A Pragmatic Analysis of English Euphemisms in *Downton Abbey*

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Abstract

Euphemism is a universal linguistic phenomenon and is commonly used in daily communication. This paper attempts to probe into the relationship of English euphemisms with Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle, as well as the British culture in Downton Abbey reflected by the employment of euphemisms. Through the conversational analysis of English euphemisms in Downton Abbey, the thesis discovers how and why people employ English euphemisms in daily communication and goes further to explore the British cultures reflected by the employment of euphemisms in Downton Abbey. People achieve the euphemistic effects by violating the Cooperative Principle on purpose and at the same time complying with the Politeness Principle. In addition, English euphemisms in Downton Abbey violate the Cooperative Principle for concealment and observe the Politeness Principle for modesty and respect. The employment of euphemisms mainly reflects the aristocratic spirit, the social hierarchy and the gentleman culture in Downton Abbey.

Keywords: English euphemism; pragmatic analysis; conversational analysis

1. Introduction

Euphemism is a universal linguistic phenomenon and is commonly used in daily communication. As an indirect and vague expression, euphemism is instrumental in fulfilling conversations. However, the consensus in terms of the definition of euphemism hasn't been achieved. Until now, there are many definitions of euphemism. The followings are two typical ones. (1) "A euphemism is used as an alternative to a dispreferred expression, in order to avoid possible loss of face: either one's own face or, through giving offence, that of the audience, or of some third party" (Allan and Burridge, 1991). (2) "The word 'euphemism' comes from the Greek eu, 'good' and phemism, 'speech' or 'saying' and thus means literally ''to speak with good words or in a pleasant manner''' (Neaman and Silver, 1983). Generally, euphemism means using indirect, vague but more pleasant expressions to replace not respectful, offensive and unpleasant expressions. In daily conversations, the speakers often implicate their meanings and convey something indirectly. People avoid straightforward expressions and try to be indirect, which also explains why euphemisms are widely used in all languages. Hugh Rawson (1981) also noted that euphemism is a permanent and noticeable feature of our language and even people who are straightforward and outspoken can't live through a day without using euphemisms. Euphemisms are employed to smooth conversations by avoiding unpleasantness, offence and impoliteness.

Euphemism is a common linguistic phenomenon. At the same time, it is also a phenomenon of society and culture which involves various aspects of life. A better understanding of euphemism will definitely help people to gain valuable insights into the culture of a society. In turn, as an essential part of a given culture, the application of euphemism is also influenced and constrained by the culture. Therefore, the application of euphemism must be studied in certain contexts, including the cultural background, the situation, the relationship between the speaker and hearer and so on. *Downton Abbey*, a typical British drama, is a microcosm of British society and it accurately restores the various class systems and etiquette rules of the British aristocracy. Therefore, *Downton Abbey* helps people to know about Britain and its culture in the last century. In addition, it boasts many well-designed dialogues and a lot of euphemisms and is appropriate to probe into the application of euphemisms. Therefore, *Downton Abbey* can serve as excellent and suitable linguistic data to probe into English Euphemisms in the light of the Cooperative Principle and the Politeness Principle.

2. Literature Review

Downton Abbey has been widely studied at home and abroad since 2010. Jessica Fellowes (2013) introduced the historical background, the costumes, the scenes and the shooting details of *Downton Abbey*. Rosalía Baena and Christa Byker (2015) made a detailed introduction about the ups and downs of the story and the cast in *Downton Abbey* in a nostalgic style. They believed that the article shows the national identity and the expression of common emotions, thereby arousing the widespread recognition of the British public. Kelly Boyd (2016) studied upstairs and downstairs in British Costume Drama Television from The Forsyte Saga to Forsyte Saga to *Downton Abbey*.

In addition, people scramble to translate *Downton Abbey* into other languages. Zsuzsanna Ajtony (2015) made a brief study on the theory of irony and emphasizes that the inconsistencies in irony in *Downton Abbey* needed to be reflected in Hungarian subtitles. To sum up, the foreign research on *Downton Abbey* mainly focuses on the introduction and interpretation of the plot and characters in *Downton Abbey*.

