

# Research on Address Terms in *Downton Abbey* from the Perspective of Leech's Politeness Principle

Jiangshan You\* and Hongmei Ruan

Northwestern Polytechnical University, Xi'an, China

Email: youjiangshan@mail.nwpu.edu.cn (J.Y.)

\*Corresponding author

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**Abstract**—*Downton Abbey* as the representative of British classic historic TV drama has been widely acclaimed since its first episode, which arouses a frenzy of interest in British culture in Edwardian. One of the important reasons for its popularity is that the linguistic style of the script is consistent with the rigid English social hierarchy. It precisely describes the elegant manner and strict etiquette of British society as well as their modest and humorous behaviors. Address in the script as an linguistic symbol can reflect the national customs, history, traditions and politics well. The address forms are rich and accurate in this drama, which is suitable for this study. Therefore, this thesis chooses the addresses from all six seasons as a corpus and divides them into two categories: social address and kinship address. Besides, Leech's Politeness Principle is also used to analyze the social meaning and affective meaning that the addresses express in *Downton Abbey*, which is helpful in learning the use of address forms and promoting successful exchanges with different classes of English people. This thesis adopts exemplification and qualitative analysis method to make a detailed analysis of address terms. At the same time, through the combining method of static description and dynamic description, this thesis explores social culture and emotional expressions behind the linguistic characters. This study aims to enrich the address corpus and provide some references for intercultural communication to help English teaching and learning.

**Keywords**—address terms, *Downton Abbey*, politeness principle

## I. INTRODUCTION

Address terms are a common form of language expression in people's daily life. In order to express politeness and achieve the purpose of successful communication, address terms will not only change with age, gender and identity, but also be affected by context, interpersonal relationship and social status. *Downton Abbey*, a well-produced British drama, is popular with audiences both at home and abroad. Its standard addresses of aristocrats and subtle portrayals of master and servant roles provide a good language template and language environment for English learners.

*Downton Abbey*, as a critically acclaimed British TV series, is a true re-creation of the costume and etiquette of upper class at the beginning of the 20th century under the reign of George V, providing audiences with a cultural feast full of British characteristics. This is closely related to the linguistic design of writer Julian Fellowes, who has won an Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay and the 63rd Emmy Award for Best Writing for *Downton Abbey*. The success of *Downton Abbey* is not only due to its wonderful plot, but more importantly, the meaning conveyed by its profound language foundation. Julian Fellowes's exquisitely detailed portrayal of each character and their relationships, as well as

the abundance of address terms, makes *Downton Abbey* one of the best predicates to this study. With the change of society and thought, address terms as "barometer" also reflects the change of social culture, as some of the characters in the TV drama choose to stick to tradition, while others choose to follow the changing times. The address terms they use can be analyzed by Leech's politeness principle and classified into the social meaning and emotional meaning according to Leech's meaning theory. As the script has been commented by historians as "a high degree of restoration of that period of history", and vividly shows the social changes and psychological changes of characters before and after World War I, the study of address terms in *Downton Abbey* is of great cultural value to the historical study of that period.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Address terms are the most basic speech act used by people to communicate with each other, and the basis of polite expression. Seemingly simple, but of great significance, address terms can reflect people's personality, mood, education level and relationship. Therefore, linguists at home and abroad are eager to study them. With the progress of society and the transfer of language, address terms are also changing, which is worthy of further study from both synchronic and diachronic perspectives.

### A. Previous Studies on Address Terms

Since the 19th century, address terms have attracted the attention of linguists, which started the prelude of the study. Linguists have studied symmetric terms and address forms through some social investigations. In recent years, there are more and more researches on address terms in China, especially on the use and comparison of address terms in foreign classics.

As early as the 1960s, foreign linguists began to study address terms. Lewis H. Morgan, an American anthropologist, began the study of address terms in the 19th century, examining conjugal and kinship relations in primitive societies based on questionnaire responses and his own field of study. Later, he discovered the principles of social organization and development of early human beings, and compiled a book called *Ancient Society* in 1877. He then came up with the study of family relations and related terms between Indian relatives from the form of address terms [1]. Later, Roger Brown, a linguist, continued the research on address forms in American language in his book *Address Terms*, and proposed two well-known semantic factors that restrict pronoun use: power and solidarity. In 1960, Brown & Gilman published an academic paper titled "The Pronoun of

