

Conversational Aspects of Deontic Modality in “Downton Abbey”

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Abstract

Locher (2008: 509) stresses that “[a]s social beings we express, communicate, and, ultimately, negotiate our identity through many different channels” – one of the most important being language. Based on this observation as well as the recent trend within sociolinguistics and pragmatics to recognize mediated language performance in movies or TV-shows as a valuable source for linguistic variation and change, this paper traces the negotiation of social relationships and identities in conversations between characters in the British TV-series *Downton Abbey*. As the characters in the series are of different social ranks, their relations are found to be strongly negotiated when communicating and reacting to expressions of obligation. Therefore, the present study investigates the strategies used by characters of different social ranks to mark deontic modality. A qualitative analysis of selected episodes suggests that characters prefer indirect strategies for expressing obligation; the choice of strategies itself is highly context-dependent.

1 Preliminaries

In recent years, staged language performance has found increasing interest within sociolinguistics and pragmatics. Scholars have noticed the linguistic value of ‘texts’ as we find them in performed music in concerts, plays or even religious services (cf. Bell & Gibson 2011). As Bell and Gibson (2011: 556) portray, performance should not be limited to referring to the actual language output, i.e. *parole* in the Saussurean sense, but is something that is *inherent* to all interactions and therefore always contextualized: “To the extent that speakers are agentive, we can indeed say that they are always performing language, they have an awareness of alternative choices and their social meanings”. In order to avoid overgeneralisation, Coupland (2007) coins the term “high performance” in contrast to what he refers to as “mundane performance”. The former is used to describe a performance type that is characterised by having a schedule as well as temporal and spatial boundaries, by being pre-

announced, by requiring cooperation between performers and audience and especially by their public nature. In this sense, performances related to media products such as films, TV and radio shows as well as pop songs are also instances of high or staged performance, even though they are mediated. This mediation might seem to evoke different requirements for their analysis, but, as Bell and Gibson (2011: 558) point out, “their pervasiveness in contemporary society makes them the primary channel of public performance” and therefore these mediated performances provide important material for linguistic inquiry. As this insight is a fairly novel and recent one, research is only in the process of picking up and comparable studies are still limited.

Against this background, the present paper sets out to investigate conversations in *Downton Abbey* (henceforth DA), one of the most popular and successful British period drama series past and present. It was created by Julian Fellowes, its first season was aired in 2010 with a second, third and fourth season following in the consecutive years.

The series is set in the name-giving Downton Abbey, a fictional Yorkshire estate and portrays the lives of an aristocratic family – the Crawleys – and their servants. The plot develops around everyday issues such as love, hate, antagonism, jealousy, happiness and arguments – within the family, amongst the servants as well as between servants and family members. The (post-)Edwardian era (King Edward VII died in 1910), in which the series is set, was a period of great social changes caused by a number of historical events. By tracing on the story of the Crawley family, the series tries to depict the effects dramatic events (such as the sinking of the Titanic, the First World War, the Spanish flu pandemic, the interwar period and the formation of the Irish Free State) had on British society and the hierarchies traditionally associated with it.

After the First World War, aristocracy still had its place in British society, but also lost power. While they once owned large parts of the countryside, country houses now had to be closed and much of the control had to be given to the former tenants (cf. Thompson 1975). *DA* tries to show the struggling, caused by this series of serious events, of an aristocratic family which, on the one hand, tries to hold on to the old ways and traditions, but, on the other hand, is forced to give in and loosen up to the new ways. This does not only concern the members of the family, but also the various members of staff. This also means that due to these setbacks, which affect all the characters in some way or another, they have to constantly redefine their roles within the house – and thus their identity – which, of course, they also have to do linguistically.

Locher (2008: 509) directly relates language use (or performance) to identity construction:

As social beings we express, communicate, and, ultimately, negotiate our identity through many different channels: one such channel may be the way we dress, another the way we comport ourselves; yet another important channel is the use of language. We can even claim that the way in which we use language plays a crucial role when enhancing, maintaining, and challenging relationships in interpersonal communication.