Since the release of *Downton Abbey* in 2010, it has been widely studied by the scholars in China. *Downton Abbey* is mainly studied from the following perspectives: British culture, feminist and pragmatics. Fang Xiao (2013) explored the characteristics of British culture: the country complex, the aristocratic spirit and the coexistence of rigid social hierarchy and the values of liberty, equality and fraternity. Wu Jiaxiu (2020) explored the development of feminist thought through the changes of the clothing of women from the aristocratic class, the middle class and the proletariat. She suggested that the clothing vividly reflects the feminism in *Downton Abbey* and this article shows the characteristics of feminism through studying the costumes in *Downton Abbey*. Xu Lisha (2017) attempted to reveal the conversational implicature of the lines in *Downton Abbey* by exploring how the lines violate the four maxims of Cooperative Principle and figure out the relationship of its stylistic features and its surrounding social environment. Some scholars also studied other aspects of *Downton Abbey*. Liu Yanjie (2014) attempted to analyze the conversational implicature in *Downton Abbey* from the perspective of the context of culture. Xu Bingbing (2014) attempted to explore how the humor effect in *Downton Abbey* is achieved by violating the maxims of Cooperative Principle. The author suggested that the deliberate violation of the Cooperative Principle and its maxims adds humor to the conversations and reveals the character and attitude of the speaker.

Downton Abbey is also studied from the point of view of Politeness Principle. Liu Chang (2017) noted that the choices of polite addresses is closely related to the social emotional meanings the characters intend to express and their choices of polite addresses observe the Politeness Principle.

However, from the angle of Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle, few scholars have studied English euphemisms in *Downton Abbey*. The study of English euphemisms in *Downton Abbey* mainly focuses on the pragmatic function. Lu Yingna (2015) elaborated the communicative functions of English euphemisms from the four aspects: avoidance of taboo, concealment of truth, expression of politeness and humor and satire. Dong Xiaojun (2016) also explored the communicative functions of euphemisms in *Downton Abbey* from the four aspects: taboo, politeness, beautification and humor and satire. Therefore, further study of euphemisms in *Downton Abbey* needs to be done from the angle of Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle. This paper attempts to probe into the English euphemisms in *Downton Abbey* to figure out how English euphemisms and Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle are related.

3. Conventional Constructive Devices of English Euphemism

English euphemism often appears in different forms: word, phrase and sentence. It is formed by resorting to the three devices: lexical devices, grammatical devices and rhetorical devices. Therefore, the conventional constructive devices of English euphemism are conducive to figure out the working mechanism of English euphemism.

3.1 Lexical Devices

Euphemisms can be expressed by applying the lexical terms, such as blending, vague words, abbreviation, spelling devices, synonym, antonym, back-formation and so on. Vague words or expressions are used to make things less unpleasant. The application of vague words or expressions can expand the meaning of words to conceal the harsh reality. For example, the word "accident" is used to describe a person who has been in trouble and has died.

3.2 Grammatical Devices

Euphemism is not limited to the lexicons and it can also be achieved by resorting to grammatical devices without actually changing the content of the message. Sometimes the speaker may deliberately uses grammatical devices to achieve euphemism and the effect is that an extra meaning is conveyed.

Syntactical negation is a grammatical device to achieve euphemism, such as the sentence pattern "not suppose", "not think", especially "not sure''. For example, "I'm not sure he can have dinner'' is more euphemistic than "I know that he can't have dinner". Therefore, syntactical negation can weaken the negation degree and achieve euphemism. Subjunctive mood is used to blame or request others in a euphemistic way. For example, "I wish that you have told me earlier" is politer and more euphemistic than the direct blame "why didn't you tell me earlier?".

3.3 Rhetorical Devices

Rhetoric is the skill of using language in speech or writing in a special way that influences or entertains people. Euphemism can also be achieved by recourse to figures of speech, such as periphrasis, irony and aposiopesis.