Power and Solidarity” marked with V and T. V stands for respect and politeness; T stands for closeness and kindness. Brown and Gilman’s research reveals: the power semantics contained in pronoun symmetry are not interchangeable, just as it reflects the differences in social status and identity between the two speakers [2]. In 1961, Brown teamed up with Marguerite Ford to publish a scholarly article called “Address in American English” which kicked off the sociolinguistics address era. Their research shows that in American society, there are three semantic modes to choose from in the address system: calling each other by name; using titles plus surnames for each other; asymmetric selection. Brown and Ford’s research also shows that, like the choice of symmetrical form, the choice of addressing style is also affected by the context and the speaker’s emotions [3]. In 1966, Ervin-Tripp, an American linguist, based on the research of Brown and Ford, summarized the research on address problems since the 1970s in his article “Sociolinguistic Rules of Address”. This paper enumerates and analyzes many possible constraints in the choice of address, and describes the academic world in the American west and the address system in Russian, Yiddish and Puerto Rican in the 19th century by means of a computer flow chart. After that, some scholars conducted a detailed study on the use of address in English, German, French, Russian and other Western languages [4].

Since the 20th century, domestic linguists have begun to study sociolinguistics, and address terms have gradually gained their attention. In “Analysis of Address Terms in English”, Li Boli divides address into three parts: name, social address and kinship address. He has studied how names are formed in English, how they are named and what they mean. In the social address, he specifically analyzes various general address, job title address and professional address, and explains the environmental conditions in the actual use. In the kinship address, according to the cultural customs and language habits of different English countries, he sums up the daily communicative use of kinship address. It has a wide coverage and strong practicability, which provides an important reference value for cross-cultural communication [5]. In “A Preliminary Study of Address Terms”, Kong [6] studies the general picture of address terms from sociolinguistics and pragmatics, and summarizes the main theories of address terms, including Brown and Gilman, Brown and Ford, and Ervin-Tripp. For the changes of address forms, the article also makes an elaboration. From the diachronic angle and the synchronic angle, it respectively analyzes the changes and the reasons behind it, and illustrates that the semantics of address will even change. Finally, the author summarizes the different cultural connotations of address terms in Chinese and English. Wang focuses on the differences between Chinese and English social address and the cultural connotations behind the differences in her paper “Comparative Analysis of Social Address Between Chinese and English”. She also discusses several factors that affect address, such as context, social status, social role, motivation, emotion, attitude and other factors [6].

### B. Previous Studies on *Downton Abbey*

*Downton Abbey* has long been a popular British TV series all over the world. With its increasing popularity, it has

aroused scholars’ research on it. Both at home and abroad, scholars have analyzed *Downton Abbey* from different perspectives and different fields to express their own views.

Overseas the British drama has created a huge wave of British style, and newspaper headlines everywhere are full of comments about the drama, with people expressing their opinions from various aspects. Jessica Fellowes, niece of Julian Fellowes, published her Book *The World of Downton Abbey* in 2013. The book serves as a bridge to make up the socio-cultural gap between the present era and the era in which the drama takes place, helping viewers and readers to view the differences and conflicts of life in that era with modern perspectives and values [7]. In 2015, authors Rosalí a Baena and Christa Byker published an article in *National Identities*, named “Dialects of Nostalgia: *Downton Abbey* and English identity”. Plot and cast aside, one of the fundamental reasons for the success of *Downton Abbey* is that it offers ideological lessons. The sense of belonging generated by nostalgia will dilute the differences of class, race, gender and so on, thus strengthening the consciousness of “we” and achieving the purpose of national identity. As a result, against the background of the gradual loss of race consciousness in Britain today, it can project the idealized past into the real present, and *Downton Abbey* is a powerful symbol of nationhood and a valuable heritage work [8].

There are so many aspects of *Downton Abbey* that have attracted domestic linguists to explore it in depth. With the popular broadcast of six seasons in recent years, research on it has also emerged. In cross-cultural research, Jiang Li in his dissertation “A Study of Cross-Cultural Communication of British Drama in China—Taking *Downton Abbey* as an Example” composes the history of the development of British drama itself as well as the ways and means of entering China and summarizes the reasons for its success [9]. In terms of discourse analysis, Xu Bingbing published an article called “Violation of the Cooperative Principle and Language Humor in British Drama *Downton Abbey*”. She analyzes some violations of the cooperative principle and maxims in the drama, whose conversational implicature, with the help of context, background knowledge and logic reasoning, will facilitate the smooth progress of the conversation, to achieve the effect that the speaker wants to express [10]. In addition, there are also some studies on characters’ personalities. For example, Zhao and Jia published “On The Rebellious Spirit of Lady Siebel in *Downton Abbey*”. From the perspective of postmodern feminism, Sybil’s rebellious spirit is analyzed through the changes of her own personality and the contrast with other characters. Lady Sybil is also praised for her courage in liberating her mind and fighting for equal rights for men and women [11].

