

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE OF UKRAINE  
Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv  
Educational and Scientific Institute of Philology  
Department of English Philology and Intercultural Communication

**Bachelor's thesis**

**SOCIAL STATUS FACTOR IN MODERN COMMUNICATION  
(BASED ON DOWNTON ABBEY SERIES)**

**Anna Blyshchak,**  
4th year student of the Education Program  
'English Studies and Translation  
and Two Western European Languages'  
Field of science: 03 "Humanities"  
Specialty: 035 "Philology"

Supervised by:  
**Olena Kaptiurova**

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## АНОТАЦІЯ

Ця бакалаврська робота досліджує зв'язок між мовою та соціальним статусом крізь призму соціолінгвістики, зосереджуючись як на теоретичних засадах, так і на практичному аналізі. Перший розділ закладає теоретичне підґрунтя, розглядаючи соціальний статус як багатовимірне лінгвістичне явище, на формування якого впливають культурні, соціальні та ситуативні чинники. У ньому аналізується, як мовна варіативність виступає маркером класової належності та соціальної ідентичності, а також підкреслюється роль стратегій ввічливості у регулюванні владних відносин у процесі комунікації. Окрему увагу приділено мові як інструментові влади, що циркулює в суспільстві, впливаючи як на утвердження авторитету, так і на прояви опору. Сукупність цих підходів формує міцну аналітичну основу для розуміння мови як соціального інструмента конструювання та легітимації ієрархічних структур.

Спираючись на цей фундамент, у другому розділі представлено соціолінгвістичний аналіз британського телесеріалу «Абатство Даунтон», який використовується як приклад для вивчення класової комунікації в Британії початку 20-го століття. Аналіз зосереджується на трьох мовних вимірах: вимові, лексичному виборі та прагматичних стратегіях. Акценти слугують чіткими маркерами соціального класу, причому аристократичні персонажі послідовно використовують стандартну вимову, тоді як персонажі з робочого класу розмовляють з виразними регіональними акцентами. Лексичні контрасти між офіційною, престижною лексикою та розмовною, діалектною мовою ще більше підкреслюють соціальний поділ. Прагматичні особливості, такі як директивні мовленнєві акти та стратегії ввічливості, показують, як мовці ведуть переговори про владу та підтримують соціальний порядок, причому персонажі з вищого класу

використовують непряму мову та пом'якшення, на відміну від більш прямої мови робітників. Цей розділ демонструє, що мова в «Абатстві Даунтон» функціонує не лише як відображення соціальної ієрархії, а й як механізм, за допомогою якого владні відносини встановлюються і відтворюються.

**Ключові слова:** соціальний статус, діалект, мовна варіативність, соціальна ієрархія, принцип ввічливості

## ABSTRACT

This bachelor's paper explores the relationship between language and social status through a sociolinguistic lens, focusing on both theoretical foundations and practical analysis. The first chapter establishes the theoretical foundation by exploring social status as a multifaceted linguistic phenomenon influenced by cultural, social, and situational factors. It examines how language variation functions as a marker of class and identity, highlighting the role of politeness strategies in managing power relations during interaction. The chapter also discusses language as a form of power that circulates within society, influencing authority and resistance. Together, these perspectives provide a robust framework for understanding how speech acts as a social tool to construct and negotiate hierarchy.

Building on this foundation, the second chapter presents a sociolinguistic analysis of the British television series *Downton Abbey*, using it as a case study to examine class-based communication in early 20th-century Britain. The analysis focuses on three linguistic dimensions: pronunciation, lexical choice, and pragmatic strategies. Accents serve as clear markers of social class, with the aristocratic characters consistently using Received Pronunciation, while working-class characters speak with distinct regional accents. Lexical contrasts between formal, prestige vocabulary and colloquial, dialectal language further highlight social divisions. Pragmatic features such as directive speech acts and politeness strategies reveal how speakers negotiate power and maintain social order, with upper-class characters employing indirectness and mitigation, in contrast to the more direct language of the servants. This chapter demonstrates that language in *Downton Abbey* functions not only as a reflection of social hierarchy but also as a mechanism through which power relations are enacted and reproduced.

**Key words:** social status, dialect, language variation, social hierarchy, politeness principal

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## INTRODUCTION

The significance of social status in shaping linguistic behavior across cultures has become a key focus within sociolinguistic research, particularly in contexts where communication reflects intricate social hierarchies. Prominent scholars such as William Labov, Peter Trudgill, James Milroy, David Sankoff, Norman Fairclough, and Robin Lakoff have laid the foundation for understanding how language serves as both a mirror and a mechanism of social stratification. Their work highlights how linguistic variation correlates with socio-economic class, gender roles, and power relations, and how these factors are expressed differently across cultural contexts.

The **subject** of this paper is social status as a key factor in modern communication. The **object** of this study is the linguistic tools—phonetic, lexical, grammatical, and pragmatic—used to convey social status within modern English communication.

The **relevance** of this research lies in the growing necessity to understand how language encodes social hierarchies in both real and fictional settings. In an increasingly globalized world, sensitivity to the ways in which power and status are expressed linguistically is crucial for effective and respectful intercultural dialogue.

The central **aim** of this study is to examine how language reflects social status, with the following objectives:

- To investigate the verbal indicators of social hierarchy in cinematic discourse;
- To explore politeness strategies and their variations in relation to social status;
- To examine the intersection of language, power, gender, and prestige as portrayed in *Downton Abbey*;
- To contrast aristocratic and working-class speech patterns through phonetic, grammatical, and lexical comparison.

*Downton Abbey*, a British period drama set in the early 20th century, serves as the primary case study for this research. The series offers a rich linguistic landscape that vividly captures the spoken realities of a class-divided society. Through the interactions between the Crawley family and their domestic staff, the show provides clear linguistic contrasts between the upper and lower classes. Standard English and Received Pronunciation (RP) function as markers of aristocratic prestige, while regional accents and colloquialisms signal lower socio-economic positioning. Gender also plays a crucial role, as the female characters' speech reflects both adherence to and resistance against the expectations of propriety and subordination. These dynamics make *Downton Abbey* a particularly valuable resource for analysing the performative aspects of language in the context of class and gender.

This research employs a combination of **methods** including discourse analysis, comparative analysis, and the descriptive method. Theoretical materials were synthesised and systematised; relevant episodes were watched to identify phonetic traits associated with both upper and lower class characters; dialogue scripts were examined to detect patterns in vocabulary usage; and interactional strategies were observed to reveal how power, politeness, and authority are constructed and negotiated through language. Particular attention was paid to the use of imperatives, hedging, modal verbs, and terms of address as markers of social rank.

The **novelty** of this paper lies in its interdisciplinary approach, combining sociolinguistics, media linguistics, and cultural studies to explore how status-based linguistic variation functions within a fictional but historically grounded context. Rather than merely categorising speech styles, the research seeks to show how these linguistic choices align with broader themes of social structure, personal identity, and cultural values.

The **practical value** of this study is multifaceted. It may serve as an educational resource for courses in sociolinguistics, cross-cultural communication, and discourse analysis. Moreover, it contributes to the understanding of how linguistic markers of social status can be interpreted and applied in media analysis, intercultural training, and even English language instruction focused on pragmatic competence and stylistic variation.

The **structure** of this paper includes an introduction, two main chapters, conclusions for each chapter, a general conclusion, a list of references, a list of illustrative material, and a summary.

## **1.1. Social Class and Its Linguistic Implications**

### **1.1.1. The Concept of Social Class: Definitions and Sociolinguistic Perspectives**

Language is more than just a tool for communication—it is a reflection of the society in which it is used. While every individual has a unique way of speaking, many linguistic patterns are shaped by broader social factors, with class being one of the most significant. Just as differences in speech can be observed between men and women or between children and adults, they also emerge between people from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Education, profession, and social prestige all influence the way individuals speak, affecting their pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammatical choices. These differences are not random; rather, they act as markers of status, much like clothing, manners, and cultural knowledge. People often adjust their speech, consciously or unconsciously, to fit the expectations of their social environment, reinforcing class distinctions in the process. Since language is inherently social, understanding how it is shaped by class offers valuable insight into the way societies function, how power is distributed, and how language both reflects and perpetuates social hierarchies [27, p.159].

Defining social class is one of the most persistent and deeply complex challenges in sociolinguistic research. While people intuitively recognize distinctions in status and power—separating professionals from laborers, white-collar from blue-collar workers—these everyday perceptions lack the precision needed for rigorous academic analysis. Scholars have long debated how best to categorize class, employing various intricate measures such as income, wealth, education level, occupation, and even geographic location. Each of these factors contributes uniquely to an individual's social standing, yet none alone can fully encapsulate the nuanced, multi-dimensional nature of class [27, p.160].

One of the most influential and profoundly debated theories on social class originates from the groundbreaking work of Karl Marx. According to Marxist

ideology, class is not simply a matter of prestige or respect but is fundamentally rooted in economic structures. The defining feature of class, in this view, is an individual's relationship to the means of production. In a capitalist society, the starkest and most critical divide exists between those who own capital—the bourgeoisie—and those who rely exclusively on selling their labor to survive—the proletariat. Capitalists thrive on profits, rents, and investments, while workers earn their livelihood only through labor, creating an inherent and unavoidable tension between the two groups. This opposition, Marx argued, is the driving force behind economic and social conflict [27, p.160].

However, the influence of class extends far beyond economic realities. Social hierarchies shape cultural norms, ideologies, and, most crucially for our discussion, language. The ruling class does not merely control wealth; it also dictates societal values, expectations, and standards—often embedding these deeply within language. Nowhere is this more evident than in the concept of a “standard” language. The idea that a particular dialect is inherently superior, refined, or prestigious is not a linguistic truth but rather a socially constructed belief that privileges the speech patterns of the dominant class. The dialects of the working class, by contrast, are frequently stigmatized, seen as uneducated, unsophisticated, or even improper, reinforcing existing social divisions [27, p.161].

Beyond this broad class struggle, Marx also identified variations within social groups that influence language. The conditions under which people work—their level of autonomy, social environment, and daily routines—shape their perspectives, values, and, inevitably, their speech. Industrial laborers, subjected to rigidly structured and highly supervised tasks, often develop a strong sense of solidarity and shared struggle, reflected in their speech patterns and communal linguistic identity. In contrast, middle-class professionals, such as managers, clerks, and independent workers, tend to experience greater individual autonomy,

encouraging an ideology of personal achievement and self-reliance. This difference in outlook manifests in language, as middle-class speakers often align their speech with standardized, socially prestigious forms, reinforcing their privileged status and social mobility [27, p.161].

While the Marxist approach sees class as a struggle between opposing economic groups, another way of looking at social class focuses more on status and hierarchy rather than power and conflict. This perspective, which is widely used in Western sociology and has had a strong influence on sociolinguistics, treats class as a gradual ranking system. Instead of dividing people into two distinct groups, it organizes them along a scale based on factors like income, education, and occupation—things that contribute to their overall social standing. One of the biggest advantages of this approach is that it allows researchers to measure class in a structured, objective way, making it easier to compare individuals within a study [27, p.161].

This method was introduced into sociolinguistics by William Labov in his famous 1966 study *The Social Stratification of English in New York City*. Labov built on the work of sociologist Michael [28, p.13], who had developed a ranking system for a survey called “Mobilization for Youth,” conducted in the same area a year before Labov’s research. Both Labov and Michael agreed that class should be defined using production-based factors (like a person’s job) rather than consumer habits. However, instead of focusing on a divide between the powerful and the powerless, Labov used a structured ranking system to place people along a social hierarchy, comparing their language use to their position on this scale [27, p.81].