Periphrasis is a roundabout way of expressing something indirectly. When people have to say something that is offensive, unpleasant, people would rather expressing it in a euphemistic way. Irony is a rhetorical device by which people use the words which mean the opposite of what they really want to express. It is used to achieve the effect of humor or sarcasm. Aposiopesis is the device of suddenly breaking off in the middle of a sentence as if unwilling to continue to talk about the taboo or unpleasant things.

4. Interpretation of Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle

Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle play important roles in pragmatics. The two principles both explain the regularity in conversation from different perspectives. They are complementary to each other and are combined to guide people in everyday conversations, thereby helping to smooth the conversation and boost the efficiency.

4.1 Cooperative Principle

Herbert Paul Grice (1975) proposed the Cooperative Principle in an aim to elaborate the process of daily conversation, in which people tend to express their intended meanings by implication. The speakers and hearers must be cooperative to fulfill a conversation. Then he proposed the Cooperative Principle, CP for short. It suggests that people should make their conversational contribution serve the communicative goal of the conversation in which they are involved. Four categories of maxims come under this principle:

(1) The Quantity Maxim
(a) Make your contribution as informative as required for the current purpose of the exchange;
(b) Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.
(2) The Quality Maxim
Try to make your contribution one that is true.
(a) Do not say what you believe to be false;
(b) Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.
(3) The Relation Maxim
Be relevant.
(4) The Manner Maxim
Be perspicuous.
(a) Avoid obscurity of expression;
(b) Avoid ambiguity;
(c) Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity);
(d) Be orderly.
(Grice, 1975)

In a conversation, all participants are expected to abide by the Cooperative Principle. However, in everyday conversation, people don't always follow it. They are well justified to violate the maxims and the resulting effect is that the utterance becomes indirect, and then the conventional implicature arises. People can communicate the extra meaning when they express themselves indirectly by violating one of the four maxims.

4.2 Politeness Principle

Linguistic politeness is one of the major social conventions of human communication which serves as a reminder of taking into account feelings of other people. "Speaking politely" actually means showing people's awareness of other people's "Face", i.e. their public image or outward appearance, as in "lose face", "save face". Geoffrey Neil Leech, a famous linguist, advanced Politeness Principle in an aim to solve something that Cooperative Principle can't explain and clarify how rules of politeness play a part in daily communication (Hu and Li, 2013). This principle suggests that people should cut down on impolite expressions as far as possible and increase polite ones as much as possible. The principle can be further illustrated by a series of maxims:

(1) Tact Maxim
(a) Minimize cost to other;
(b) Maximize benefit to other.
(2) Generosity Maxim
(a) Minimize benefit to self;
(b) Maximize cost to self.
(3) Approbation Maxim
(a) Minimize dispraise of other;
(b) Maximize praise of other.
(4) Modesty Maxim
(a) Minimize praise of self;
(b) Maximize dispraise of self.
(5) Agreement Maxim
(a) Minimize disagreement between self and other;
(b) Maximize agreement between self and other.
(6) Sympathy Maxim
(a) Minimize antipathy between self and other;
(b) Maximize sympathy between self and other.
(Leech, 1983)

4.3 Relation Between Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle

People have recourse to the Cooperative Principle to reason out the conversational implicature from the utterances, but the Cooperative Principle can't explain why people tend to violate the maxims in daily communication to make the utterances indirect and vague. Then Leech suggested that politeness is associated with indirectness. To be more specific, in natural and everyday conversation, indirect expressions are generally associated with greater politeness. The more indirect the utterance is, the politer it is. As a result, Leech proposed the Politeness Principle. Therefore, Politeness Principle makes up the limitations of Cooperative Principle and explains something that Cooperative Principle can't solve. It is complementary to the Cooperative Principle and tries to explain why Cooperative Principle is often apparently violated. In natural and everyday conversations, the maxims of the Cooperative Principle can be violated for all kinds of reasons and the Politeness Principle, to a certain extent, can account for people's tendency to go against the Cooperative Principle and its maxims. In addition, the Cooperative Principle sometimes collides with the Politeness Principle. In everyday conversations, sometimes, people have to violate the Cooperative Principle in an aim to express themselves with great politeness to others while abiding by the Politeness Principle. Tian Qinghua (2016) suggestd that "Euphemisms violate the Cooperative Principle so that the Politeness Principle can be better followed. The two complementary principles are combined to achieve euphemism with the maximum effect, thereby helping to smooth the conversations and promote harmonious interpersonal relationship".