## III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter mainly introduces research questions, address terms, Leach’s politeness principle and Leach’s theory of meaning, and discusses these definition or theories with detailed examples to lay a good foundation for the following analysis.

### A. Research Questions

This paper will use Leach’s politeness principle to analyze the social and emotional significance of addresses in

*Downton Abbey*. And the main research questions are as follows:

(1) What social and emotional meanings are expressed by address terms in *Downton Abbey*?

(2) Among the four maxims in Leach's politeness principle, what are the main factors that affect the address terms in *Downton Abbey*?

### B. Address Terms

As address terms attract more and more attention from Chinese and Western scholars, as Braun Friederike said: Address term is indeed the basic concept of address theory, and this term represents the linguistic reference of the speaker to the other side of the conversation. Many scholars have tried to define address term, but none of them has been widely accepted. Different scholars give different interpretations in order to emphasize some characteristics of address terms. Leslie Dunkling, in *A Dictionary of Epithets and Terms of Address*, defines address term like this: The terms we use to others, and those used to us in return, which define us, placing us firmly at a social and professional level, indicating our emotional impact on those around us.

British people choose the form of address very carefully in daily communication, so people are very sensitive to their title and address terms. This is most vividly reflected in *Downton Abbey*, where the address used by people of different social classes varies greatly, from the formal diplomatic terms used by royalty, to the informal terms used between servants, and the American address used by the Countess's American relatives when they come to Britain. The following are two types of address according to the typical address forms in *Downton Abbey*: social address and kinship address. Social address is a form of address that people use more often except for kinship address, which is generally given according to the role that people play in social communication to show politeness. At the same time, it shows a person's social status, power, occupation, etc. Social address includes general address, job title address, professional address, name address and so on. In a family, kinship address plays an important role in maintaining the relationship between family members. The linguist Scott defines Kinship Names as follows: Kinship names are often used by Britons to refer to members of their family and are occasionally used for business communication purposes, especially in family-owned-and-operated businesses. Kinship address includes couple address, parents address, cousins address, elders and juniors address [12].

### C. Leech's Politeness Principle

Politeness has always been regarded as an embodiment of human civilization and is usually understood as a strategy adopted by speakers to achieve a certain goal, such as increasing or maintaining the harmonious relationship between the two parties in communication. Linguists and anthropologists have done a wealth of research in this area, including Brown and Levinson's principle of politeness from a rhetorical and stylistic perspective, and later based on the former study, Leech divided pragmatic principles into two categories of "interpersonal rhetoric" and "textual rhetoric". Politeness principle belongs to interpersonal rhetoric, and it consists of principles and maxims observed by both sides of communication. This paper analyzes the meaning of address

terms in *Downton Abbey* by Leech's politeness principle [13].

#### 1) Four maxims in Leach's politeness principle

Leech divides politeness principles into six categories, each of which includes one principle and two sub-principles. This paper applies four principles to the analysis of address terms in *Downton Abbey*, which are detailed as follows:

**Tact Maxim:** (1) Minimize cost to other. (2) Maximize benefit to other. This principle takes listeners or others as the starting point and reflects the reduction of expressing opinions that are harmful to others. From the basic purpose of verbal communication, proper discourse is not only for politeness, but it can achieve the best communicative effect. Tact maxim is regarded as the most important one among the six maxims, because it is mainly used in directive and commissive statements, and is also the most polite rule in linguistic behavior. Therefore, tact maxim is the basis of politeness principle and is most widely used in communication.

**Approbation Maxim:** (1) Minimize dispraise of other. (2) Maximize praise of other. This principle takes listeners or others as the starting point and embodies the reduction of the expression of derogatory views towards others, involving the speaker's evaluation or criticism to the hearer. The core content of this principle is "depreciate oneself and appreciate others", which is of psychological significance. This rule applies to a class of statements that are declarative and expressive. In general, words of praise are always welcome. When facing the other side of communication, praising him is not only a simple matter of politeness, but also the need of pragmatic purpose. Considering the communicative psychology of the listener is the key to realize this rule.