To do this, Labov developed a ten-point socioeconomic index (SEC), which combined three main factors: education, occupation, and income. Participants were ranked on each of these categories—for example, someone with only a primary school education scored a 0, while someone with a college degree

received a 3. The total SEC score was the sum of these rankings, meaning scores ranged from 0 (lowest status) to 9 (highest status) [23, p.81].

Since working with all ten class levels wasn't always practical, Labov often grouped them into broader categories. The most common breakdown included four main groups: the "lower class" (scores 0–1), the "working class" (2–5), the "lower-middle class" (6–8), and the "upper-middle class" (9). He also introduced an alternative "social scale" (SC) that only considered education and occupation, leaving out income. In some cases, he argued, this simplified classification made it easier to see patterns in language use. While some critics have pointed out that reorganizing the groups like this could influence the results, Labov's method was still a major step in linking social class to linguistic differences [23, p.81].

His findings showed two types of linguistic patterns. Some features, like post-vocalic /r/ and certain vowel variations, changed gradually across class levels, suggesting they were part of ongoing language shifts. Other features, like the pronunciation of /th/ and /dh/, showed a much sharper divide between lower and higher classes, reflecting long-standing speech differences [23, p.123]. Later studies, such as Trudgill's [51 p.2] work in Norwich and Horvath's [16, p.5] study in Sydney, found similar patterns: newer linguistic changes tend to show subtle class differences at first, but over time, they become strong markers of social identity [21, p.19].

Sankoff and Laberge introduced the concept of the *linguistic market* as a more precise way to rank individuals in society based on their actual language use rather than broad social class categories [42, p.201]. Building on Bourdieu and Boltanski's work, they developed an index measuring how much a speaker's social position demands the use of a standard language. This method was tested in a study of linguistic variation and change in francophone Montreal [30, p.251]

Unlike large-scale occupational prestige studies that rely on lay judges, Sankoff and Laberge's rankings were made by eight expert sociolinguists familiar

with Montreal's speech community [32, p. 3]. These judges assessed 120 speakers based on their socioeconomic life histories, considering factors like occupation, household roles, and family background. Their rankings showed a high degree of consistency, reinforcing the validity of this approach [29, p. 108].

One key insight from their research is that linguistic variation does not always align neatly with traditional measures of social class. Some occupations, such as teachers, journalists, and receptionists, require individuals to use more standard language than others with similar levels of education, income, or status. Labov's department store study highlighted this pattern, showing that employees who interacted with customers used more prestige variants than those working behind the scenes. Even among workers in the same job with similar pay, language use varied depending on the prestige of the store [23, p. 2].

The *linguistic market index* developed by Sankoff and Laberge provides a more nuanced way to understand these patterns. It takes into account the degree to which an individual's economic activity requires adherence to standard language norms. While this approach has some methodological limitations, it offers a valuable refinement of social class definitions in sociolinguistics [6, p. 350].

### **1.1.2. Class and Its Interaction with Linguistic Other Dimensions**

Defining class becomes more challenging when considering its overlap with gender and ethnicity, as both can influence prestige and power. Men and women of the same class often exhibit distinct linguistic behaviour. For example, Guy et al. found that lower-working-class women were the most frequent users of a particular intonational change, while men in the same class showed significantly lower usage. Such differences suggest that gender plays a role in linguistic variation beyond class alone [27, p. 170].

In the 1970s, linguists, particularly those involved in feminist research, started examining how language reinforces social inequality and maintains patriarchal power. Studies on gender and communication show that women tend to do more of the “conversational labor,” supporting and facilitating discussions much like they are often pushed into lower-status jobs. Fishman observed that women frequently used minimal responses like “mm” and “yeah” to keep conversations going, whereas men were more likely to withhold or delay responses, controlling the flow of discussion [37, p. 465].

This imbalance is not limited to casual conversations—it extends to workplaces and professional settings, where women in authority are often interrupted or talked over. Research has shown male patients interrupting female doctors (West 1984) and male employees doing the same to female managers [37, p. 466]. Modern studies confirm that these patterns persist: a 2014 study at George Washington University found that men interrupted women 33% more often than they interrupted other men. During a three-minute conversation, men interrupted female partners an average of 2.1 times, while this number dropped to 1.8 when speaking with other men. Women, on the other hand, rarely interrupted their male counterparts—only once per conversation on average [58].

Linguist Robin Lakoff argued that women face a dilemma regarding linguistic choices due to ingrained biases. When they use tentative speech patterns—such as hedges (e.g., “sort of,” “you know”), disclaimers (e.g., “I’m not sure,” “I suppose”), and tag questions (e.g., “isn’t it?”, “right?”)—they may be perceived as likable but simultaneously viewed as lacking intelligence or competence. This perception often justifies their exclusion from serious discussions and positions of power. On the other hand, when women adopt more assertive speech patterns, they are considered competent and intelligent but may face social sanctions for deviating from traditional feminine expectations.

Women who reject tentative language are often labeled negatively, with terms such as "bully broad," "iron maiden," and "bitch" used to describe them [43, p.3].

Empirical research has validated Lakoff's claims. Wiley and Eskilson found that women employing assertive language were evaluated as effective leaders, though they were regarded as less likable compared to their more tentative counterparts [16, p. 994]. Similarly, studies by Juodvalkis, Grefe, and Hogue indicated that dominant female candidates were more likely to be recommended for job positions, yet they were also viewed less favorably than submissive women [20, p. 12]. Further evidence suggests that women who engage in self-promotion tend to be rated as more competent but are simultaneously perceived as less likable than those who practice self-effacement. This effect is particularly pronounced when women apply for leadership positions traditionally associated with femininity [41 p. 132].

Expectation States Theory offers a framework for understanding how status hierarchies emerge and persist within social interactions. According to this theory, gender—alongside factors such as race, ethnicity, and education—serves as a diffuse status characteristic that shapes assumptions about an individual's competence. Those perceived as having greater competence are expected to contribute more meaningfully to group tasks, while individuals with lower perceived competence are assumed to play a more passive role [7, p. 29]. Within social interactions, people subconsciously assign weight to status characteristics, determining whose contributions are valued and whose are not. As a result, individuals with higher status characteristics are more likely to take on leadership roles, offer suggestions, and shape decision-making processes. Conversely, those with lower status expectations are expected to conform, ask for guidance, and defer to others' opinions. Over time, this dynamic reinforces existing social hierarchies, as those initially granted more status continue to accumulate influence [38, p. 637].

Since status is collectively defined, societal expectations dictate acceptable behavior. High-status individuals are permitted to assert themselves, while low-status individuals are expected to exhibit deference. Any deviation from these norms is often met with social backlash. For instance, women who attempt to assert authority may find their contributions ignored or be interrupted more frequently. Such patterns ensure that established status structures remain intact [38, p. 504].

Expectation States Theory also suggests that the impact of status characteristics is context-dependent [7, p. 31]. In settings where education is a primary status marker, assertive individuals are assumed to be more competent and, consequently, wield greater influence. By contrast, individuals who display tentativeness despite having similar qualifications are often perceived as less capable. As a result, those who exhibit confidence and assertiveness tend to dominate discussions and decision-making processes, reinforcing their higher status, while tentative speakers struggle to gain influence. This reinforces the idea that perceived competence plays a crucial role in determining social and professional power structures [37, p. 466].

Race and ethnicity further complicate class distinctions, as systemic discrimination limits economic and social mobility for racialized groups, leading to a skewed class distribution. Research consistently shows that individuals from Black, Asian, and other minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds in the UK are disproportionately affected by poverty compared to their White British counterparts. According to the Social Metrics Commission (2020), nearly half (46%) of individuals in households headed by a Black/African/Caribbean/Black British person lived in poverty—amounting to 900,000 people—while the figure was significantly lower (19%) for White-headed households [31]. Further analysis by the Runnymede Trust (2022) found that BME individuals were 2.5 times more likely to experience relative poverty (earning below 60% of the

median income) and 2.2 times more likely to face deep poverty, with incomes more than 50% below this threshold [10].

Linguistic discrimination further reinforces racial and class-based inequalities. Raciolinguistic ideologies shape the experiences of Latinx populations, whose bilingualism is frequently perceived as a deficiency rather than an asset. Due to historical colonial relationships between the U.S. and Latin America, Latinx individuals are often stereotyped as either lacking full proficiency in English or failing to master Spanish, reinforcing the perception that their language practices require remediation. The assumption that racialized speakers must acquire "academic language" to fully participate in economic and intellectual spheres perpetuates systemic linguistic bias [13, p. 15].

A similar dynamic is evident in the UK, where linguistic discrimination against Black British English (BBE) mirrors broader racial and economic inequalities. BBE, a linguistic variety influenced by Jamaican Patois, West African Creole (Pidgin), White Mainstream English (WME), and Black British vernacular, is often misclassified as slang rather than recognized as a legitimate language system. This dismissal, rooted in anti-Blackness, contributes to systemic linguistic discrimination in education. Dr. April Baker-Bell defines this phenomenon as Anti-Black Linguistic Racism, whereby Black students' language is policed, corrected, and suppressed, forcing them to code-switch to White Mainstream English to avoid discrimination. Such linguistic marginalization reinforces negative stereotypes about Black speech, ultimately affecting students' self-esteem and academic confidence [8, p. 474].

The criminalization of BBE in schools highlights the intersection of language, race, and class. In 2021, a South London school banned the use of BBE vocabulary, punishing students for speaking in a way that was both natural and culturally significant to them. Such policies disproportionately affect Black students and contribute to higher exclusion rates—Black Caribbean students, for

instance, are five times more likely to be excluded than their White peers. These exclusionary practices demonstrate how language-based discrimination functions as an extension of broader racial and economic disparities [48].

Therefore, gender, race, and class are deeply interconnected, treating them as separate variables risks oversimplifying the social forces that shape language variation.

## **1.2. Linguistic Markers of Social Hierarchies**

### **1.2.1. Language as a Reflection of Power and Authority**

Power operates in different ways and across various levels of society. It exists within global institutions, national governments, workplaces, and even everyday conversations. Language plays a key role in reinforcing, challenging, and shaping these power structures. From the way nations regulate language policies to how individuals assert dominance in conversation, speech is deeply intertwined with authority. This perspective aligns with critical discourse analysis, particularly the ideas of Michel Foucault, who viewed power as something that is not simply imposed from above but is instead exercised and negotiated through discourse. According to Foucault, those in positions of power control the ability to define, categorize, and exclude others, shaping societal norms in the process [46, p. 2].

Foucault's view of power is especially significant because it challenges the idea that power is rigid or one-directional. Instead, it circulates within society, creating opportunities for both dominance and resistance. This dynamic is evident in the way people push back against linguistic norms, whether through social movements advocating for language rights or individuals resisting prescriptive grammar rules in informal speech [46, p. 2].

Beyond Foucault's framework, two other important concepts help explain the relationship between language and power: *hegemony* and *symbolic capital*.

The concept of hegemony, introduced by Antonio Gramsci, refers to power that operates through consent rather than force. It describes how dominant groups establish their authority by making their own interests seem like common sense [54, p. 23]. A clear example of linguistic hegemony is the dominance of Standard British and American English in media, education, and publishing. These varieties are widely accepted as the "correct" forms of English, while regional dialects or non-standard varieties are often dismissed or even stigmatized. The idea that only certain ways of speaking are prestigious or professional is not a natural fact but a product of this hegemonic influence [39, p. 28].

Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *symbolic capital* offers another way to understand why certain forms of language carry more prestige than others. Just as financial capital determines access to wealth, symbolic capital refers to the social value attached to specific linguistic traits. For instance, in the U.S., mainstream American English pronunciation is an asset in broadcasting, whereas a Brooklyn accent is not. Similarly, in Britain, Received Pronunciation (RP) is commonly associated with intelligence and authority, making it advantageous in legal or political settings. However, it is also true that perceptions of symbolic capital shift depending on context. While RP may signal credibility in news reporting, it can also come across as elitist or outdated in youth-oriented media, where regional accents might be seen as more relatable or authentic [46, p. 3].

In discourse, however, power often manifests through constraints imposed by more powerful participants on those with less power. Norman Fairclough categorizes these constraints into three general types:

1. **Constraints on content:** This involves what is said or done during the interaction.
2. **Constraints on relations:** This refers to the social relationships that form between participants in discourse.

3. **Constraints on subjects:** These are the 'subject positions' participants can occupy within the conversation.

While these categories often overlap and interact in practice, distinguishing between them helps clarify the different ways in which power operates in discourse [9, p. 43].

Powerful participants use these constraints to control or guide the contributions of less powerful participants. For example, a teacher may not directly control a student's speech but still limits what the student can say or do by the conventions of the professional discourse type in use. These conventions include expected roles and routines, such as the student's obligation to follow specific procedures or respond in particular ways. Thus, while direct control may not always be evident, the conventions set by the more powerful participant determine the limits of what is acceptable in the conversation [9, p. 45].

Moreover, power can be exerted not only through direct actions like issuing orders or asking questions but also through the selection of the discourse type. By determining which type of discourse is appropriate, powerful participants indirectly constrain what can be said or done. Interestingly, this form of constraint also acts as a self-imposed limitation, as the conventions of the chosen discourse type apply to all participants, even those in more powerful positions. However, more powerful participants may be able to bypass or manipulate these conventions to a certain degree, allowing them to exercise flexibility that is not available to those in less powerful positions [9, p. 46].

In discourse, power can therefore operate on multiple levels, directly and indirectly influencing what participants can say, how they relate to one another, and the roles they occupy within the conversation. The conventions that govern these interactions can both empower and restrict participants, shaping the flow of communication and reinforcing hierarchical power dynamics [9, p. 47].

Importantly, power not only affects how we communicate but also shapes the very evolution of language itself. Just as social change is driven by competing interests and shifting power dynamics, language change follows a similar pattern. The relationship between language and power is especially evident in multilingual societies, where the status of a language is deeply intertwined with social hierarchies and the dynamics between various groups [9, p. 47].

Earlier sociolinguistic theories often viewed bilingual or multilingual communities as stable systems in which languages were assigned to specific domains—one language for home, another for formal settings like school or work. However, more recent research has shown that language use is far more fluid, shaped by complex social, political, and power-driven factors. For example, Miriam Meyerhoff and James A. Walker’s study about variables like age, social class, gender, and ethnicity influencing language variation and change revealed that language choices are not determined by rigid rules but are influenced by shifting social and political factors [55, p. 109].

This insight is particularly important in contexts where dominant languages threaten the survival of minority languages. In the 1970s, Catalan sociolinguists in Francoist Spain resisted the suppression of their language, recognizing that linguistic survival was closely tied to power struggles. This battle for language status continues today in places like Hong Kong and the U.S., where debates over language planning and policy reflect deeper questions about identity, nationalism, and social inclusion [45, p. 898].

Ultimately, language is never neutral—it is always reflective of and responsive to the social structures in which it exists. The way we speak influences how we are perceived, and those in power shape the linguistic norms that define prestige. However, just as language can be a tool for maintaining authority, it can also serve as a powerful tool of resistance. Communities and individuals can use language to challenge prevailing power structures, resist oppression, and assert

their own identities. This ongoing dynamic of power and language is central to both social change and linguistic evolution [46, p. 5].

### **1.2.2. Standard English and Language Varieties as Status Indicators**

A widely accepted view in Britain is that language reflects social class, with individuals of higher standing more likely to use Received Pronunciation (RP) and Standard English, while those from lower social classes tend to speak regional accents and dialects. This linguistic stratification highlights deeper societal structures, where speech functions not only as a means of communication but also as a marker of identity and status. The famous line from *Pygmalion*, “Once you open your mouth, you are placed,” encapsulates this idea, emphasizing how language can immediately signal one’s social background.

The connection between language and social hierarchy has been extensively studied by sociolinguists such as William Labov and Peter Trudgill. Labov’s Department Store Study demonstrated how pronunciation correlates with socioeconomic status. Conducted in three New York department stores—Saks, Macy’s, and Klein’s—the study examined the presence or absence of postvocalic (r) in words like “fourth” and “floor.” Labov hypothesized that pronunciation patterns would reflect social stratification, with speakers from different socioeconomic backgrounds exhibiting distinct linguistic features [23, p. 3].

To test this, he asked salespeople a question designed to elicit the phrase “fourth floor.” His findings revealed a clear pattern: employees at Saks, the high-end store, pronounced (r) most frequently, those at the mid-tier Macy’s showed an intermediate usage, and staff at Klein’s, the lowest-ranked store, used (r) the least. This demonstrated that pronunciation was not random but systematically aligned with social hierarchy [23, p. 4].

Similarly, Peter Trudgill explored the relationship between language and class in Britain, particularly in rural areas. He observed that lower-class individuals often spoke regional dialects, whereas those of higher status tended to use Standard English. One striking example is the variety of terms for "scarecrow" across British dialects—such as "bogle," "mawpin," and "rook-scarer"—which illustrates how linguistic diversity is shaped by class and geography [26, p. 56].

Trudgill also studied pronunciation differences, finding that RP remained consistent among the upper class across different regions, while middle- and lower-class speakers exhibited significant regional variation in accent. His research reinforced the idea that both social and geographic factors influence linguistic patterns, maintaining distinctions between social groups [60, p. 417].

Gender is another significant factor shaping linguistic choices. Robin Lakoff argued that women's linguistic behavior is not due to language itself but rather their place in society. Because women have historically occupied a lower social position, their speech tends to be more polite and indirect compared to men's. For instance, women frequently use tag questions to soften statements, seek confirmation, or present suggestions in a less assertive manner. This tendency reflects broader societal expectations, where men's speech is often perceived as more authoritative and powerful [24, p. 54].

Like Labov and Trudgill, Lakoff's research highlights how language reflects and reinforces social structures. Individuals from higher social classes often adopt standardized speech forms to assert their status, whereas lower-class speakers retain regional dialects. This pattern extends beyond Britain; for instance, in China, Standard Mandarin is associated with prestige, with professionals and leaders using it in formal settings, while dialect use remains more common among lower socioeconomic groups [24, p. 417].

### 1.3. The Politeness Principle in Status-Related Communication

Politeness serves as a fundamental social mechanism that regulates human interaction by ensuring that speakers consider the feelings of others. It is widely viewed as a hallmark of civilized behavior and one of the most effective strategies for managing interpersonal relationships. The concept of the Politeness Principle was first introduced by P. Brown and S. Levinson and later refined by G. Leech [5, p. 15]. At its core, politeness encourages speakers to express themselves in a way that is not only courteous and sincere but also fosters mutual respect, creating a positive impression in communication. The Politeness Principle can be broadly defined through two key objectives: minimizing expressions of impoliteness while maximizing polite discourse. The terms "self" and "other" are central to this principle, as politeness fundamentally concerns the relationship between communicative participants. Typically, in a conversation, "self" refers to the speaker, while "other" corresponds to the listener, though it may also extend to a third party, whether present or absent. Leech's framework for politeness consists of several maxims, which tend to function in complementary pairs:

a. **The Tact Maxim:** This principle emphasizes minimizing costs to the listener while maximizing their benefits. For instance, consider the following exchange:

- A: "Would you like to take a break and grab some coffee?"
- B: "It would be my pleasure to share a cup of coffee with you."

Here, speaker B enhances politeness by shifting the benefit toward the listener, demonstrating greater consideration. In contrast, when a speech act imposes too much on the hearer, limiting their ability to choose freely, it may come across as impolite. An example of this can be seen in the following dialogue:

- Guest: "This dish seems undercooked."

- Waiter: "That's not my problem—I just serve the food, I don't cook it."

The waiter's response disregards the guest's concern and provides no resolution, making it dismissive and unhelpful [59, p. 54].

b. **The Generosity Maxim:** This maxim encourages speakers to minimize their own benefit while maximizing their own cost. Consider the following variations of a request for water:

- A: "Bring me a glass of water."
- B: "Can I have a glass of water, please?"
- C: "Would you be so kind as to bring me a glass of water?"

In these examples, the level of politeness increases as the speaker shifts the focus away from their own needs and formulates the request in a way that acknowledges the listener's role. A's direct demand sounds abrupt and is more likely to be met with resistance, while C's phrasing places greater effort on the speaker's part, making the request more considerate and increasing the likelihood of a positive response. A similar contrast can be seen in the following exchange:

- A: "Could you tell me the time, please?"
- B: "Figure it out yourself."

Speaker A's question adheres to the Generosity Maxim by making a minimal demand, allowing the hearer to respond willingly. However, Speaker B's blunt response disregards the principle, making the interaction more confrontational and potentially damaging the conversation [30, p. 54].

c. **The Approbation Maxim:** This maxim encourages minimizing criticism of others while maximizing praise. It is particularly relevant in situations where individuals seek validation or feedback. Consider the following responses to a question about an outfit:

- A: "How do you like my new dress?"
- B1: "It looks terrible on you."

- B2: "It's not bad, but I've seen nicer ones."
- B3: "It's a great choice! The color really suits you."

Speaker B1's response violates the Approbation Maxim by offering direct negative feedback, which is likely to cause offense. B2 avoids outright criticism but still lacks enthusiasm, making the response neutral at best. Only B3 fully adheres to the maxim by providing positive reinforcement, making this type of response preferable in social interactions where maintaining harmony is important [59, p. 55].

d. **The Modesty Maxim** states that speakers should minimize self-praise while maximizing self-criticism. This principle aligns closely with the Approbation Maxim, as both regulate expressions of positive and negative evaluations. However, while the Approbation Maxim focuses on how speakers assess others, the Modesty Maxim pertains to self-evaluation, emphasizing humility and self-deprecation in communication [19, p. 157].

For instance:

- *"I can't believe I completely forgot to submit the assignment on time! You probably remembered, didn't you?"*

e. The **Agreement Maxim** emphasizes minimizing disagreement and maximizing agreement in conversation. It focuses on whether the speaker's opinion aligns with that of the listener. The greater the alignment, the more effectively the maxim is observed.

For instance:

- *A: How about going for a run this evening?*
- *B1: Running sounds exhausting. Can't we just watch a movie instead?*
- *B2: Well, I guess that could work if we don't have other plans.*
- *B3: That's a great idea! I've been meaning to exercise more anyway.*

In this case, B1 directly rejects the suggestion, which creates discord. B2 does not openly disagree but expresses reluctance, indicating a lack of enthusiasm. Meanwhile, B3 fully embraces the proposal, reinforcing agreement and fostering a more harmonious interaction. However, complete agreement is not always possible or even desirable. When disagreement is necessary, it can be softened with indirect language, humor, or apologies.

For example:

- *Father: You have an incredible talent for spending money faster than anyone I know!*
- *Son: Well, Dad, I just believe in saving time, and since time is money, I'm actually being efficient!*

Although this response humorously acknowledges the criticism, it avoids outright contradiction, maintaining a polite and cooperative tone [17, p. 96].

f. **The Sympathy Maxim**, on the other hand, stresses reducing antipathy and increasing expressions of empathy in interaction. This maxim plays a crucial role in maintaining positive interpersonal relationships, especially in emotionally sensitive situations.