Language can thus be seen as a “tool for interacting minds” (Tylén et al. 2010) which is used to decrease social distance and to enhance relationships, whereas it may also be used to stress and maintain social distance in other cases.

As the series provides a number of interesting constellations regarding social standings and relationships which are strongly defined by how the British class system is structured, operated and regulated, power differences are quite distinct within the family as well as amongst the servants. This is also why orders, requests, commands and permissions (i.e. directive speech acts) are central to many interactions in DA. Linguistically, these can, of course, be expressed in diverse ways; most of them, if not all, present instances of deontic modality. The aim of this paper thus is to investigate the various linguistic, and especially conversational, strategies the characters in DA use for expressing deontic modality to enhance, maintain and challenge their relationships in interpersonal communication.

The structure of the paper is as follows: Section 2 will lay out the project design of this study by providing theoretical foundations for the analysis, by further defining the focus of the study and by presenting the data sample. Section 3 comprises the analysis of actual dialogues from the series and Section 4 provides a summary and discussion of the findings.

2 Project design

2.1 Theoretical embedding

As already indicated, identity is not a fixed concept but rather “in flux” (Locher 2008: 511), negotiated and renewed in different situations and “viewed as the emergent product rather than the pre-existing source of linguistic and other semiotic practices and therefore as fundamentally a social and cultural phenomenon” (Bucholtz & Hall 2005: 588).

Thus, we can understand characters in DA as constantly re-negotiating their identity and social relations by interacting with each other, on the one hand as members of British society at large and, on the other hand, as members of the smaller community at Downton. Hence, they constantly engage in what Locher (2008: 510) calls *relational work* and describes as “the process of defining relationships in interaction”.

Identity construction is, however, also influenced by more general aspects such as authority, hegemony and power relations – notions which either authorize or dismiss identities (Locher 2008: 513). Locher (2008: 513) argues further that “[p]oliteness research is one of the productive research strands that aims at a better understanding of how interactants negotiate the interpersonal side of communication”. As reflected in DA, social hierarchies and class structures in Edwardian England are very much determined by and can be described well in terms of concepts such as power and distance. These two terms appear frequently in linguistic – mostly pragmatic – analyses as Power (P) and Distance (D) and are the two determining factors of politeness theory as conceptualized by Brown and Levinson (1987).

Central to their politeness theory is the term *face*, which has two specifications: positive and negative face. The former refers to someone’s want of acceptance and appreciation, while the latter describes someone’s want of independence and not being imposed on by others (Brown & Levinson 1987: 62). Basically, they follow the assumption that speaker as well as hearer care to “maintain each other’s face” (Brown & Levinson 1987: 60), even though it is frequently challenged by so-called face-threatening acts (FTAs). FTAs are measured in terms of their ‘weightiness’ (W_x), which is, in turn, determined by the already mentioned factors of P and D as well as R_x (the social and cultural ranking of the imposition – Locher 2008: 516), producing the following formula for ‘measuring’ the weightiness of a FTA: $W_x = D(S,H) + P(H,S) + R_x$. Accordingly, in Brown and Levinson’s model, the weightiness of the FTA is determined by the distance between the speaker (S) and the hearer (H), the power that H has over S as well as the cultural ranking of the imposition (R). It seems also important to note that – despite the mathematical notation – these variables are highly context-dependent and that, as a consequence, the weightiness of one FTA can hardly be generalised to another. The key challenge within an interaction thus remains to keep the face-threat to a minimum, which can be achieved by a number of strategies; for instance, the use of modal verbs and expressions to mitigate an utterance and to increase its indirectness.