**Modesty Maxim:** (1) Minimize praise of self. (2) Maximize dispraise of self. This principle starts with the speaker and embodies the idea of reducing self-praise, which is the other side of the same coin with "tact maxim". Therefore, this maxim also applies to declarative and expressive statements. This is a "low profile" principle. Without bragging about oneself and keeping a humble attitude is not only the norm of life, but also the norm of verbal communication. Boasting is often impolite. Therefore, belittling oneself will seem more appropriate and more polite.

**Sympathy Maxim:** (1) Minimize antipathy between self and other. (2) Maximize sympathy between self and other. This principle involves the relationship between the speaker and the listener, especially the feelings of both parties, and reflects the reduction of emotional opposition. This rule applies to declarative statements. This maxim is reflected as a "peace" mentality, and also as an emotional disclosure criterion, which requires emotional consistency between the two parties in verbal communication.

#### 2) Theory of meaning in Leach's politeness principle

Leech published *Semantics* for the first time in 1974, and in 1981, he made significant modifications and additions in many aspects according to the latest development of semantics. As the book says: "I divide 'meaning' in its broadest sense into seven different types: rational, connotative, social, affective, reflective, collocative and thematic. Leach defines social meaning as follows: Social meaning is the meaning expressed by a language about the

social environment in which the language is used. Leach believes that words can be divided into different stylistic ranges in practical use, and these words or pronunciations can tell us the geographical and social environment where speakers live, and some features of language can also show us the social relationship between speakers and listeners. Affective meaning can also be seen as an expression of implication. "It is easy to think about how language reflects the personal feelings of the speaker, including his attitude towards the listener and the things he is talking about. This kind of meaning may be called affective meaning, which is often expressed explicitly through rational content and connotative content." This is how Leach describes affective meaning. Sometimes when we need to show our attitude, we can use different words according to the requirements of politeness in order to be more polite.

#### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter applies four maxims in Leech's Politeness Principle to analyze the social and affective meanings of address terms in *Downton Abbey*.

##### A. Social Meaning of Address in *Downton Abbey*

The language used by the British aristocracy has always been a model of politeness and elegance. The address terms in the period drama *Downton Abbey* reflect rich social meanings. Everyone plays different social roles and assumes different social responsibilities. Especially after the First World War, the industrial revolution broke out and the working class began to rise, the monarchy collapsed, and social classes changed. Many characters in *Downton Abbey*, especially the people who lived at the bottom before World War I, silently seized this opportunity and realized a great change in social status and identity.

##### 1) The influence of social status

The characters in *Downton Abbey* use address forms, strictly based on different social status and social classes, following Leach's tact maxim, so as to properly show different social meanings. Take Lord Grantham, the most typical character, as an example. As the master of Downton Abbey with hereditary title, he has supreme status and absolute authority in his domain. The different titles given to him by servants, guests and relatives properly reflect the status differences among people. Those who meet him for the first time or with a lower rank than him will address him as "Lord Grantham, your Lordship, my Lord". In the third person it is "his Lordship", to show respect and dignity to him. However, Duke could call him "Grantham" directly, indicating that he is superior to an earl among peers. During the First World War, the Earl is also given the rank of "Colonel of the North Riding Volunteers" and the rank of "Lord Lieutenant". In the special period, the society endows him with more titles, so that he has a new identity and undertakes more social responsibilities. Lord Grantham has inherited his title by hereditary and is of noble descent, while others choose address terms based on their relative rank, using the most appropriate address that highlights the difference in status. There are many similar examples, all prove that the factor of social status has a great influence on the appropriateness of address terms, and it also dominates

the social meaning expressed by address.

In the first few seasons of *Downton Abbey*, the social hierarchy between people seems to be an unbridgeable gap. Even though the upper class share the same heart with the working people at the bottom, the cold social system still makes them feel at a loss and can only express deep sympathy for the unfortunate. Therefore, social status is the most important factor affecting the expression of the social meaning of sympathy maxim. For example,

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.