For example:

- *A: I've been feeling awful these past few days.*
- *B1: Well, that's what happens when you don't dress warmly enough.*
- *B2: You should really take better care of yourself.*
- *B3: That sounds terrible. I hope you get some rest and feel better soon.*

B1 and B2 focus on assigning blame rather than offering comfort, which can make the speaker feel worse. In contrast, B3 adheres to the Sympathy Maxim by expressing concern and providing supportive words, which align with polite communicative behavior [17, p. 96].

Nevertheless, it is also true that Leech's Politeness Principle faces criticism for its limited applicability and methodological flaws. It applies only to cooperative interactions, despite acknowledging both politeness and impoliteness [4, p. 161]. Leech's model is also criticized for cultural bias, as it prioritizes Western norms, particularly the Tact Maxim [18, p. 152].

When speakers wish to communicate uncertainty, they often rely on probability expressions. For instance, saying, "*It's possible I'll attend the conference*" allows a speaker to express hesitation about their plans without making a definitive commitment. However, probability terms serve more than just an informational function—they are also used as a politeness strategy, helping speakers navigate social interactions while managing face. In linguistic terms, *face* refers to an individual's public self-image, which they strive to maintain in social exchanges. Brown and Levinson categorize face into two components: **positive face**, which reflects a person's desire to be liked and appreciated, and **negative face**, which represents their need for autonomy and freedom from imposition. Any interaction carries the potential to threaten one or both aspects of face, and politeness strategies—including the use of probability expressions—are often employed to mitigate such threats [15, p. 5].

For example, rather than bluntly stating, "*You'll never finish it in time,*" which could damage the listener's positive face, a speaker might soften their assertion with a hedge, saying, "*It's possible you won't finish it in time*" or "*You might not be able to finish it in time.*" This subtle adjustment makes the statement less confrontational and provides the listener with some degree of autonomy in how they respond, thus addressing both positive and negative face concerns. However, because probability expressions can be used both to indicate genuine uncertainty and to manage face, their meaning is often ambiguous, and recipients must determine the speaker's true intent [15, p. 6].

Research highlights how face management influences the way probability expressions are interpreted. In a study by Bonnefon and Villejoubert, participants were asked to assess a doctor's statement that they would "possibly" develop either deafness or insomnia. Interestingly, participants perceived the probability of the more severe condition (deafness) to be higher than that of the less severe one (insomnia). This suggests that when a situation is more face-threatening—such as delivering bad news—the listener assumes the speaker is using hedging language as a politeness strategy rather than as an objective probability estimate [2, p. 749]. Similar findings indicate that listeners tend to infer politeness strategies more often when the speaker's face is at stake, rather than their own [3, p. 80].

A comparable pattern is found with **scalar expressions**, which are terms that exist along a continuum of meaning, such as *some* and *all*. According to the principle of **scalar implicature**, when a speaker says "*some*", it is typically understood to mean "*some but not all*". However, studies suggest that when an interaction involves face-threat, this implicature weakens. Bonnefon found that participants interpreted "*Some people hated your party*" as referring to a larger number of people than "*Some people enjoyed your party.*" This indicates that when delivering negative information, speakers may use "*some*" as a face-saving hedge rather than as an accurate quantifier. Listeners, in turn, recognize this strategy and adjust their interpretations accordingly. Further research by Bonnefon, Dahl, and Holtgraves shows that these effects become even stronger when the scalar term is preceded by a pause, as this signals that unwelcome news is about to follow [3,p. 9].

Face considerations also influence the interpretation of **connectives**, such as *or* and *and*. Normally, the use of *or* implies exclusivity—meaning that one option is true, but not both. However, Feeney and Bonnefon demonstrated that when *or* is used in a negative or face-threatening context, listeners are less likely

to interpret it as exclusive. This suggests that, just as with probability terms and scalar expressions, politeness concerns influence how people interpret seemingly straightforward language [11, p. 185].

In conclusion, politeness is more than just a social nicety—it actively shapes how we communicate and connect with others. Leech’s framework highlights key strategies for maintaining harmony. At the same time, research on probability expressions and implicatures shows that politeness doesn’t just influence what we say but also how others interpret it. Ultimately, these strategies help us navigate social dynamics, reinforcing both language norms and interpersonal relationships.

## **CONCLUSIONS TO CHAPTER 1**

Language is far more than a means of communication; it is a key instrument in shaping and reflecting social hierarchies. Sociolinguistic research has long demonstrated that linguistic variation is closely tied to social class, with scholars offering different perspectives on how class itself should be defined. While Marxist theory views class as a struggle between economic groups, Labov emphasized the role of status and hierarchy, showing how linguistic choices correlate with social stratification. Expanding on this, Sankoff and Laberge introduced the concept of the linguistic market, shifting the focus from broad class categories to how individuals’ actual language use determines their social positioning. These frameworks illustrate how language reinforces social divisions, particularly when intersecting with factors like gender and ethnicity.

The way language is perceived and evaluated is often shaped by power dynamics, which operate at both institutional and interpersonal levels. Lakoff argued that women’s language tends to be more tentative due to societal expectations, a claim later supported by Wiley and Eskilson, who found that assertive female speakers were seen as competent but less likable. Trudgill’s

research further highlights how linguistic prestige is distributed along class lines, with Received Pronunciation (RP) and Standard English linked to higher status, while regional dialects are often associated with lower-class backgrounds. These findings underscore how language functions as a status marker, reinforcing broader social inequalities.

At the core of these issues is the relationship between language and power. Foucault's theory of discourse illustrates how power is not merely imposed from above but continuously negotiated through language. This is evident in the role of politeness strategies, which serve as mechanisms for navigating social hierarchies. Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory, along with Leech's Politeness Principle, highlights how linguistic choices can either reinforce authority or mitigate power imbalances in communication. These strategies play a crucial role in maintaining social order, particularly in status-related interactions where language can serve to assert dominance or foster cooperation.

Ultimately, language serves as both a reflection of social structures and a means of reinforcing them. The privileging of Standard English in formal settings perpetuates class distinctions, while linguistic discrimination against marginalized groups reinforces broader systemic inequalities. Recognizing these biases is essential not only for understanding how language functions within society but also for challenging the structures that use language as a tool of exclusion.

## **2. LINGUISTIC MARKERS OF SOCIAL STATUS IN MODERN COMMUNICATION BASED ON DOWNTON ABBEY**

### **2.1. Social Class and Linguistic Variation in *Downton Abbey***

The representation of social class through language is a central theme in sociolinguistic research, and historical drama offers a compelling medium for examining the ways in which speech reflects and reinforces social hierarchy. *Downton Abbey*, a critically acclaimed British television series, serves as an ideal case study for analyzing linguistic markers of social status in modern communication. Set in the early 20th century, the series portrays the lives of the aristocratic Crawley family and their servants, highlighting the rigid class distinctions that defined British society during this period. Through its nuanced dialogue and character interactions, *Downton Abbey* provides a rich linguistic landscape for exploring how language varies across social classes and how these distinctions are maintained, challenged, or blurred over time.

A key reason for selecting *Downton Abbey* as the focus of this study is its meticulous attention to historically accurate speech patterns, making it a valuable source for examining how social class influences language use. The series clearly distinguishes the formal, polished speech of the aristocracy from the more colloquial and pragmatic language of the working class, demonstrating differences in pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and discourse strategies. The household's structure itself—divided into "upstairs" (the Crawley family and their guests) and "downstairs" (the servants)—mirrors the broader class divisions in British society. However, class distinctions in *Downton Abbey* extend beyond this binary framework. As Oakland notes, the social hierarchy in early 20th-century Britain was highly stratified, with the working class divided into skilled and unskilled laborers and the middle class further split into lower, middle, and upper sections based on wealth and occupation [34, p. 160]. The series reflects these complexities, as seen in the contrast between Lord Grantham, a traditional

aristocrat with inherited wealth and status, and characters like Richard Carlisle, a self-made newspaper magnate whose social mobility is tied to his profession rather than lineage.

Social class has historically been signaled through various markers, including fashion, manners, and, most significantly, language. While external indicators like clothing have become less reliable over time due to increased accessibility to luxury fashion, linguistic variation remains a crucial means of distinguishing social status. As Tomida emphasizes, accents serve as one of the most measurable indicators of class, with the upper class traditionally associated with Received Pronunciation (RP), the middle class favoring RP with minor regional influences, and the working class typically speaking with strong regional accents [50, p. 101]. This pattern is evident in *Downton Abbey*, where the aristocratic Crawleys exhibit refined pronunciation, while their servants and other working-class characters display distinct regional features in their speech. The series reinforces the long-standing prestige hierarchy of British accents, as documented by sociolinguists like Milroy & Milroy, where RP and Queen's English occupy the highest status positions, while working-class accents, particularly those associated with industrial towns, rank lower in terms of perceived prestige and social mobility [30, p. 4]. Additionally, contemporary sociolinguistic research reinforces the historical patterns observed in *Downton Abbey*. Sharma's study confirms that RP and Queen's English remain at the top of the social prestige scale, consistently associated with high status, correctness, and even aesthetic appeal [44, p. 68]. This aligns with Giles et al.'s "imposed norm hypothesis," which suggests that standard varieties are not only considered linguistically superior but also ideologically constructed as more pleasant and likeable, while industrial town accents—such as those of Newcastle, Birmingham, and Liverpool—occupy the lower end of the prestige spectrum [14; p. 87]. This hierarchical organisation is deeply embedded in the series'

portrayal of class-based language differences, demonstrating how pronunciation and speech patterns contribute to the perception of social status [22, p. 5].

### **2.1.1. Standard English as a Marker of Elite Identity**

*Downton Abbey* presents a diverse linguistic landscape, where speech patterns serve as a key marker of social class. The series employs a wide range of accents and dialects to distinguish between the aristocracy and the working class, reflecting the rigid class structure of early 20th-century Britain. The upstairs characters, primarily members of the Crawley family, predominantly use Standard English or Received Pronunciation (RP), whereas the downstairs staff exhibit features of various regional dialects, including Yorkshire, Cockney, Scottish, and Irish varieties. These linguistic differences not only reinforce the social hierarchy but also contribute to character development and historical authenticity.

One of the most defining linguistic features among the aristocracy is their adherence to RP, a high-prestige accent historically associated with the British upper class. RP became institutionalized in British public schools during the 19th century as a means of social distinction, with parents deliberately sending their children to elite institutions such as Eton College to distance them from regional speech patterns [34, p. 171]. In *Downton Abbey*, the Crawley family's speech reflects this tradition, with characters such as Lord Grantham and Lady Mary exemplifying the polished and refined qualities of RP.

In line with Wells' distinction between different forms of Received Pronunciation (RP), the variant referred to here as U-RP—short for "upper-class RP"—represents the most conservative and traditionally prestigious form of the accent. This variant is closely associated with Britain's upper class and has historically served as the phonological hallmark of elite institutions, including the Royal Family, Parliament, the Church of England, and the judiciary. However, it

is now spoken in its purest form by fewer than 3% of the population, and even members of the Royal Family, particularly the younger generation, have been observed using non-standard features such as glottalisation [21, p. 13].

Today, U-RP is largely viewed as outdated and socially marked, often limited to older speakers. Its overtly “posh” sound has led to it being stereotyped and even mocked in popular culture, especially in portrayals of aristocratic characters in media.