5. *Pragmatic Analysis of English Euphemisms in* Downton Abbey

In this part, some of the conversations in *Downton Abbey* are chosen and the English euphemisms in it are analyzed in light of Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle to figure out how and why people employ English euphemisms in daily communications.

5.1 Violation of Cooperative Principle for Concealment

In the following part, the paper will explore how English euphemisms in *Downton Abbey* violate the four maxims of the Cooperative Principle by resorting to the lexical devices and rhetorical devices: aposiopesis, irony, periphrasis and vague words. In addition, English euphemisms in *Downton Abbey* reach their effects by violating the maxims of Cooperative Principle mainly for concealment.

5.1.1 Aposiopesis Used in Violation of the Quantity Maxim

The information the speaker gives should be as informative as is required for the purpose and not be more informative than is required. Many euphemisms are created by making information more or less informative to violate the quantity maxim. By resorting to aposiopesis, English Euphemisms in *Downton Abbey* violate the quantity maxim to reach their effects. The following is a typical example from *Downton Abbey*.

Example 1:
Lord Grantham: The thing is, Bates, I said I'd give you a trial and I have. If it were only up to me... It's this question of a valet's extra duties.
Mr. Bates: You mean waiting a table when there's a large party?
Lord Grantham: That and carrying things and… You do see that Carson can't be expected to compromise the efficiency of his staff.
(Episode1, Season 1)

This is a conversation between Mr. Bates and Lord Grantham. Mr. Bates is a valet and he is lame. Mr. Carson thinks that Mr. Bates is not competent for his job. Therefore, Lord Grantham decides to lay off Mr. Bates. "If it were only up to me…" and "That and carrying things and…" are euphemisms formed by resorting to aposiopesis and they violate the quantity maxim in that they break off in the middle of the sentence and are less informative than is expected by the hearer. "If it were only up to me…" is used to conceal the fact that Lord Grantham has to lay off Mr. Bates. "That and carrying things and…" is used to conceal the fact that Mr. Bates is lame and he is not competent for the job which is physically demanding in an aim to save Mr. Bates's face; otherwise Mr. Bates may feel despised and not being respected. As an aristocrat, the aristocratic spirit reminds Lord Grantham not to despise Mr. Bates although Mr. Bates is only a servant. Lord Grantham tries to be polite and save Mr. Bates's face by using euphemisms, which reflects Lord Grantham's good manners as an aristocrat.

5.1.2 Irony Used in Violation of the Quality Maxim

The quality maxim requires that speakers should always tell the truth and show what they truly think or feel. Euphemisms are used to express unpleasant and offensive things in an indirect and pleasant way. Therefore, people may use euphemisms to purposely overstate or understate the reality or cover up the truth to mitigate the damage by violating the quality maxim. By resorting to irony, English euphemisms in *Downton Abbey* violate the quality maxim to reach their effects. There are typical examples from *Downton Abbey*.