(Season 1, episode 1)

This dialogue happened after the Titanic accident. Lord Grantham guessed, in this highly hierarchical society, rescue work must first open to women and children of classy cabin. He felt the darkness of society and powerlessness, and showed the greatest sympathy for the poor deprived of survival rights in steerage cabin. "Devil" is a colloquial word for a poor or unlucky person. It is often used with "poor". Even though Lord Grantham was in high society, his conscience and good character made him repugnant to the darkness of society. It can be seen from his hope that those poor people would have a good birth in their next life that his traditional and conservative ideas did not awaken his consciousness of breaking the class system, but still chose to obey and pay allegiance to the monarchy. This kind of sympathy is not so much for the submerged passengers in the lower class as for the bottom people who were oppressed but powerless to resist in the whole society.

##### 2) The influence of contextual factors

In some contexts, laudatory address tends to be more in line with the needs of social occasions and people's psychological needs to express social meaning, so it is necessary to praise others to the maximum extent in specific occasions. For example,

Shrimp: It gives me great pleasure to bring down blessings on the head of the beautiful Marchioness of Hexham. But first I should read a telegram from her grandmother, the redoubtable Mrs. Levinson.

(Season 6, episode 9)

At Edith's wedding dinner, Robert's best friend, Marquis Shrimp, gave a toast to the couple. It was such a solemn and blessed moment. Shrimp used "beautiful Marchioness of Hexham" with generous praise, which not only reflected Edith's status, but also fully showed the status and glory of the newly married marquis and the earl's family, and praised the beauty of the bride in a proper context. Then "the redoubtable Mrs. Levinson" was used to praise the countess's mother, which was also a respect and praise for the countess. In such a remarkable occasion, such praise reflected people's recognition of Edith's social status as a marchioness, at the same time in such a context to the maximum praise of the earl's family.

Modest maxim is more to reflect people's etiquette cultivation, and lowering self is a good way to get along with people. In order to make the communication conform to the

direction of their pragmatic purpose, the characters in *Downton Abbey* not only express praise to each other, but also belittle themselves, which shows politeness from another perspective and contains certain social meaning. For example,

Carson: I'm sure that's not necessary, my lady.

Sybil: I's not my lady now, Carson. It's Nurse Crawley.

(Season 2, episode 2)

There was a feminist advocate in the earl's aristocratic family, Lady Sybil. During World War I, with the help of Mrs. Crawley, she became a nurse, training and helping the wounded, and for the first time in her life, she felt valuable. So in this conversation, she refused to be called "my lady" when helping Carson with his heart attack. Instead, she lowered herself to a minimum of praise and asked to be called "Nurse Crawley". Her modesty was a protest, suggesting that in the first World War, she was not a noble lady waiting to be served, but a nurse who saved lives of others. She wanted to use the address "Nurse Crawley" to show her role in helping those who were in need, which was indicative of her desire to get rid of aristocratic formalities and her desire for female independence.

#### *B. Affective Meaning of Address in Downton Abbey*

In daily communication, people follow the principle of politeness not only to conform to social etiquette and customs, but also to express a kind of emotion, which can be expressed through address terms. In *Downton Abbey*, along with the development of the characters, there are also a lot of emotional changes, leading to different address terms. These terms record psychological activities of the characters at the time, and are the true portrayal of their psychology, which makes the characters more fleshed out, and the complex relationship between characters, more simple and clear to be understood by the audience.

##### *1) The influence of interpersonal relationship*

Due to the difference of interpersonal relationship, in order to fully express inner feelings, the choice of address terms can be some informal forms. In non-social situations, it is perfectly appropriate to ignore honorifics. For example,

Mr. Carson: It'll be a different life.

Mrs. Hughes: But we can make a go of it, Charlie. And I definitely mean to try. Happy New Year.

Mr. Carson: Happy New Year, Elsie.

(Season 6, episode 1)

Mr. Carson and Mrs. Hughes, as housekeepers in *Downton Abbey*, had a sweet love affair in the final season. Because of their high positions in the Earl's family, Mr. Carson and Mrs. Hughes were always addressed in honorific terms, so that they were even used to addressing each other as "Mr. Carson" and "Mrs. Hughes" in their work and even in their daily lives after marriage. Ever since Mrs. Hughes first suggested that Carson should call her Elsie, as in the example above, the two people first used the informal address "Charlie" and "Elsie" to indicate their conjugality and that such address terms were intimate only to them, with no social meaning but only a genuine outpouring of affection.

When people are faced with difficult situations, there is sympathy for them, whether in family or between superiors

and subordinates, because the relationship between people is forged when working together through difficult times. For example,

Anna: Poor Carson. We will have to treat him like a god for a month to calm his nerves.