Upper-class Received Pronunciation (U-RP), as outlined by Wells, is characterized by a number of distinct phonetic features that serve as audible markers of social status. One such feature is the noticeably rounded quality of the *GOAT* vowel /əʊ/, especially prominent in words such as *don't* and *hope* [51, p. 263]. This can be observed, for instance, when Sybil speaks to her father: “I'll stay until after the wedding; I don't want to steal their thunder.” S2E8 (05:33) A similar use appears when Violet greets guests with “You hope you know why.” In both cases, the vowel /əʊ/ is articulated with exaggerated rounding, highlighting the aristocratic speech pattern. S1E1 (36:36)

Another distinguishing feature of U-RP is the quality of the final vowel in words such as *happy*, which often approaches [e], rendering words like *city* closer to [sɪte] [51, p. 263]. This can be clearly heard when Isobel Crawley states: “That must be our priority,” with the final syllable of *priority* pronounced as /i/ rather than the more modern /ɪ/. S2E6 (26:44) A comparable articulation appears when Lady Mary tells her fiancé, “Apparently Papa has lost a great deal of money,” again exhibiting this open vowel quality. S3E1 (46:46) Interestingly, this feature is not exclusive to U-RP; it is also characteristic of certain regional accents, including Yorkshire, which introduces an additional layer of complexity in sociophonetic interpretation.

U-RP speakers also tend to preserve the /j/ glide in words like *tune* and *suitable*, producing [ju] instead of the simplified [u] that appears in many non-

standard or working-class accents [51, p. 264]. For example, this pronunciation is present in Violet's conversations in: "How do we know Carlisle is *suitable*?" (28:12) and "Marmaduke was the grandson of a manufacturer." S2E2 (28:37) It also surfaces in Robert Crawley's confrontation with Branson: "You've been driving me about, bowing and scraping and *seducing* my daughter behind my back?" S2E8 (05:01) According to Trudgill's sociolinguistic findings, [ju] is considered a prestige variant typical of RP, while [u] is more frequently associated with lower social strata. The study further revealed that women tended to favor prestige variants like [ju] more often than men. However, Trudgill also noted that in certain male peer groups, especially within the working class, non-standard speech forms were more socially valued, suggesting a complex relationship between gender, class, and language use [51, p. 26].

In addition to these segmental features, U-RP is marked by particular realizations of central diphthongs, such as those found in *near*, *square*, and *cure*. These diphthongs often have a noticeably open or centralized second element, and in some cases, they may be smoothed into monophthongs [56, p. 265]. This is clearly illustrated when Lady Violet addresses Edith: "Edith, dear, you're a woman with a brain and reasonable ability. Stop whining and find something to do." S3E4 (08:10) The word *dear* here exemplifies smoothing of the /ɪə/ diphthong into /ɜː/. A similar instance occurs when Lady Sybil pleads, "Is there a smithy nearby?"—again featuring a centralised and monophthongal realization of the final vowel S1E5 (17:58).

Among all characters, the Dowager Countess, Lady Violet, most consistently exemplifies heightened U-RP pronunciation. In contrast, Lady Cora, who is originally American, exhibits a unique blend of RP features overlaid with an American drawl. Her slower, more deliberate speech style not only sets her apart from the native British characters but also adds a layer of elegance and

clarity, subtly aligning her with upper-class norms while maintaining a distinct transatlantic identity.

Prosodic and stylistic elements further reinforce the elite associations of U- RP. Emphatic stress and a liberal use of intensifiers—such as *very*, *enormous*, and *serious*—are hallmarks of upper-class discourse. RP is not only judged on phonetic grounds but also closely tied to extra-linguistic qualities such as refinement, politeness, and social grace. As Mugglestone notes, attitudes toward language often reflect broader social prejudices: what is deemed “correct” or “elegant” speech typically aligns with dominant class ideologies rather than objective linguistic merit [31, p. 50].

These aesthetic expectations extended to vocabulary as well. Lexical choices such as *papa* were preferred over more neutral or colloquial terms like *father* or *dad*, partly due to their sound and partly because of their courtly origins. According to Mugglestone, words like *papa*, *potatoes*, *poultry*, *prunes*, and *prism* were promoted for their phonetic elegance, particularly by characters like Mrs. General in Dickens’ *Little Dorrit*. The bilabial plosives in *papa*, for instance, were thought to shape the lips into an attractive, “proper” pout, aligning with the aesthetic and behavioral ideals expected of upper-class young women. These phonological and lexical preferences were not merely stylistic but served as tools for constructing and signaling elite identity—particularly in historical representations of aristocratic femininity [31, p. 151].

### **2.1.2. The Phonological Difference Between Aristocratic and Working-Class Speech**

In addition to the linguistic patterns exhibited by the upper-class characters, the speech of the servants in *Downton Abbey* is particularly noteworthy due to its greater phonological diversity when compared to Received Pronunciation (RP). Among the various dialects present in the series, the northern variety—

specifically, the Yorkshire dialect—stands out. This is unsurprising, given that the estate is located in Yorkshire, and several staff characters display linguistic features associated with this regional variety.

This section outlines the salient phonetic and phonological features of the Yorkshire dialect as described in Meier's *Accents and Dialects for Stage and Screen*.

According to Meier, rhoticity refers to how a speaker articulates post-vocalic /r/, i.e., the /r/ sound that occurs after a vowel. The Yorkshire accent is classified as non-rhotic, meaning that post-vocalic /r/ is generally not pronounced [26, p. 123].

One of the most distinguishing features of the Yorkshire dialect is the use of the vowel /ʊ/ where RP and General American (GenAm) would use /ʌ/. Meier refers to this as “one of the most distinctive of the Yorkshire signature sounds” [26, p. 125]. For instance, Gwen exclaims “*Hurry up!*” (02:46) S1E1, and Miss O’Brien comments “She's just a housemaid that fastens hooks and *buttons* when she has to” S1E2 (4:35).

The diphthong /aɪ/, typically realized as such in RP and GenAm, often has a closer onset in the Yorkshire dialect, resulting in /æɪ/ [26, p. 125]. Daisy's utterance “I never had that in my *childhood*. Someone you could always trust,” S1E6 (23:27) and Mrs. Hughes' line, “The *time* has come when we really have to make a decision” S1E7 (8:00), both exemplify this feature.

Another common Yorkshire trait is the realization of the so-called “long e” as a monophthong, /e:/ or /ɛ:/, rather than the diphthong /ɛɪ/ found in RP and GenAm [26, p. 125]. For example, Anna introduces herself “I'm Anna, the head *housemaid*,” (10:23) S1E1 and later remarks, “I'm trying to find some *space* on top of the cupboard to make life easier” S1E3, (1:17). Gwen's line, “Dad will think I'm a fool to leave a good *place*... but I don't believe that,” further supports this pattern.

The omission of initial /h/ is also frequent [26, p. 125]. Miss O'Brien asks, "Will we be seeing a lot of *him*?" (S1E3, 41:35), and Mrs. Patmore instructs Anna, "You've got a cold, I want you out of *here*" (S1E4, 05:18), both illustrating *h*-dropping.

Glottalization, particularly the use of the glottal stop /ʔ/ in intervocalic positions, is another marked feature. Examples include Daisy's "I'll do *it*" (S1E2, 10:40) and Gwen's questioning "*What*?" (S1E3, 1:30).

Words ending in -y, -ie, or -ey are often realized with /e/ instead of the RP/GenAm /i/ or /ɪ/. This can be heard in Miss O'Brien's remark: "You better have an answer *ready*" S1E3 (40:40), and Anna's statement: "Well, they do say honesty's the best *policy*..." S2E2 (37:00).

Interestingly, Mrs. Patmore's speech also reflects features of the Cockney dialect. In Season 1 discussing her declining eyesight with Mr. Carson, she pronounces -*ing* as /k/ instead of /g/: "Whoever heard of such a *thing*? A blind cook." S1E5 (36:48) Glottal stops and *h*-dropping, common in both Cockney and Yorkshire accents, are also present in her speech: "Easy, Daisy, he's a grown man! I suppose he can lift a *meat* pie." S1E1 (19:50) and "Daisy, did you *hear* me call, or have you gone selectively deaf?" S1E2 (05:12).

Another dialect represented in the series is Scottish English, spoken by Mrs. Hughes, who mentions her Scottish origin in Season 1. Her speech features several typical Scottish characteristics. For example, she consistently pronounces post-vocalic /r/, a trait of rhotic accents: "See here! In the *first* place, none of the rooms in this house belong to you." S1E3 (07:03). In Episode 6, she states, "I don't blame her, but it can't go on *forever*" S1E6 (03:20). Her intonation also differs from Standard English; she often ends statements with a high-rising contour, as in "Stop flannelling and get on before I *betray* you to Mr Carson!" S1E4 (41:35) and "Steady, William! This isn't a *race*" S1E7 (01:13).

Tom Branson's speech provides a contrast, indicating a more educated Irish background rather than one rooted in the working class. As Filppula notes, working-class Irish English is generally more marked by distinct grammatical and lexical features [12, p. 145]. Branson, however, exhibits none of the overt grammatical or lexical markers of Irish English typically associated with working-class speech. Nonetheless, his pronunciation displays some regional features.

For instance, Branson frequently uses /t/ lenition, producing a tapped or flapped /t/ in intervocalic positions, as in: “I'm *waiting* to take old Lady Grantham home” S1E4 (15:42). Occasionally, he pronounces /t/ as a fricative, as in “bit” from the line: “... so it was *a bit*... well, boring, so to speak” S1E4 (02:25). His pronunciation of *clothes* is also distinctive; the /o/ is lengthened, giving the word a monophthongal quality: “What happens to His Lordship's old *clothes*?” S1E4 (18:04).

Branson also tends to pronounce the *-ing* ending as /n/, a feature he exhibits when arguing with Miss O'Brien: “...helping the needy than sending stiff collars to the equator” S1E4 (18:20). Additionally, his speech is rhotic, as evident in his line to Lady Sybil: “Only, I couldn't help *overhearing yesterday*, and from what Her Ladyship said, it sounded as if you support women's rights.” S1E4 (32:20).

Branson's speech remains largely consistent throughout the first season, showing no noticeable shift in dialectal features over time. As previously discussed, while his accent includes some phonological traits associated with Irish English—such as /t/ lenition, variation in rhoticity, and vowel lengthening—his speech lacks overt grammatical or lexical features typically attributed to working-class Irish dialects. This absence, as noted by Filppula, may suggest a more educated background, setting Branson apart from stereotypical representations of Irish working-class speech [12, p. 146].

### 2.1.3. Grammatical and Lexical Differences Between Aristocratic and Working-Class Speech

Beyond pronunciation, grammatical structures and vocabulary choices also reflect the social divide between classes in *Downton Abbey*. This section explores how non-standard grammar and regionally marked words help construct the linguistic identities of working-class characters, in contrast to the formal and prestigious language of the aristocracy. The character of Daisy, in particular, provides a rich example of non-standard grammar typical of regional working-class dialects. Her speech frequently includes double negation, a well-documented feature of non-standard English varieties. For instance, in episode five of the first season, she says, “I didn’t do nothing” S1E5 (22:20), a construction that emphasizes negation in a way not permitted in Standard English but common in many vernacular forms. Another salient grammatical feature in Daisy’s speech is the substitution of *don’t* for *doesn’t* in third-person singular contexts, as in: “That don’t count” S2E6 (39:55).