Example 2:

Isobel: He's treating one of your tenants, John Drake, for dropsy, but seems reluctant to embrace some of the newer treatments.
Robert: Oh, Drake is a good man and far too young to die, but I suppose the doctor knows his business.
Violet: Not as well as Mrs. Crawley, apparently.
(Episode 2, Season 1)
Example 3:
Violet: You are quite wonderful the way you see room for improvement wherever you look. I never knew such reforming zeal.
(Episode 5, Season 1)

These are conversations between Isobel and Violet. "Not as well as Mrs. Crawley" and "You are quite wonderful" are Violet's praise for Isobel literally or apparently while actually they show Violet's blame on and criticism of Isobel. In example 2, Isobel is trying to persuade the doctor to treat the patient with the newer treatments that he has never tried before. However, Violet thinks that the doctor should not take her advice. "Not as well as Mrs. Crawley" is a seemingly high compliment, but the real intention of Violet is just the opposite. Violet deems Isobel as not experienced or professional and blames her interfering with the doctor's treatment for the patient. In the example 3, the apparent praise is actually the indirect but heavy sarcasm. Therefore, the above euphemisms formed by resorting to irony are the opposite of the truth and violate the quality maxim. At the same time, by resorting to irony, Violet disguises her criticism of and blame on Mrs. Crawley. Although Violet is in bad terms with Mrs. Crawley and they often bicker over something unimportant, Violet does not embarrass Mrs. Crawley by saying something ungracious. On the contrary, Violet uses polite and euphemistic expressions to expresses her dissatisfaction indirectly. As an aristocrat, Violet shows her good manners, which reflects the British aristocratic spirit.

5.1.3 Periphrasis Used in Violation of the Relation Maxim

The speakers should, as required by the relation maxim, say something relevant to the context, including the linguistic context and the situational context. By resorting to periphrasis, English euphemisms in *Downton Abbey* violate the relation maxim to reach their effects.

Example 4:
Matthew: I hope I haven't kept you up too late. I'm afraid we've interfered with your dinner.
Carson: It's been rather a chop-and-change evening downstairs.
Matthew: Lady Grantham got off all right?
Carson: "All right" is an optimistic assessment, sir.
(Episode 4, Season 1)

Matthew and Robert annoy Lady Grantham because of the inheritance issues. When Matthew asks whether Lady Grantham gets off all right, Carson does not give an affirmative or negative answer but saying something which is irrelevant and violates the relation maxim. However, the irrelevant answer expresses indirectly that Lady Grantham is not all right at all. This irrelevant answer does not only express Lady Grantham's real feelings in a euphemistic way by resorting to periphrasis but also save Matthew's face by avoiding making him feel embarrassed or awkward. At the same time, this euphemism also conceals Carson's blame on Matthew. Therefore, Carson takes into consideration the feelings of Matthew and tries his best to be polite and gentlemanlike. He does not blame Matthew directly and use euphemism to save Matthew's face. His gentlemanly behavior reflects the gentleman culture embodied in *Downton Abbey*.

5.1.4 Vague Words Used in Violation of the Manner Maxim

In accordance with requirements of the manner maxim, the speaker is expected to be perspicuous and express themselves clearly and concisely to avoid obscurity or ambiguity.
Many euphemisms violate the maxim of manner by expressing something obscurely or ambiguously to avoid talking about the taboos, unpleasant or embarrassing things. By resorting to vague words, English euphemisms in *Downton Abbey* violate the manner maxim to reach their effects.

Example 5:
Robert: Mrs Patmore, it's worse than that.
Mrs Patmore: What can be worse than being dead?
Robert: Private Philpotts was shot for cowardice on 17th February.
(Episode 2, Season 2)

The word "cowardice" actually means deserting in face of a battle. However, a deserter would bring shame not only to himself but also to his family. People who hear of the truth may look down upon the solider and his family. Therefore, Robert uses the vague word "cowardice" to conceal the unacceptable, harsh and shameful fact. In this way, the euphemistic effect is achieved by taking into account Mrs Parmore's feelings considering that this news must be a shock for Mrs Patmore.

By resorting to the euphemism, Robert has a care for feminine sensibilities as he knows that women are finer and more fragile than the men. Robert's emotional attitude of sympathy, understanding and respect for women is fully presented, which embodies Robert's gentlemanly consideration. Therefore, to a certain extent, Robert's gentleman behavior reflects the gentleman culture.

