), but they use it for 42% of the minor requests (in Cicero's own letters it is used for only 4% of the minor requests). *Rogo*, which appears with requests for the first time in the first century B.C., became the dominant 'please' word not long after Cicero's time,¹⁵ and the beginnings of this usage seems to be reflected in the practice of his correspondents: probably Cicero was somewhat conservative in his moderate use of *rogo*.

Although requests are far more common in letters than in other literary genres, they are not completely absent elsewhere. Examining the usage of the 'please' equivalents in more literary prose can give us an idea of the register to which each term belongs. The results, shown in Table 4, suggest that there are significant register differences between the various terms. *Rogo*, which is entirely absent from Cicero's speeches and rare in his rhetorical and philosophical works, belongs exclusively to a more informal register when used with requests, and *velim* shows a strong preference for that more informal register. But *quaeso*, which is by far the most common of these terms in all genres except letters, clearly belongs to a much higher register.¹⁶ *Peto* does not show much preference for specific registers.

TABLE 4: USAGE WITH REQUESTS IN DIFFERENT GENRES OF CICERO'S WORKS

Term	Occurrences in letters	Occurrences in speeches	Occurrences in rhet. and phil.	Total
<i>velim</i>	398	8	15	421
<i>quaeso</i>	64	85	35	184
<i>rogo</i>	99	—	2	101
<i>peto</i>	72	26	9	107
Total	633	119	61	813

¹⁵ E.g. in the Vindolanda tablets 35 of the 37 'please' expressions use *rogo*; in the letters of Claudius Terentianus 13 of 16 'please' expressions use *rogo*.

¹⁶ Cf. Adams (1984), 60. There is also a large number of passages in the speeches and dialogues in which *quaeso* is used with questions; if they were taken into account, its popularity in those genres would be even more striking.

Once again the evidence of Cicero's contemporaries can be used to assess how typical his use of these terms was. The results can be found in Table 5.

TABLE 5: USAGE IN LITERARY PROSE OF THE FIRST CENTURY B.C.

Term	Cicero (excluding letters)	Other first-century prose (excluding letters)
<i>velim</i>	23 (13%)	3 (18%)
<i>quaeso</i>	120 (67%)	10 (59%)
<i>rogo</i>	2 (1%)	1 (6%)
<i>peto</i>	35 (19%)	3 (18%)
Total	180	17

These figures show a striking similarity: although the amount of non-Ciceronian evidence is small, it strongly suggests that in non-epistolary genres Cicero's usage of 'please' equivalents was indistinguishable from that of his contemporaries. In his informal language he may have been more conservative than other Romans of his day, but in literary prose there was no difference between Cicero's use of polite request formulae and that of other authors.

The extent to which *quaeso* is more frequent than the other 'please' terms in literary prose may seem surprising, as there is a common impression that *quaeso* had an archaic flavour. This impression is based on a passage in which Cicero comments to Atticus:¹⁷

Caesar autem mihi irridere visus est 'quaeso' illud tuum, quod erat et εὐπινές et urbanum. (Att. 12.6a.2)

Caesar, however, seemed to me to be making fun of your *quaeso*, which was attractive and elegant. (my translation)

Hofmann ([1951], 128; cf. Ricottilli [1985], 282), for example, states on the basis of this passage that *quaeso* was 'von Cic. Att. 12,6 gleichzeitig als archaisch und gewählt gewertet'. But this is a misinterpretation of the passage. *Εὐπινής* means 'attractive' not 'archaic',¹⁸ and in linguistic terms *urbanus* ('elegant', 'polished', 'witty' or 'smart') is the opposite of archaic;¹⁹ therefore Cicero is describing

¹⁷ It may also come from Quintilian's remark (*Inst.* 8.3.25) *satis est vetus 'quaeso': quid necesse est 'quaiso' dicere? 'Quaeso is antique enough: what is the need to say quaiso?'*. No doubt the word was indeed archaic in Quintilian's day, but as he was substantially later than Cicero this tells us nothing about the use of *quaeso* in the first century B.C.