(Season 1, episode 2)

The context of this statement was that one of Carson's former partners at the theatre was threatening Carson and blackmailing him over the affair, so that Carson's history of shady work and stealing kitchen food was exposed to the Earl, Bates and Anna. Carson, as the housekeeper, was the superior of all the servants with power. He was also a role model for the servants to follow. As a housekeeper, being told this kind of thing would make him feel embarrassed. However, Bates and Anna not only helped him keep the secret but also expressed sympathy and pity. "Poor Carson" showed their understanding of the high housekeeper and hopes to restore the harmonious relationship as soon as possible. As Anna said, everyone had secrets and everyone should understand each other, and they would do everything they can to help Carson through this difficult time. The address term "Poor Carson" expresses the warmth and friendship of mutual trust between people.

##### *2) The influence of emotional attitude*

Emotional attitudes sometimes lead people to praise others from the bottom of their hearts, and sometimes to express flattery and adulterate false emotions for a communicative purpose. For example,

Duke: My dear Lord Grantham...

Robert: Don't call me "My dear Lord Grantham"! I knew what you were doing when you came here.

(Season 1, episode 1)

Duke found out that Mary, the eldest daughter of Lord Grantham, was expected to inherit the family fortune. Since he ranked higher than Grantham, it was appropriate to use "Grantham". In the above dialogue, Duke suddenly used "My Dear Lord Grantham" to praise the earl's noble position in his heart and express false emotions. He tried to get close to Grantham and please the Earl as much as possible, to find out the true whereabouts of the inheritance. It was also a way to ingratiate himself with the Earl and marry Mary later. But his impure motives were discovered by Lord Grantham, who did not agree with such an emotional attitude and therefore refused this address term.

Emotional attitude is always an indispensable influencing factor when people express their affective meaning. Sometimes people use the modesty maxim to belittle themselves in attitude, and highlight the advantage of another party in affective meaning. For example,

Robert: And now, as the Prodigal Husband home from sea, let me raise a glass to my extraordinary wife who can clearly manage far better in my absence.

(Season 4, episode 8)

Lord Grantham described himself as "the Prodigal Husband" because he returned from the US with two bottles of good wine and found his wife's charity sale so successful that his actions were "extravagant". Therefore, he used

modesty maxim to minimize himself to foil his wife, and praises his wife's virtue and ability with "my extraordinary wife" to further subliminate the relationship between the couple.

## V. CONCLUSION

This paper makes use of Leach's politeness principle to analyze the social and affective meanings of address terms in *Downton Abbey*. Through this British drama, we find that address terms are actually everywhere. Although the expression form seems short and concise, it is full of connotation.

The address terms used by the characters in the drama are closely related to the social and affective meaning that they want to express. Their choice of polite address almost accords with Leach's politeness principle. This paper selects four maxims that can reflect the politeness of typical aristocratic address terms in the drama: Tact Maxim, Approbation Maxim, Modesty Maxim and Sympathy Maxim. Each maxim is analyzed from the two factors that have the greatest influence on address terms in the context of *Downton Abbey*. The conclusion is as follows: First of all, these four maxims help this study to find several factors that have great influence on the choice of address form in communication. When address terms express social meaning, social status has the greatest influence on address form among address terms that follow tact maxim and sympathy maxim. In terms of address terms following approbation maxim and modesty maxim, contextual factors has the greatest influence on address form. When address terms express affective meaning, interpersonal relationship and emotional attitude have great influence on the address form under the four maxims. Secondly, these factors also lead to the abundant meaning of address terms. It can show the whole social style and class conflict at the end of Edward's time, the change and innovation of the times and the development and progress of the world, and also reflect the vicissitudes of human feelings and changeable emotions. In *Downton Abbey*, even though social class prevents people from communicating with each other freely, people are able to work together in the face of many difficulties, and there are touching feelings of tolerance, understanding and compassion everywhere.

Though this paper has made a detailed review and research on typical polite address terms in *Downton Abbey*, the study is only limited to the noble family and analysis results are only limited to upper class society, which may be deviated

from the mainstream society at that time. In order to get a more accurate understanding of the social and affective meanings expressed in the context of that era, we can also select more corpus and analyze the polite address used by the lower class people, and then summarize and synthesize them to get more comprehensive and convincing conclusions.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Jiangshan You conducted the research, analyzed the data and wrote this paper; Hongmei Ruan supervised on writing and improving this paper; all authors had approved the final version.

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