2.2 Research focus

Based on these observations, I will pursue the question of how social relations and identities are negotiated in conversations in DA and how this is influenced by the use of expressions of deontic modality. In order to find answers to this question, I will examine interactions between servants as well as interactions between members of the family and their servants or other people of lower social rank.

To briefly sketch the linguistic object of study, deontic modality is a category which is usually associated with referring to necessity or possibility and to be seen as on a scale “going from absolute moral necessity via the intermediary stages of (on the positive side of the scale) desirability, acceptability and (on the negative side of the scale) undesirability, to absolute moral unacceptability” (Nuyts 2005: 9). Contrary to the position taken in traditional approaches, modality is not tied to the use of the central modal verbs only, however. More recent accounts (cf. Krug 2000; Facchinetti, Krug & Palmer 2003) stress the emerging modal status of verbs such as *have (got) to/hafta* and *gotta* also *want to/wanna* as well as other items such as *had better* and *might as well*. Alongside more lengthy paraphrases, these fill up the spaces on the scale which are left unoccupied by the central modal verbs.

In this regard, it is important to note that the expression of obligation is closely linked to directive speech acts, which “embody an effort on the part of the speaker to get the hearer to do something, to ‘direct’ him or her towards some goal (of the speaker’s, mostly)” (Mey 2001: 120).

The following research questions will therefore be central to the present study: Which strategies are used to express deontic modality? Is obligation rather expressed by direct or by indirect speech acts? Generally speaking,

the imperative in orders or requests is dispreferred in many languages, including English, despite its status as the ‘genuine’ expression of the speech act ‘order’ or ‘request’. Levinson remarks that “most usages [of requests] are indirect” (1983:264), whereas “imperatives are rarely used to command or request (p.275) (Mey 2001: 113).

In connection with these observations, Koester (2006), for example, also notes that orders and instructions are often mitigated by indirect forms because the dominant interactant tries to balance out the power relations in the conversation. This is in line with Haiman (1980, 1983), who challenges the structuralist position that language is an arbitrary system, and instead argues that the structure of language, to a large part, is motivated and “directly reflects some aspect of the structure of reality” (Haiman 1980: 515)¹, e.g. social hierarchies. Haiman postulates further that social distance is reflected by the length of utterances, whereby more formal registers, e.g. euphemisms, are “invariably longer” (1983: 800) than their corresponding words in more informal registers (cf. the word pair *feces – shit*) and have the instrumental function of protecting “a respected other from whatever unpleasantness is inherent in the speaker’s message” (Haiman 1983: 801). What is important for the present

¹ I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for bringing Haiman’s (1983) discussion of the ‘iconic expression of social distance’ to my attention.

study then is that euphemisms and other instances of the more formal registers are not only longer, but at the same time also more indirect than their informal correspondences.

Moreover, interactions in DA, at least the ones among servants and the ones between the family and the servants, fall in the category of workplace communication and

[i]n research on workplace directives, for instance, the focus is on the way people use language to get things done, and issues of power and politeness together with their implications for solidarity building and relationships, are always relevant (Vine 2010: 330).

Another point will be to see which strategies are employed to mitigate the face threat, which seems to be an immediate side-effect of utterances conveying obligation, permission, requests, etc: do characters make more use of the classic central modal verbs or do they find other ways of expressing deontic modality?

As already implied, DA is set at a time when British society was undergoing changes on all levels. Class differences were levelled out structurally, which, as we might hypothesize, can also be seen linguistically. Therefore, another question to be pursued in the following analysis is whether decreasing social distance between interactants triggers changes in the strategies used for expressing obligation. It needs to be noted, however, that this study does not aim at analysing the post-Edwardian period and its depiction in the TV-series as such, but rather at showing how the relations are portrayed for the modern viewer of the show².