¹⁸ The word was originally an epithet of objects, indicating an attractive appearance (cf. the 'neat, tidy' and 'bright, decorative' given by LSJ s.v.); its use for literary productions is a transferred sense derived from this meaning. Ps-Longinus (*Subl.* 30.1) uses the related word *εὐπνεία* to mean 'beauty' or 'elegance', Byzantine etymologica define *εὐπινής* with *εὐειδής* 'beautiful' (e.g. *Etym. Magn.* 395.4), and Cicero himself uses *εὐπινῶς* to describe something good enough to read aloud in public (*Att.* 15.17.2). The idea that *εὐπινής* means 'archaic' comes from the word's derivation from *πίνος*, which can refer to the patina on bronze statues and is sometimes used in a transferred sense for 'attractive qualities of earlier literature'; see Russell (1964), 149. But it is clear from the way *εὐπινής* is used that the relevant aspect of the patina is its attractiveness rather than its age.

¹⁹ Cicero's contemporary Varro (*Rust.* 1.2.1) contrasts the linguistic usage of the *recentes urbani* with usage *ut dicere didicimus a patribus nostris*, indicating that for him the language of the *urbani* was specifically innovative.

the usage not as archaic, but as attractive and elegant. But unfortunately the usage so described may not be simply *quaeso*: the antecedent of *quod* is not *quaeso* in general, but '*quaeso illud tuum*, Atticus' use of *quaeso* in a given context (the context referred to is, alas, no longer extant). So there is no certainty that Cicero is making a general statement about *quaeso* at all here; he is just as likely to be talking about the word's appropriateness in a particular context.²⁰

The frequent use of *quaeso* by Cicero and his contemporaries is thus not at all surprising; in the first century B.C. the word was the standard way of expressing 'please' in the higher registers of prose. Its absence from the letters of Cicero's correspondents (and its near-absence from Cicero's own letters to everyone except Atticus, Quintus and Terentia) indicates that it belonged to too high a register to be used in an informal genre like a letter. In this context what is surprising is Cicero's striking tendency to use *quaeso* in letters to intimates: as noted earlier, 86% of Cicero's uses of *quaeso* with requests in letters are addressed to Atticus, Quintus and Terentia. We might expect more formal, high-register language in letters to more distant acquaintances and informal, lower-register language in letters to intimates, exactly the opposite of Cicero's usage here.

Cicero's unexpected use of *quaeso* may be connected to his relatively sparing employment (especially in letters to intimates) of the lowest-register 'please' equivalent, *rogo*. Perhaps Cicero, though thoroughly skilled in the use and manipulation of all the registers of the Latin language from the most formal through the most informal, really felt most at home with a more elegant register than the normal conversational one: perhaps he simply enjoyed elegant Latin. When writing to those closest to him he may have allowed that preference for more elegant terminology to show itself in a way that he could not let it do when writing to more distant acquaintances, who might have taken his use of elegant language as being pretentious or standoffish.

If indeed Cicero simply liked the term *quaeso* because it was elegant, his comment to Atticus quoted above has additional resonance. Caesar, who was noted for his preference for plain language (cf. Willi [2010]), had disparaged Atticus' use of *quaeso*: perhaps that disparagement arose from a feeling that the word was too elegant, and Cicero, who genuinely enjoyed elegant Latin even (or perhaps especially) in private, sprang to its defence.

CONCLUSION

In Latin of the first century B.C. a variety of different words were used as the equivalent of English 'please', and there were significant distinctions of usage among these terms. *Quaeso* was elegant and belonged to a high register, so that many Romans refrained from using it in letters, while *rogo* was a new term with growing popularity in the lower registers. A writer like Cicero who used a variety of terms in his letters would distinguish between them by the magnitude of the

²⁰ Such seems to be Shackleton Bailey's interpretation in his commentary ([1966], 305), where he comments 'No doubt Atticus had overworked the expression *quaeso* in his petition'.

requests to which they were attached: there was a hierarchy in which *velim*, *quaeso*, *rogo* and *peto* were deployed in ascending order of the magnitude of the request.

University of Exeter

ELEANOR DICKEY

e.dickey@exeter.ac.uk

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