In conclusion, euphemism achieves its effect by violating the four maxims of Cooperative Principle to some degree to make the utterance indirect and vague. Therefore, the speaker can imply their intended meanings and convey something indirectly to conceal the harshness, bluntness and offensiveness.

5.2 Observation of Politeness Principle for Modesty and Respect

Politeness Principle, PP for short, is one of the important theories in pragmatics. As for many linguists, politeness has been regarded as an effective strategy to achieve the effect of promoting interpersonal relationship and saving face in conversation. Leech took politeness as the key factor in accounting for why people tend to convey something indirectly. Then he proposed the Politeness Principle to make up drawbacks of Cooperative Principle for the reason that Politeness Principle can, to a certain extent, explain exception to and apparent deviations from the Cooperative Principle. Sometimes, to violate some maxims of the Cooperative Principle is also for politeness. People try to be not only cooperative but also polite. For this reason, euphemisms obey Politeness Principle. Therefore, based on the Politeness Principle, many English euphemisms showing politeness come into existence in the form of word, phrase, sentence and text. For example, "crippled man" can be replaced by the euphemistic expressions "a special man" and "differently able man", "the blind" can be substituted by "the visually changed". The following part is to explore how euphemisms in *Downton Abbey* observe the Politeness Principle and its maxims. English euphemisms in *Downton Abbey* mainly observe the approbation maxim, the modesty maxim and the agreement maxim to show modesty and respect by resorting to rhetorical devices and grammatical devices: periphrasis, syntactical negation and subjunctive mood.

5.2.1 Periphrasis Used in Observation of the Approbation Maxim

To observe the approbation maxim, people are expected to reduce dispraise of other to the lowest possible level and make praise of other as great as possible. English euphemisms in *Downton Abbey* observe the approbation maxim by resorting to periphrasis. There is a typical example in the series.

Example 6:
Carson: And you might ask one of the maids about making the bed.
Mrs. Hughes: Isn't that good enough, either?
Carson: It's not bad. I didn't mean that.
Carson: But I do like those sharp corners.
(Episode 6, Season 6)

When Mrs. Hughes asks Carson whether her making the bed is not good enough, Carson does not express his dissatisfaction directly which would damage Mrs. Hughes's face. Carson uses "not bad" which is often a euphemistic and reluctant way of saying. By resorting to periphrasis, the euphemism "But I do like those sharp corners" expresses indirectly that Carson is not content with the corners of quilts made by Mrs. Hughes. These euphemistic expressions minimize dispraise of Mrs. Hughes and save Mrs. Hughes's self-esteem. In this way, Carson shows good manners and has respect for Mrs. Hughes. Carson's gentlemanly consideration and respect for women reflect the gentleman culture.

5.2.2 Syntactical Negation Used in in Observation of the Modesty Maxim

The speaker should, in conformity to the modesty maxim, endeavors to reduce the praise of self to the smallest possible amount and make the dispraise of self as great as possible. By resorting to syntactical negation, English euphemisms in *Downton Abbey* observe the modesty maxim. The following is a typical example from *Downton Abbey*.

Example 7:
Robert: Carson, have you broken the news to Mrs. Hughes?
Mary: What news is this?
Robert: Where they're having the wedding reception.
Mary: I hope she's pleased.
Carson: To be honest, My Lady, she's a little hesitant. She's not quite
convinced that it would be appropriate.
Mary: Why not?
Carson: She feels we would be making a claim to which we have no right.
(Episode 2, Season 6)

Mary decides that Carson and Mrs. Hughes's weeding reception will be in the great hall. However, Mrs. Hughes does not agree. If Carson expresses directly Mrs. Hughes's refusal, this is not polite and would damage Mary's face. By resorting to the syntactical negation device, "she's not quite convinced that it would be appropriate" is more euphemistic than "she thinks that it is not appropriate". In addition, by maximizing cost to self, Carson explains that Mrs. Hughes feels that, as servants, they are lowly folk and have no right to hold their wedding reception in the hall. In this way, Mr. Carson shows his modesty by abasing himself. To be more specific, Mr. Carson tries to raise Mary's status while lowering his. These euphemistic expressions express indirectly Mrs. Hughes refusal while also showing politeness and respect to Mary to save her face. Carson's modesty and respect for Mary also reflects the rigid social hierarchy. The relationship between master and servant explains why any disrespect for Mary is not allowed. As a servant, Mr. Carson must accept the authority of the master with all deference. Therefore, even when Carson wants to refuse Mary, he expresses it indirectly and euphemistically; otherwise Mr. Carson may be deemed as overstepping the mark.