2.3 Data sample

In order to include an element of comparison and to trace possible societal changes as reflected in the expression of obligation, episodes of all four seasons aired so far are included in the analysis: Season 1 (E1, E2), Season 2 (E1, E5, E9 + Christmas special), Season 3 (E1, E5, E9 + Christmas special) and Season 4 (E7, E8)³. Except for the episodes from Season 1, where the whole (social) setting is presented and in which the outlines of relationships are defined, and the episodes from Season 4, which close the temporal frame, the choice of the episodes for the data sample was more or less random.

² DA has repeatedly been criticized for inaccurate usage of vocabulary and many anachronisms. In this paper, I will, however, not be concerned with evaluating the historical correctness of the script. I will consider the language employed as a synchronic rather than diachronic system in order to avoid any judgements about whether certain words and expressions are likely to have been used at the beginning of the 20th century.

³ While the regular episodes are usually around 45-50 minutes, the Christmas specials are around 90 minutes.

The sample is thus thought to provide an overview of different strategies employed to express obligation amongst the servants as well as interactions between the family and their employees – ‘upstairs’ and ‘downstairs’ so to speak. As this would go far beyond the scope of this paper, I will not, however, discuss every single instance of obligation marking in the episodes considered. Instead, I will elaborate on a few interesting examples which seem representative of the sample at large. Anticipating one of the more general results of the investigation, the expression of obligation markers in DA confirms Levinson’s (see above) postulation that requests are mostly made indirectly. The examples in the following section were therefore chosen in order to present the wide range of strategies applied to reduce the directness of directive speech acts.

3 Analysis

Generally speaking, in the scenes under investigation the whole spectrum of utterances expressing deontic modality can be found. Even though central modal verbs like *must*, *should*, *can* etc. are obligation markers par excellence, they are, of course, not the only ones used in the series. Instead, even though not very frequently, emerging modal expressions such as *had better* and *Let’s* are also found. The latter indicate a certain degree of indirectness and thus become conversationally/pragmatically interesting.

In DA, the imperative, the strongest and most binding way of expressing necessity and obligation, is, as it seems, also the most frequent form of deontic modality. This is not surprising, however, as the dependency and power relations between the characters – be it between a member of the family and one of the servants, or Mr Carson, the butler, and one of his subordinates – provide an appropriate reason and context for orders to be made in the form of imperatives, as this is generally the case when the speaker is in a higher social position than the hearer. As imperatives are relatively straightforward and, even though they can differ in force, are relatively easy to interpret, instances of imperatives will not be discussed in more detail. If examples of imperatives appear in one of the conversations to be analysed, I will, however, comment on them briefly.

For the present paper, I have subdivided the data sample into two different categories. First of all, I am going to discuss conversations amongst the group of servants, in the subsequent section I will take a closer look at conversations between members of the family and various staff members. Conversations within the family also showed interesting patterns of obligation expression, but for reasons of space they shall not be discussed here.

3.1 Conversations ‘downstairs’

As already mentioned, the servants are not just servants in an aristocratic household. The job they do also determines their rank, their rights, and, in the end, their linguistic behaviour. This situation can be clearly observed in the first example, which happens to be one of the very first scenes in the very first episode.

(1) DA S1E1 00:04:17-00:04:45, Drawing room

[Mrs Hughes, the housekeeper, walks into the drawing room, in a fast pace, upright posture and serious face. Anna, head housemaid, and Daisy, the kitchen maid, are at work]

1 Mrs Hughes: Is the library tidy?

2 Anna: Yes, Mrs Hughes.

3 Mrs Hughes: Good. I want the dining room given a proper going over today. You can do it when they've finished their breakfast.

[turning to Daisy, the kitchen maid] Oh, heavens, girl! You're building a fire, not inventing it. How many have you done?