Additionally, both Daisy and Mrs. Patmore exemplify another northern dialect feature: the use of the third-person plural pronoun *them* as a demonstrative determiner, replacing the standard *those*. This is evident when Daisy recalls a tragic event—“But he drowned in them icy waters” S1E5 (05:46)—and when Mrs. Patmore answers Anna’s question about dinner by saying, “Them, of course” S1E5 (29:51). This usage not only aligns with patterns found in northern English speech but also contributes to the construction of authentic regional identities within the series.

Regarding **vocabulary**, many words used by the Crawley family derive from Latin and French, whereas other words used by the servants are dialectal forms and slang terms which are not considered formal. Furthermore, they carry linguistic stereotypes.

There are some examples of these words in Tables 1 and 2, which show some of the words found in the series:

### Upper class vocabulary

Words	Origin	Characters
reluctant	Latin	Robert, Earl of Grantham, S1E1
ally	Latin	Violet, Dowager Countess of Grantham, S1E1
entirety	Latin	Violet, Dowager Countess of Grantham, S1E1
horrid	Latin	Lady Sybil, S1E1
perilous	Latin	Cora, Countess of Grantham, S1E2
ludicrous	Latin	Lady Mary, S1E2
luncheon	uncertain	Cora, Countess of Grantham, S1E1
vanity	Latin	Mr Carson, S1E2
termagant	Latin	Violet, Dowager Countess of Grantham, S1E2
amateur	French	Violet, Dowager Countess of Grantham, S1E2

impertinent	Latin	Dr Clarkson, S1E2
superfluous	Latin	Matthew Crawley, S1E2
attaché	French	Cora, Countess of Grantham, S1E3
alas	Latin	Kemal Pamuk, S1E3
conceal	Latin	Cora, Countess of Grantham, S1E3
fragile	Latin	Robert, Earl of Grantham, S1E3
trivial	Latin	Matthew Crawley, S1E4
odious	French	Lady Sybil, S1E4
impoverish	French	Robert, Earl of Grantham, S1E4
absorbed	Latin	Lady Mary, S1E5
splendid	French	Violet, Dowager Countess of Grantham, S1E5
ungallant	French	Matthew Crawley,

		S1E5
unsullied	French	Cora, Countess of Grantham, S1E5
ordeal	Germanic	Lady Sybil, S1E5
mercurial	Latin	Sir Anthony Strallan, S1E6
conundrum	Unknown	Isobel Crawley, S1E6
fastidious	Latin	Lady Mary, S1E6

### Lower class vocabulary

Words	Origine	Characters
chump	uncertain	Mr Molesley, S1E2
riddance	Middle English	Mr Bates, S1E3
grouch	Middle English	Thomas, S1E5
to flannel	Middle English	Mrs Hughes, S1E4
jiffy	unknown	Daisy, S1E6
noodle	Dutch	Miss O'Brien, S1E6
lad	Old Danish	Mrs Hughes, S1E7

clodhopper	Middle English	Thomas, S1E6
dozy	Middle English	Mrs. Parmore, S1 E6

An analysis of Table 1 reveals that 17 out of the 26 listed words are of Latin origin, 7 are of French origin, and only 1 can be traced back to Germanic roots. This distribution is noteworthy, considering that both Latin and French historically functioned as prestige languages in Britain, accessible primarily to the educated elite. In contrast, none of the words in Table 2 derive from Latin or French. According to *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, the terms listed in Table 2 are primarily slang or colloquial expressions rooted in Old English. Interestingly, most of the entries are adjectives typically used to refer to individuals. For example, “clodhopper,” meaning “peasant,” and “chump,” meaning “blockhead,” both emerged in the 19th century [47]. This lexical contrast highlights the division between the vocabulary associated with the educated upper classes and that of the uneducated lower classes. The remaining characters not discussed here exhibit less consistent patterns regarding this linguistic distinction and are therefore less central to the analysis.

Apart from the previously mentioned features, there are also variations in other groups of vocabulary, particularly in the expressions used by the characters when swearing or expressing surprise. Before discussing these examples, it is necessary to clarify that, like all speakers, those who use Standard English also swear and resort to informal language, although, naturally, the lexical choices differ. As Trudgill notes, “many people appear to believe that if someone uses slang expressions or informal turns of phrase this means that he is not speaking standard English” [21, p. 17]. Thus, all characters, regardless of their social background, occasionally use swearing and informal expressions, and it is

particularly interesting to analyze the diversity of such language found throughout *Downton Abbey*.

On the one hand, among the upper-class characters, examples can be found illustrating the use of emotionally charged language. Cora, Countess of Grantham, while discussing the newly hired valet with her husband, comments: “It is quite eccentric, even for you, to have a cripple valet.” S1E1 (31:24) The term "cripple" is extremely offensive and refers to a person whose legs or arms do not function in the usual manner; here, it is employed to underscore the valet’s perceived inadequacy in fulfilling his duties.

Lady Mary, her daughter, also uses sharp language. In the first episode, criticizing the valet’s physical incapacity, she comments, “I don't. How can a valet do his work if he's lame?” demonstrating the aristocracy’s expectation of physical perfection among their staff S1E1 (28:04).

Similarly, in the fifth episode, Robert, Earl of Grantham, expresses concern for Lady Sybil’s safety: “Oh, don't risk the traffic in Moulton, not now every Tom, Dick, and Harry seems to have a motor.” S1E5 (08:23) The phrase "every Tom, Dick, and Harry" reflects his worry about the increasing number of inexperienced drivers.

In the sixth episode, while discussing his daughter's political engagements, Robert also comments, “But there was quite a brouhaha,” employing a term that conveys a sense of uproar or noisy commotion. S1E6 (05:39)

On the other hand, among the servants, the use of informal and strong language appears even more prominently. For instance, Mrs. Patmore, expressing her annoyance with Daisy in the fifth episode of the first season, exclaims: “It's that bloomin' Daisy! I said she'd be the death of me, now my words come true!” The word "bloomin'" serves as one of many slang euphemistic substitutes for "bloody" and dates back to the 19th century [1, p. 141].

Miss O'Brien, in the final episode of the first season, uses strong language as well, saying: "Ten years of my life that's what I've given her. Ten bloody years." S1E7 (26:27) The word "bloody" is particularly noteworthy. While in American English "bloody" carries no improper significance, in Britain it has historically been considered one of the most offensive indecencies [1, p. 142]. Scholars have proposed that "bloody" might have originated from associations with bodily and sexual taboos, such as menstruation. However, the problem with these hypotheses is that when "bloody" first appeared as a common intensifier in written English around 1700, it seemed relatively harmless. Initially, "bloody" functioned as a mere intensifier, similar in force to "frightfully," yet over time, its offensiveness increased, eventually surpassing "damned" and approaching the level of unprintability associated with "fucking." As a result, "bloody" was often censored and written as "b\*\*\*\*y." One plausible explanation for this shift is the association of the word with vulgarity and its spread among the lower classes [1, p. 143].

Finally, Mr. Bates provides another example of the use of strong language among the servants. In the fourth episode of the first season, addressing Thomas, who had tried to exploit Daisy's naivety, he calls him a "bastard." Considering Mr. Bates's role as a valet, such language would normally be deemed inappropriate within the house. Nevertheless, given the more relaxed norms of speech in the servants' hall, the use of such expressions becomes acceptable in this context.

## **2.2. The Intersection of Power, and Prestige in Language Use in *Downton Abbey***

Following the First World War, although the aristocracy continued to occupy a place within British society, it simultaneously experienced a significant

decline in power. Whereas aristocratic families had once possessed vast expanses of rural land, the post-war period saw many country estates being closed, with much of the land transferred into the hands of former tenants [48, p. 203]. *Downton Abbey* seeks to portray the challenges faced by an aristocratic family confronted with these societal shifts: on the one hand, they endeavour to preserve traditional ways and values, while on the other, they are compelled to adapt to new realities and gradually relinquish their former privileges. This struggle for adaptation is not limited to the family members themselves but extends to the household staff as well. Consequently, the upheavals affect all characters to varying degrees, requiring them to continually renegotiate their roles within the household — and, by extension, to renegotiate their identities — a process that inevitably manifests linguistically.

In this context, language can be conceptualized as a “tool for interacting minds”, serving to reduce social distance and strengthen interpersonal relationships, but equally capable of reinforcing and maintaining social divisions when necessary [53, p. 28]. The series offers a wealth of illustrative examples of social hierarchies and interpersonal dynamics, reflecting the deeply entrenched structures of the British class system. As a result, power differentials are highly visible both within the aristocratic family and among the servants. For this reason, linguistic elements such as orders, requests, commands, and permissions — collectively categorized as directive speech acts — play a central role in many interactions depicted in *Downton Abbey*.

From a linguistic perspective, these directive speech acts are realized in various ways, nearly all of which involve the use of deontic modality. In the dialogues examined, the full range of deontic expressions is represented. Although central modal verbs such as *must*, *should*, and *can* are the most direct indicators of obligation, they are by no means the only forms utilized. Less frequent but noteworthy modal expressions, such as *had better* and *let's*, also

appear within the series. These forms, due to their greater indirectness, become particularly interesting from a conversational and pragmatic standpoint [35, p. 105].

In *Downton Abbey*, the imperative form — the most forceful and binding method of expressing necessity and obligation — seems to be the most prevalent manifestation of deontic modality. This observation is unsurprising, considering the hierarchical nature of relationships portrayed in the series, whether between aristocratic family members and their staff or between Mr Carson, the butler, and his subordinates. In such contexts, the issuance of commands through imperatives aligns with the general tendency for speakers of higher social status to adopt more direct linguistic strategies when addressing those of lower status. For example:

S1E4 (09:40)

**Cora, Countess of Grantham:** Of course, darling. As long as you choose what I choose. Branson, you'll be taking Lady Sybil to Ripon tomorrow. She'll be leaving after luncheon.

**Branson:** Certainly, Your Ladyship.

When Cora instructs the chauffeur Branson she uses a declarative statement to issue a directive. There is no modal verb softening the obligation. The sentence reflects deontic modality—expressing duty or permission—as part of a top-down power structure. This is a prime example of legitimated institutional discourse, where power is embedded in routine language and accepted roles [9, p. 48]. Branson's response confirms submission to hierarchical norms through formal address and a high-register adverb, signaling both deference and acceptance of power relations. His language reflects a reproduction of social order through discourse.

Despite the evident imbalance in power and the considerable social distance between the aristocratic Crawley family and their servants, the upper class typically interacts with their staff in a manner that is courteous and

respectful. Instead of issuing direct commands, they tend to phrase their requests in softened, polite language, even when exercising authority or expressing discontent. This careful use of language reflects strategies aimed at minimizing face-threatening acts and preserving social harmony within the hierarchical household. For example:

S1 E5 (11:57)

**Mrs Patmore:** I'm sorry, but I can't do more than my best.

**Mrs Hughes:** Is there some difficulty Your Ladyship?

**Cora, Countess of Grantham:** Dear Mrs Hughes, as you know, we're giving dinner on Friday for Sir Anthony Strallan.

**Mrs Hughes:** Yes, milady.

**Cora, Countess of Grantham:** Well, it seems he's particularly fond of a certain new pudding. It's called Apple Charlotte. Do you know it?

**Mrs Hughes:** I—I'm not sure.

**Cora, Countess of Grantham:** His sister, Mrs Chetwood, sent me the receipt. I'm trying to persuade Mrs Patmore to make it.

**Mrs Patmore:** And I'm trying to persuade Her Ladyship that I have already planned the dinner with her, and I can't change it now.