5.2.3 Subjunctive Mood Used in Observation of the Agreement Maxim

To follow the agreement maxim, people are advisable to reduce disagreement to the lowest possible degree and to increase agreement as much as possible. By resorting to subjunctive mood, English euphemisms in *Downton Abbey* observe the agreement maxim.
Example 8:
Isobel: The hospital is for officers.
……

Cora: But I don't know if we can make that an absolute rule.
Doctor Clarkson: If the world were logical, I would rather agree with you.
(Episode 3, Season 2)

Cora thinks that there can be an exception for the rule that the hospital is for officers. Although Doctor Clarkson disagrees with Cora, he does not express directly and explicitly. By applying the grammatical device of subjunctive mood, Doctor Clarkson expresses his disagreement while successfully minimizing disagreement between himself and Cora by observing the agreement maxim. This euphemistic expression also shows respect and politeness. Doctor Clarkson belongs to the middle class and Cora, as an aristocrat, belongs to the upper class. The difference in status determines that Doctor Clarkson must be polite and respectful to Cora even when he disagrees with her. Therefore, Doctor Clarkson's respect and politeness for Cora can, to a certain extent, reflect the rigid social hierarchy.

In the above examples, people use euphemisms to show modesty and respect in communication by adhering to the approbation maxim, the modesty maxim and the agreement maxim of Politeness Principle. In daily communication, people use euphemisms to be polite to make their words less forceful, severe and offensive in an aim to show modesty and respect.

6. Reflection of British Culture in English Euphemisms in *Downton Abbey*

As a typical British drama, *Downton Abbey* boasts a lot of English euphemisms. When the characters of *Downton Abbey* achieve the euphemistic effect by violating the Cooperative Principle for concealment and observing the Politeness Principle for modesty and respect, they are influenced by the British culture. The employment of euphemisms conveys the British culture and in turn the British culture always affects the use of euphemisms. There are three kinds of British culture reflected by the use of English euphemisms: the aristocratic spirit, the social hierarchy and the gentleman culture.

6.1 Aristocratic Spirit

Aristocracy in Britain is not only a position or a title, but also a tradition. The behavior standards and values of the aristocracy set an example for the whole nation, which, combined with the long-term rule of the aristocracy in Britain, contributes to the formation of the aristocratic spirit. The definition of aristocratic spirit is mainly reflected in three aspects: the strong sense of ownership and the courage to assume social responsibilities when the nation is in crisis; the principle of "virtue is above all else" and the spirit of independence; the noble personality, temperament and elegant aesthetic taste. In *Downton Abbey*, the aristocratic spirit reflected by the English euphemisms is mainly about the noble personality, good manners and politeness. For example, Robert is the owner of the manor and he enjoys the absolute authority. He can dismiss any servant at will. However, when he tells Mr. Bates his decision to lay off Mr. Bates, Robert does not adopt a condescending manner. Robert uses euphemisms to indirectly and euphemistically express his ideas to save Mr. Bates's face. Robert takes into account the feelings of Mr. Bates, which shows his noble personality and good manners. Violet is in bad terms with Mrs. Crawley and they always bicker with each other. However, the aristocratic spirit reminds and propels Violet to behave politely and show good manners. When Violet tries to express her blame on and criticism of Mrs. Crawley, she uses euphemisms to express indirectly and euphemistically to save Mrs. Crawley's face. The aristocratic spirit guides the aristocrats in *Downton Abbey* when they employ euphemisms.