4 Daisy *[kneeling in front of the fireplace, covered in dust]*: This is my last till they come downstairs.

5 Mrs Hughes: Very well. Now, get back down to the kitchen before anyone sees you.

[Daisy picks up her utensils and leaves]

In this example, turns 1 and 2 can be considered a so-called pre-sequence⁴, “[u]tterances which serve as ‘precursors’ to others” (Mey 2001: 144), which, in this case, consists of an adjacency pair (question – answer); turn 2 is a preferred second pair part. Mrs Hughes’ *Good* in turn 3 is an indication that Anna’s reply was such a preferred second pair part. We are dealing with a type of pre-sequence which, according to Mey (2001: 144) can be referred to as an ‘inquirer’: “These usually precede a request of some kind; their function is to make sure that the request about to be made is indeed, from the point of the requestee, within the limits of the possible”. The acknowledgement of Anna’s positive response in 2 allows Mrs Hughes then to move on to the actual purpose of her utterance, namely the request for the dining room to be given a proper going over. This request takes the form of an indirect speech act – *I want the dining room ...*, not directly demanding the housemaid to do it. The following utterance, *You can do it ...*, however specifies the previous utterance and it becomes clear that Mrs Hughes is not going to clean the dining room herself. The use of the modal *can* often indicates permission or a suggestion, but here Anna clearly does not have a choice. The use of *I want* and *can* is, however, less face-threatening than the use of an imperative would be and can

⁴ The terminology used for analysing the organizational structure of conversations follows Schegloff’s *Conversation Analysis* as summarized in Archer, Aijmer & Wichmann (2012) and Mey (2001).

therefore be seen as a mitigation strategy. Without knowing anything about the characters yet, one can sense, merely by Mrs Hughes' demeanour, that she is in charge. By Daisy's sitting on the floor covered in dust, it can also be guessed right away that she is on the bottom of the social scale. The second part of Mrs Hughes' utterance in turn 3, when she addresses Daisy, also shows the influence of P and D in their interaction. Daisy's and powerless position becomes clear when Mrs Hughes exclaims *Oh, heavens, girl!* The whole utterance in 3 seems to be a FTA to Daisy's positive as well as negative face. Her work is neither appreciated (positive face) nor is she thought to be able to build a fire by herself (negative face). Daisy obediently replies in turn 4 before Mrs Hughes makes another request in turn 5, this time directly ordering the kitchen maid to go back to the kitchen by the use of the imperative *get back down*. One could also argue turn 5 to be the first pair part of a request-obedience adjacency pair and Daisy's reaction, namely her picking up her utensils and leaving the room, a preferred second pair part.

Concluding the analysis of this scene, one might say that it consists of two conversations following the same pattern: a pre-sequence, where a question is asked by the housekeeper to explore the situation, is followed by a request. It seems that Anna's higher ranking amongst the housemaids encourages a more indirect way of placing orders, whereas Daisy is addressed by an imperative. Mrs Hughes communicates on various levels that she is the boss and has a say in the housekeeping, whereas Anna and Daisy are the ones to take orders.

As the youngest and most naïve member of the servants, who gets distracted rather easily, Daisy frequently is the recipient of orders – direct as well as indirect ones. Mrs Patmore, the resolute cook, is her immediate supervisor, which is why they repeatedly provide for not only linguistically interesting but also humorous conversations about her duties and responsibilities in the kitchen.

(2) DA S1E2 00:04:14-00:05:14, Servants' hall

[conversation going on between Thomas, Miss O'Brien, Anna, Mr Bates and William; Daisy is also present]

1 Mrs Patmore [*angrily from the kitchen*]: Daisy!

[Daisy does not react. The conversation continues, Mrs Patmore enters and is baffled by Daisy's standing around]

2 Mrs Patmore: Daisy, did you hear me call, or have you gone selectively deaf?!

3 Daisy [*sheepishly*]: No, Mrs Patmore.

4 Mrs Patmore: Then might I remind you we are preparing dinner for your future employer, and if it goes wrong, I'll be telling them why!

[Daisy rushes after Mrs Patmore.]

Mrs Patmore's exclamation of Daisy's name in turn 1 should be understood as a request for the kitchen maid to come to the kitchen. She, however, gets a dispreferred response as Daisy does not show any reaction at all.