**Mrs Hughes:** Why not?

**Cora, Countess of Grantham:** Because everything's been ordered and prepared.

**Mrs Hughes:** Well, there's nothing here that looks very complicated. Apples, lemons, butter...

**Mrs Patmore:** I cannot work from a new receipt at a moment's notice!

**Daisy:** But I can read it to you, if that's the problem.

**Mrs Patmore:** Problem? Who mentioned a problem? How dare you say such a thing in front of Her Ladyship?

**Cora, Countess of Grantham:** Very well. We'll try it another time when you've had longer to prepare. We'll stay with the raspberry meringue.

**Mrs Hughes:** And very nice it'll be, too.

**Cora, Countess of Grantham:** I'm sure.

**Mrs Patmore:** Have you taken leave of your senses?

**Mrs Hughes:** I'm so sorry about that, milady.

**Cora, Countess of Grantham:** Never mind. I was asking a lot. Do look after that girl.

**Mrs Hughes:** Daisy? She's used to it. She'll be all right.

**Cora, Countess of Grantham:** I wonder. Mrs Patmore looks ready to eat her alive.

**Daisy:** I was only try to help.

**Mrs Patmore:** Oh! Judas was only trying to help, I suppose, when he brought the Roman soldiers to the garden!

Cora's conversation with Mrs Hughes and Mrs Patmore around the preparation of Apple Charlotte illustrates the negotiation of power through language.

**Cora:** *"I'm trying to persuade Mrs Patmore..."*

This line is a strategic use of modality and indirectness to mask an order as a collaborative effort. Rather than commanding, Cora discursively constructs herself as a participant, not an enforcer—a power mitigation strategy. The use of the progressive aspect ("I'm trying") portrays the action as ongoing, softening its authoritative force. The verb *"persuade"* presupposes the addressee's agency, further masking the power differential.

**Mrs Patmore:** *"I cannot work from a new receipt at a moment's notice!"*

Here, we see linguistic resistance. Mrs Patmore asserts her agency using strong epistemic modality ("cannot") and temporal immediacy ("at a moment's

notice”) to defend her professional boundaries. Her rising intonation and exclamation mark signal emotional intensity, making the resistance explicit.

Daisy’s attempt to help with the recipe reading:

*"But I can read it to you, if that's the problem."*

is met with a hostile reaction that reflects intra-servant micro-power dynamics. Mrs Patmore's rebuke, referencing Judas, employs biblical intertextuality to dramatize Daisy’s perceived transgression. This is an assertion of local hierarchical power, showing how power is also stratified within lower social classes and constructed through discourse.

**Cora (later):** *"Never mind. I was asking a lot."*

This is a clear face-saving act—Cora self-criticizes to maintain rapport and avoid damaging the fragile equilibrium between master and servant. Her use of past progressive ("was asking") again softens the force of the prior speech act. This utterance reveals how even in positions of authority, speakers often perform humility to maintain social cohesion.

Interestingly, direct and unmitigated directives appear more frequently in servant-servant interactions than in master-servant ones. Consider the following example from the first episode:

**Mrs Hughes:** Is the library tidy?

**Anna:** Yes, Mrs Hughes.

**Mrs Hughes:** Good. I want the dining room given a proper going over today. You can do it when they've finished their breakfast. Oh, heavens, girl! You're building a fire, not inventing it. How many have you done?

**Daisy:** This is my last till they come downstairs.

**Mrs Hughes:** Very well. Now, get back down to the kitchens before anyone sees you. S1E1 (04:19)

In this scene, Mrs Hughes issues multiple imperatives and evaluative comments with minimal politeness strategies. The stark contrast with the

aristocrats' linguistic behaviour reinforces the idea that power, when exerted within the same class or institutional rank, is often articulated more directly. This suggests that linguistic politeness correlates not only with power but also with the perceived need to maintain cross-class decorum, while within-class dynamics allow for more overt assertion of authority.

In the early 20th century, women's roles were still largely secondary to those of men, both socially and professionally. However, *Downton Abbey* illustrates the gradual shift that begins to take place, as many of the show's female characters undergo meaningful development in their personal lives and even begin to explore new professional paths. From a linguistic point of view, one interesting—if often overlooked—aspect of this gender portrayal is prosody.

Most of the female characters speak in a way that closely aligns with the prestige variety of British English, with the exception of Daisy and Mrs Patmore, whose regional accents mark them as working-class. The upper-class women, by contrast, speak with a soft drawl that is both clear and carefully measured. This prosodic feature adds to the overall impression of elegance and delicacy. In fact, it seems to reflect how society at the time expected women—especially women of status—to sound: graceful, calm, and composed. Their speech patterns support the gendered image they are meant to project, and prosody becomes part of that performance.

Another notable feature of the series, in relation to gender and language, is how characters handle taboo topics, especially those related to women's bodies and sexuality. Both male and female characters often avoid speaking openly about issues like menstruation or sex. Instead, they rely on vague expressions or euphemisms. For example, Lady Mary refers to menstruation simply as “women's stuff” S3E8 (04:09), while Lady Cora, addressing the stigma around premarital sex, tells Mary, “now you are damaged goods” S1E5 (27:59). These

phrases reflect not only social discomfort but also the limited vocabulary deemed acceptable for such topics at the time.

In addition to euphemisms, silence and gesture are also used to navigate difficult subjects. When Lord Robert discovers that Lady Cora is pregnant, he speaks with Dr Clarkson but avoids stating the matter directly: “How long has she ...?” S1E7 (06:54). He leaves the sentence unfinished and relies instead on nonverbal cues to convey what he means. This hesitation highlights the social awkwardness surrounding certain topics, particularly those related to female reproduction, and shows how language, silence, and body language work together to manage what can be said—and what must be left unsaid.

### 2.3. Politeness Strategies in *Downton Abbey*

In the early seasons of *Downton Abbey*, the rigid class structure appears as a deeply entrenched and nearly insurmountable divide. Although members of the aristocracy occasionally display compassion for those of lower status, the social system itself remains largely unyielding, often leaving both parties with limited means of genuine connection beyond sympathy. Within this context, social status emerges as a central factor influencing the way politeness maxims are expressed and interpreted throughout the series.

**Tact Maxim.** The tact maxim, arguably the most fundamental of Leech’s politeness principles, emphasizes consideration for others by encouraging speakers to minimize cost to the listener and maximize benefit to them. It is commonly expressed in **directives** (such as requests or suggestions) and **commissives** (such as promises or offers). For instance, in the exchange below:

Robert, Earl of Grantham: Did Mr Napier get off all right?

Mr Carson: He did, my lord. S1E3 (36:34)

Mr. Carson addresses Robert as “my lord,” demonstrating how characters in *Downton Abbey* carefully adhere to hierarchical address forms as a way of maintaining social decorum. These forms reflect the application of the tact

maxim, signaling deference based on status. Lord Grantham, as a hereditary aristocrat, is addressed with titles such as “Lord Grantham,” “your Lordship,” or “his Lordship” by those of lower rank or unfamiliar acquaintances. However, peers of higher rank, such as a Duke, may refer to him simply as “Grantham,” underscoring their elevated social position.

**Generosity Maxim.** The generosity maxim, closely related to the tact maxim, instead focuses on minimizing benefit to the self while maximizing cost to the self. It is also expressed through directives and commissives, but the speaker positions themselves as taking on more burden or sacrifice. A representative example appears in the first episode of the first season, when Cora welcomes her family’s lawyer:

**Cora, Countess of Grantham:** Mr Murray, how lovely to see  
you. Do come in.

**George Murray:** You're very kind, Lady Grantham, but I must get  
back to London.

**Cora, Countess of Grantham:** But you'll stay for luncheon?

**George Murray:** Thank you, but no. I'll eat on the train. In fact, if  
you'd be so good as to ask for the motor to be brought 'round?

**Robert, Earl of Grantham:** Mm. S1E1 (22:47)

In this exchange, both Cora and Mr. Murray employ polite refusals and offers, demonstrating self-effacing behavior typical of the generosity maxim, even within a formal and status-conscious environment.

**Approbation Maxim.** The approbation maxim directs speakers to minimize dispraise of others and maximize praise, and it is primarily expressed through **expressives** (such as compliments or apologies) and **assertives** (statements of belief or opinion). For example:

**Mr Carson:** Downton is a great house, Mr Bates, and the  
Crawleys are a great family. We live by certain standards and those

standards can at first seem daunting.

**Mr Bates:** Of course. S1E1 (18:04)

Here, Mr. Carson highlights the prestige of both the household and its owners, subtly encouraging Bates while reinforcing the values of the aristocratic environment. His use of positive language not only aligns with the approbation maxim but also sustains the hierarchical identity of the setting.

**Modesty Maxim.** In contrast to the approbation maxim, the modesty maxim requires speakers to downplay their own achievements and emphasize their shortcomings. This principle is also typically realized through expressives and assertives. For example:

**Anna:** Hey, what's all this?

**Gwen:** Oh, you saw their faces. And their right. Oh, look at me! I'm the daughter of a farmhand, I'm lucky to be a maid. I was born with nothing and I'll die with nothing. S1E3 (12:24)

Gwen's self-effacing language reflects her internalized class identity and illustrates how modesty functions as a form of social conformity. Her statements demonstrate the modesty maxim in action and reveal the psychological effects of strict class divisions.

**Agreement Maxim.** The agreement maxim encourages interlocutors to minimize disagreement and maximize agreement in order to maintain politeness and social harmony. It is especially evident in **representatives**, where even partial agreement is preferred over open dissent. In the third episode of the first season, during a discussion about Gwen's aspirations to leave service, traditional views are reinforced:

**Violet, Dowager Countess of Grantham:** But why? I should far prefer to be a maid in a large and pleasant house than work from dawn till dusk in a cramped and gloomy office. Don't you agree,

Carson?

**Mr Carson:** I do, my lady. S1E3 (22:18)

By affirming Lady Violet's opinion, Mr. Carson upholds both politeness norms and the values of the upper class. His response avoids potential conflict and reflects shared social attitudes about the desirability of domestic service.

**Sympathy Maxim.** The sympathy maxim promotes minimizing antipathy and maximizing shared emotional understanding. This is particularly important in expressions of condolence or empathy. A striking example occurs in Season 1, Episode 1, after the Titanic disaster:

**Carson:** I understand most of the ladies were taken off in time.

**Robert:** You mean the ladies in first class? God help the poor devils below decks. On their way to a better life. S1E1 (07:05)

Lord Grantham expresses deep sorrow for the steerage passengers who perished, referring to them colloquially as "poor devils." While this sympathy does not challenge the class system outright, it reflects a moment of moral discomfort with its consequences. Lord Grantham's remark reveals a degree of compassion constrained by his own traditional worldview. He empathizes with the less fortunate without questioning the systemic inequalities that contributed to their fate.

## CONCLUSIONS TO CHAPTER 2

A close linguistic analysis of *Downton Abbey* reveals the central role that language plays in both reflecting and reinforcing the strict class divisions of early twentieth-century Britain. The characters' speech—through accent, word choice, and pragmatic strategies—offers continuous insight into the social structures that define their world.

Accents and pronunciation serve as immediate and powerful indicators of class. Members of the aristocracy speak in Received Pronunciation or Standard English, while working-class characters use regional accents such as Yorkshire or Cockney. These phonological distinctions not only help to establish character identity but also contribute to the historical realism of the series.

Lexical choices further highlight class boundaries. Upper-class characters often use vocabulary derived from Latin or French, which has traditionally been associated with education and refinement. In contrast, working-class characters rely more heavily on words of Germanic origin, colloquial expressions, and regional dialects. These lexical differences subtly reflect the disparity in educational opportunities and cultural exposure between social groups.