6.2 Social Hierarchy

In nearly a century after the Glorious Revolution, the British society can be basically divided into three classes: the landowners-centered upper class; the middle class with small landowners, farmers, professionals and businessmen; the lower class with small farmers, agricultural workers, the urban poor and urban workers. Such a society, by its very nature, is a typical aristocratic society. The three classes have defining features and must be clearly defined. In *Downton Abbey*, the application of euphemisms is dependent on many factors, one of which is the social hierarchy. In *Downton Abbey*, the life of the aristocracy and the servants under the rigid social hierarchy is presented. There is a rigid hierarchy between the master and the servant. The difference in social status constantly reminds the servants to be respectful to their masters. Using euphemisms is one of the ways for the servants to pay homage to their masters. For example, when Mr. Carson does not agree Mary's proposal to hold the wedding in the hall, he does not refuse Mary directly to avoid damage Mary's face. He uses euphemistic expressions to show his respect to Mary and save Mary's face. Therefore, the rigid social hierarchy also guides people in employing euphemisms.

6.3 Gentleman Culture

The Britain has always been known as a nation of gentlemen, so the gentleman culture embodies the British national spirit. In *Downton Abbey*, the gentleman culture is fully presented, especially through the employment of euphemisms. For example, with gentlemanly consideration, Carson and Robert take into account the feelings of women and show respect to them by using euphemisms to conceal the harsh and unpleasant fact. In addition, as the owner of the manor, Robert is not patronizing, arrogant or cruel when he decides to lay off Mr. Bates. Robert uses euphemisms to save the face of Mr. Bates and show gentlemanly manners. Therefore, the application of euphemisms in *Downton Abbey* reflects the gentleman culture.

7. Conclusion

In the pragmatic analysis of English euphemisms in *Downton Abbey*, conversations from *Downtown Abbey* are analyzed. The analysis of English euphemisms, from the perspective of the two pragmatic theories: Politeness Principle and Cooperative Principle, finds that the application of euphemisms is inextricably linked to context in that it flouts Cooperative Principle and its maxims and abides by the Politeness Principle and its maxims. In *Downton Abbey*, the English euphemisms achieve their effects by violating the maxims of the Cooperative Principle mainly for concealment and observing the Politeness Principle mainly to show modesty and respect. In light of Cooperative Principle, to reach the effect of concealment, English euphemisms in *Downton Abbey* violate the quantity maxim by resorting to aposiopesis, violating the quality maxim by resorting to irony, violating the relation maxim by resorting to periphrasis and violating the manner maxim by resorting to vague words. In light of Politeness Principle, English euphemisms in *Downton Abbey* mainly observe the approbation maxim, the modesty maxim and the agreement maxim to show modesty and respect by resorting to rhetorical devices and grammatical devices: periphrasis, syntactical negation and subjunctive mood.

The British culture influences the employment of English euphemisms when the characters of *Downton Abbey* achieve the euphemistic effect by violating the Cooperative Principle for concealment and observing the Politeness Principle for modesty and respect. The English euphemisms convey the British cultures and at the same time are affected by the British cultures. The application of English euphemisms in *Downton Abbey* reflects the British culture from three aspects: the aristocratic spirit, the social hierarchy and the gentleman culture.

Through the conversational analysis of euphemisms from Downtown Abbey from the pragmatic point, this paper helps people to understand how euphemisms are employed in everyday communication to smooth the conversations and make them more effective and pleasant. In addition, the thesis also contributes to the understanding of the British culture reflected in *Downton Abbey*.

There exist some limitations that need to be illustrated and summed up in this paper. There are limitations in the amount and scope of euphemisms taken for analysis. Therefore, further analysis needs to be done so that the study can be more conclusive. In addition, the cultural background is not fully considered. The study of euphemisms from different cultural backgrounds by contrast and comparison, such as English euphemism and Chinese euphemism, will definitely help to explore the nature of euphemisms and promote intercultural communication.

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