Turns 2 and 3 are a pre-sequence to the actual purpose of the conversation. They present an adjacency pair consisting of a question and an answer. The answer in turn 3 is a preferred second pair part, as the fact that Daisy did neither hear Mrs Patmore call nor did she go selectively deaf probably is not unexpected.

Turn 4 and Daisy's subsequent reaction present another adjacency pair: Mrs Patmore makes an indirect request in 4 and Daisy shows compliance. In turn 4, the *Then* uttered by Mrs Patmore shows that she accepts Daisy's answer and introduces her actual request; however, by the use of the modal *might*, the cook uses wording that is perceived as very polite and is often used in requests for permission. Mrs Patmore, however, does not have to ask Daisy for her permission because she is her superior. Thus, turn 4 is an indirect order for Daisy to get back to the kitchen immediately. One might think that the use of the modal *might* serves as a strategy to mitigate the FTA that Mrs Patmore is performing towards her maid. The wording of the utterance is by itself not particularly face-threatening, as I would argue, but the tone and the volume increase the weightiness of the FTA. Altogether, one could conclude that turn 4 is not strongly face-threatening at all. Daisy does not have any P over Mrs Patmore, it is her job to take her orders; furthermore, D between Daisy and Mrs Patmore is not very big, they spend most of their time together and know each other quite well. Also, in this case, Daisy knows exactly that she has done wrong by neglecting her work on such an important day. Daisy's reaction – rushing after Mrs Patmore – can be seen as her response and compliance to the order and is thus a preferred second pair part. Daisy's reaction also confirms what Nuyts (2005: 9) points out when saying that “[e]xpressions of permission, obligation and interdiction are more complex because they do not only involve an assessment of the degree of moral acceptability of a state of affairs, but also a ‘translation’ of this assessment into (non-verbal) ‘action terms’”. Thus, deontic modality does not only presuppose a deontic source, i.e. an authority issuing obligation or permission, but also a modal agent, “i.e. the person who is given permission or is under the obligation to do something” (Verstraete 2005: 1402), and also involves presuppositions about the agent's actual willingness to do what they are told. Strictly speaking, this justifies an obligation's actual translation into action terms to be considered a second pair part.

(3) DA S1E1 00:22:11-00:22:45, Kitchen

- 1 Mrs Patmore: Oh, don't tell me you haven't sent up the egg yet!
[Daisy panics and rushes out with the bowl. She grabs Gwen in the corridor.]
- 2 Daisy: Oh, God! Help me! Please, God, help me!
- 3 Gwen: What on earth's the matter?
- 4 Daisy: Just run upstairs to the dining room and find William, I beg you!
- 5 Gwen: I can't do that now.
- 6 Daisy: You've got to. I'll be hanged if you don't.
- 7 Gwen: What?
- 8 William: Daisy, is that you?
[William comes down the stairs with the bowl in his hand.]
- 9 William: Is it the chicken in a sauce or the plain chicken with sliced oranges?
- 10 Daisy: Oh, thank you blessed and merciful Lord! Thank you!
[Daisy swaps the egg dish with the salt of sorrel that William's holding.]
- 11 Daisy: It's the chicken in the sauce. I'll never do anything sinful again, I swear it, not till I die!
[Gwen stares after Daisy in confusion.]