The pragmatic use of language in the series also offers insight into power relations and interpersonal dynamics. The Crawley family tends to express requests and commands through polite, indirect forms, making use of modal verbs, mitigated statements, and hedging. By contrast, interactions among the servants—particularly between those of equal rank—tend to be more direct and unembellished. This contrast illustrates how speech patterns are shaped not only by personality, but also by one's position within the social hierarchy.

Leech's politeness maxims—particularly those of tact, modesty, and agreement—are frequently reflected in the dialogue. These principles guide interactions, helping to maintain social harmony, signal deference, and negotiate relationships marked by inequality. Moments of empathy or concern from upper-

class characters do not challenge the prevailing social structure, but rather underscore its emotional complexity.

In sum, *Downton Abbey* provides a compelling case for sociolinguistic study. The series illustrates how language does more than reflect social class—it actively maintains and legitimises it. Through carefully constructed dialogue, the show offers valuable insights into the intricate relationship between language, identity, and power.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has explored the intricate relationship between language and social status, drawing on both theoretical perspectives and practical analysis to demonstrate how linguistic variation reflects and reinforces social hierarchies. Language is far more than a means of communication; it is a social instrument—one that carries symbolic power and reflects the deeply embedded structures of class, race, and gender. From the earliest sociolinguistic studies to contemporary raciolinguistic critiques, scholars have shown that the way individuals speak is intimately tied to how they are perceived, valued, and positioned within society.

The theoretical framework established in the first chapter provided a foundational understanding of how language functions as a marker of social class. Marxist and post-Marxist theories emphasized class as a site of economic struggle, while Labov's empirical research showed how linguistic variables such as pronunciation and syntax are strongly associated with social stratification. Sankoff and Laberge's concept of the linguistic market refined this view, highlighting the economic and symbolic value of different speech forms within specific social contexts. Likewise, the works of Lakoff, Wiley and Eskilson, and Trudgill illustrated how linguistic behavior is gendered and classed, with Standard English and RP being markers of prestige and power, and non-standard varieties often carrying social stigma. This discrimination is compounded in racialized contexts, as seen in the marginalization of Black British English and Latinx bilingualism, where linguistic ideologies reflect broader patterns of exclusion and inequality.

Building on this theoretical foundation, the second chapter provided a detailed practical analysis of how these dynamics are dramatized in the British television series *Downton Abbey*. Set against the backdrop of early 20th-century England—a period marked by rigid class distinctions—the series offers a compelling case study in the sociolinguistics of class. Through careful

examination of pronunciation, vocabulary, and pragmatics, the analysis revealed how linguistic choices both reflect and construct social identities within the narrative.

Accents serve as one of the most visible linguistic markers of class in *Downton Abbey*. The aristocratic Crawley family speaks with Received Pronunciation, aligning them with the educated and economically privileged elite. In contrast, the downstairs staff speak with strong regional accents such as Yorkshire, Cockney, and Irish, clearly demarcating their working-class status. These phonological differences are not simply aesthetic; they symbolize the social boundaries that define the characters' lives and relationships.

Lexical choices further reinforce these divisions. Upper-class characters tend to use vocabulary rooted in Latin and French—languages historically associated with education, prestige, and governance—while the working-class characters favor colloquial and dialectal expressions derived from Old English and Germanic origins. This pattern was clearly demonstrated in the comparative analysis of Tables 1 and 2, which showed a stark contrast between the formal, elite-oriented language of the Crawleys and the informal, often pejorative language used by the servants. Even within informal registers, differences emerged in expressions of surprise, frustration, or vulgarity, where Standard English speakers used euphemisms or softened expressions, while the working-class characters employed direct or slang-based forms.

Pragmatic analysis added yet another layer to the understanding of language and power in *Downton Abbey*. Directive speech acts—commands, requests, permissions—were realized differently depending on the speaker's social status, reflecting the deeply entrenched class divisions of the early 20th century British aristocracy. Members of the Crawley family, despite holding considerable authority, rarely resorted to direct commands. Instead, they typically relied on mitigated and polite forms, often employing modal verbs such as could,

might, and would to soften the force of their directives. This strategic use of indirectness was not merely a matter of etiquette but a deliberate communicative choice that helped sustain their image as benevolent and refined leaders. By avoiding bald imperatives, they maintained a veneer of civility and moral superiority, while still exercising control. In contrast, interactions among the servant class were generally more direct and utilitarian, prioritizing efficiency over deference, especially in situations requiring swift coordination or task delegation. These patterns correspond closely with Leech's politeness maxims—particularly the tact, modesty, and approbation maxims—which function as social instruments for minimizing conflict and maintaining hierarchy. The tact maxim, in particular, proves essential in interactions between classes, where minimizing imposition becomes a way to signal respect and uphold established roles. Likewise, the modesty and approbation maxims reveal how individuals manage impressions in ways that align with their social standing, either downplaying their own value or emphasizing the virtue of others, depending on where they fall within the social hierarchy. In such a rigidly stratified environment, these maxims are not applied equally; rather, their use is shaped and often limited by the speaker's position within the class system.

What *Downton Abbey* ultimately reveals is that language is not only shaped by social class, but also plays a crucial role in maintaining it. The aristocracy's command of prestigious linguistic forms enables them to assert authority with subtlety, while the linguistic limitations or stigmatized speech of the working class reflects their constrained access to power and mobility. Even in moments of empathy or solidarity, the underlying structure remains unchallenged. As Foucault theorized, power is not only enforced through institutions but is embedded in discourse itself—and in *Downton Abbey*, language serves as both the script and stage on which these social dramas unfold.

In sum, this paper has demonstrated that linguistic variation—be it phonological, lexical, or pragmatic—is a central mechanism through which social class is expressed and maintained. By integrating theoretical insights with a rich, contextually grounded case study, it becomes evident that the study of language offers not only a window into historical class dynamics but also a lens through which to understand enduring structures of inequality in contemporary society. Recognizing the power of language in shaping social realities is therefore essential—not only for linguists, but for anyone concerned with justice, representation, and the possibilities of change.

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## SUMMARY

У цій бакалаврській роботі досліджується складний взаємозв'язок між мовою та соціальним статусом, що демонструє, як мовні відмінності не тільки відображають, але й активно підсилюють соціальні ієрархії. Мова є не лише засобом комунікації, а й потужним соціальним ресурсом, що сигналізує про ідентичність та приналежність, сформовану глибоко вкоріненими структурами класу, раси та статі.

Значення соціального статусу у формуванні мовної поведінки в різних культурах стало ключовим фокусом соціолінгвістичних досліджень, особливо в контекстах, де комунікація відображає складні соціальні ієрархії. Видатні дослідники, зокрема Вільям Лабов, Пітер Традгілл, Джеймс Мілрой, Девід Санкофф, Норман Ферклаф і Робін Лакофф, заклали теоретичний фундамент для розуміння того, як мова слугує одночасно дзеркалом і механізмом соціальної стратифікації. Їхні праці демонструють, що мовна варіативність корелює із соціально-економічним класом, гендерними ролями та владними відносинами, і що ці фактори по-різному виражаються в культурному контексті.

Предметом цього дослідження став соціальний статус як ключовий фактор сучасної комунікації, а об'єктом — мовні засоби (фонетичні, лексичні, граматичні та прагматичні), які використовуються для вираження соціального статусу в межах сучасного англомовного дискурсу.

Метою цього дослідження було вивчення того, як мова відображає соціальний статус. Для досягнення мети були поставлені такі завдання: дослідити вербальні індикатори соціальної ієрархії в кінематографічному дискурсі; проаналізувати стратегії ввічливості та їхні варіації залежно від соціального статусу; вивчити взаємозв'язок між мовою, владою, гендером і престижем у серіалі Абатство Даунтон; порівняти мовні особливості

представників аристократії та робітничого класу на фонетичному, лексичному та граматичному рівнях.

Теоретичну основу становлять ключові дослідження у сфері соціолінгвістики. Роботи Вільяма Лабова показали, що мовні риси, зокрема вимова і граматики, тісно пов'язані з соціальним класом. Поняття "лінгвістичного ринку", запропоноване Санкофф і Лаберж, пояснює, як різні мовні форми набувають символічної та економічної цінності залежно від контексту. Дослідження Пітера Традгілла та Робін Лейкофф виявили, що мовна поведінка також формується під впливом гендеру та соціального походження.

На основі цього теоретичного підґрунтя у другому розділі наведено детальний практичний аналіз того, як ці динамічні процеси драматично відображаються у британському телесеріалі «Абатство Даунтон». На тлі Англії початку 20 століття — періоду, що характеризувався жорсткими класовими відмінностями — серіал пропонує переконливий приклад соціолінгвістики класу. Завдяки ретельному аналізу вимови, лексики та прагматики, аналіз показав, як мовні вибори відображають і формують соціальну ідентичність у рамках розповіді.

Акценти є одним з найпомітніших лінгвістичних маркерів класу в «Абатстві Даунтон». Аристократична родина Кроулі розмовляє стандартною англійською мовою, що асоціюється з освіченою та економічно привілейованою елітою. Натомість прислуга розмовляє з сильним регіональним акцентом, таким як йоркширський, кокні та ірландський, що чітко окреслює їхній статус робітничого класу. Ці фонологічні відмінності не є просто естетичними; вони символізують соціальні межі, що визначають життя та стосунки персонажів.

Лексичний вибір ще більше підсилює ці поділи. Персонажі з вищого класу, як правило, використовують лексику, що походить з латини та

французької мови — мов, які історично асоціюються з освітою, престижем та управлінням, — тоді як персонажі з робітничого класу віддають перевагу розмовним та діалектним виразам, що походять з давньоанглійської та германської мов. Ця закономірність була чітко продемонстрована в порівняльному аналізі, який показав різкий контраст між офіційною, орієнтованою на еліту мовою Кроулі та неформальною, якою користувалися слуги. Навіть у неформальних контекстах характерними були відмінності у вираженні подиву, розчарування або вульгарності, де носії стандартної англійської мови використовували ефемізми або пом'якшені вирази, тоді як персонажі з робітничого класу використовували прямі або сленгові форми.

Прагматичний аналіз додав ще один вимір до розуміння мови й влади в Абатстві Даунтон. Директивні мовленнєві акти — накази, прохання, дозволи — реалізовувались по-різному залежно від соціального статусу мовця, що відображало глибоку класову ієрархію британської аристократії початку ХХ століття. Члени родини Кроулі, незважаючи на свою владу, рідко використовували прямі команди. Натомість вони частіше вдавалися до пом'якшених і ввічливих форм, вживаючи модальні дієслова, такі як *could*, *might*, *would*, щоб зменшити імперативність своїх висловлювань. Така стратегічна непрямота була не просто етикетом, а свідомим мовленнєвим вибором, який допомагав підтримувати образ шляхетних і культурних лідерів. Уникаючи прямих наказів, вони зберігали зовнішню ввічливість і моральну перевагу, водночас здійснюючи контроль. Натомість у взаємодії серед слуг мова була прямішою й утилітарнішою, зосередженою на ефективності, особливо в ситуаціях, що вимагали швидкої координації або розподілу завдань. Ці моделі добре узгоджуються з максимами ввічливості Ліча — зокрема, такту, скромності та схвалення — які

функціонують як соціальні інструменти для мінімізації конфліктів і збереження ієрархії.

У підсумку, дослідження показує, що мова — це не лише спосіб спілкування, а й інструмент підтримки соціальних ієрархій. Завдяки поєднанню теоретичного аналізу й культурного прикладу робота демонструє, як мовні форми формують та відображають суспільні структури влади.