Daisy is also the protagonist in the next scene to be discussed. The most interesting examples in (3) are Daisy's utterances in turns 2, 4 and 6. Mrs Patmore realizes in turn 1 that Daisy has not done something she was supposed to do and gets angry. Daisy is afraid of being punished and panics. She meets Gwen, a young housemaid, in the corridor and exclaims the imperative *Help me!* twice, and thus performs a directive speech act and at the same time a FTA. She does not want her utterance to be an order, though; she is desperate and wants to show Gwen that she really needs help by mitigating the imperatives by exclamations of *Oh God!* and *Please, God,...* . Turn 2 functions as a pre-sequence to the following conversation by which Daisy has caught Gwen's attention, who then wants to know what is going on. Daisy's response in turn 4 is a dispreferred second pair part to Gwen's question in 3, however. Daisy does not tell her what is the matter, but makes another directive speech act in the form of an imperative – *Just run upstairs...* . This order threatens Gwen's negative face, as she usually does not receive orders from the kitchen maid. As it seems, Daisy might be aware of this fact and adds *I beg you!* to her request. Thus, she wants to minimize the FTA by communicating Gwen that she would not ask her if her situation was not that desperate. In turn 5, Gwen responds with a dispreferred answer, she cannot help her. Daisy makes clear that this answer is dispreferred when she becomes even more direct in turn 6. Her use of *have got to* makes her problem seem very urgent, but at the same time she distances it from herself. She gives the reason why Gwen should help her, once again trying to minimize the FTA of her directive speech act, but by the use of *have got to* she suggests that there is some higher power which commits her to help and not only her personal dilemma. This relates to what was already

pointed out above, namely that deontic expressions imply a source, either a personal/speaker-internal or an objective/speaker-external authority. Scholars have repeatedly suggested that *must* is the more subjective way of expressing deontic modality (e.g. someone telling someone else what to do), whereas *have to* is more objective (expressing general rules) (cf. Myhill 1995, Westney 1995; also Collins 2005), even though only a slight semantic difference.

Another conversation showing that the servants are always intent on strengthening their position amongst their colleagues while at the same time trying to keep up appearances is the following. Here, we witness a dialogue between O'Brien, Lady Grantham's lady's maid and Jimmy, a footman. O'Brien has made herself a name amongst her colleagues for being plotting. Therefore, one gets suspicious when she pretends to be nice and helpful – as in this example, where she gives Jimmy advice.

(4) DA S3E5 00:02:57-00:03:37, Hallway

- 1 O'Brien: You look a bit puzzled...
- 2 Jimmy: I am. Mr Carson asked me to wind the clocks...
- 3 O'Brien: You must be doing well. In this house this marks you out as first footman more than anything could.
- 4 Jimmy: This is just it. I said 'Thank you' right away, but I know nothing about clocks.
- 5 O'Brien: You better ask Mr Burrow. He's the clock expert. He used to wind them but of course it's quite wrong for a valet to do it.
- 6 Jimmy: Mr Burrow won't mind?
- 7 O'Brien: Oh no... I can see he likes you. And that's good, since he's got the heir of his lordship.
- 8 Jimmy: Yes, I suppose I would've.
- 9 O'Brien: I would keep in with him if I were you...
- 10 Jimmy: I will. Thank you.
- 11 O'Brien: Think nothing of it.

It is well known that O'Brien likes to know what is going on 'downstairs'. Her utterance in turn 1 is not even to be seen as a pre-sequence, but a direct introduction of the conversation, even though it is made by a very indirect speech act. O'Brien states that Jimmy looks puzzled; literally, this would be a declarative speech act. It is, however, intended to be a request for further information and read to be as *Why do you look so puzzled?* Jimmy complies with her request right away in turn 2. He then goes on to express his worries about a new task, upon which O'Brien pretends to give him advice selflessly by saying *You better ask...*, which seems less pushing than telling him he, for example, *should* do so and thereby is less face-threatening. O'Brien is a lady's maid but does not have the authority to tell a footman what he

has to do; moreover, their relationship is limited to a usually strictly professional one, which is why O’Brien is keen to mitigate the FTA. This pattern is repeated in turn 9, when she performs another directive speech act, but again very indirectly by, on the one hand, using the modal *would* and, on the other hand, using the subjunctive *were*.

(5) DA S3E9 00:00:38-00:00:43, Kitchen

[Everyone’s busy preparing the family’s departure to Scotland; Bates comes into kitchen]

- 1 Bates: Suitcases are finished.
- 2 Jimmy: OK, I’ll go up and get them now.

Example (5) presents another way of how indirectly requests can be made. Bates comes into the kitchen and merely performs – at least formally – a declarative speech act, telling Jimmy that the suitcases are ready. Jimmy knows that it is his job as a footman to take care of the luggage and understands the hint that he is now supposed to go and fetch it. Turn 1 and turn 2 can thus be interpreted to be an adjacency pair expressing a request in the first pair part and compliance in the second, preferred, pair part. The complete indirectness of this request mitigates the FTA it usually involves to a minimum. It also shows that tasks are well distributed between the servants. They all know that they have to work together at busy times and therefore it seems that they do not need explicitness to know what they have to do.

3.2 Conversations between ‘upstairs’ and ‘downstairs’

Even though power relations between the family and their servants are not equal at all and their social distance is significant, the family’s behaviour towards the servants is usually of very polite and friendly nature. This is reflected in their way of placing orders, which hardly ever takes the form of imperatives, but is usually a very kind way of asking the servants to do something for them. Even when they are angry and feel the need to stress their authority, their linguistic choices can be seen as strategies to mitigate the face-threat.

In the following example, O’Brien, Lady Grantham’s maid, goes on ranting about Matthew Crawley, Lord Grantham’s heir (cf. turns 2-3). Cora overhears this and is not amused (from turn 4 onwards).

(6) DA S1E2 00:17:17-00:18:25, Servants' hall

- 1 O’Brien: I’m sorry, but I have standards.
[Anna enters and sits down next to Bates; they whisper to each other]
- 2 O’Brien: And if anyone thinks I’m going to pull my forelock and curtsy to this
[Cora enters.]
- 3 O’Brien: Mr Nobody from Nowhere—
- 4 Cora, Countess of Grantham: O’Brien!!

[The servants get up immediately.]

5 Cora: Were you discussing Mr Crawley?

6 O'Brien: Yes, milady.

7 Cora: Is it your place to do so?

8 O'Brien: I've got my opinions, milady, same as anybody.

[Mrs Hughes enters.]

9 Mrs Hughes: Can I help Your Ladyship?

10 Cora: This is the button we're missing from my new evening coat, I found it lying on the gravel, but I was shocked at the talk I heard as I came in. Mr Crawley is His Lordship's cousin and heir. You will, therefore, please accord him the respect he's entitled to [addressing everyone, especially O'Brien].

11 O'Brien: But you don't like him yourself, milady. You never wanted him to—

12 Cora *[raising her voice]*: You're sailing perilously close to the wind, O'Brien. If we're to be friends, you will not speak in that way again about the Crawleys or any member of Lord Grantham's family. Now, I'm going up to rest. Wake me at the dressing gong. *[Cora leaves and the servants sit back down.]*

Instead of showing O'Brien her obvious anger, Cora merely asks her maid whether she had any right to speak about Mr Crawley in such a way. By doing this, she states the obvious – it is of course in no way O'Brien's place to gossip about her future employer and the maid knows this. Thus, even though turn 7 takes the form of a question, it can be seen as a declarative speech act or even as directive speech act and therefore as a rhetorical question that does not ask for an answer. O'Brien, however, responds with a dispreferred answer. She says neither *yes* nor *no*, but gives her opinion – which is exactly what Lady Grantham does not think appropriate. Turns 5 to 7 could also be compared to the examination of a witness at court – with Cora being the examiner and O'Brien being the witness or defendant. In turn 9, Mrs Hughes steps in, feeling responsible for her staff members and asks whether she can help Lady Grantham. In the preferred second pair part, turn 10, Cora states the actual purpose of her visit downstairs, but also takes the chance to address the whole group of servants. Saying *You will...* is a very direct way of giving an order, a great face-threat, she mitigates it, however, by the use of *please* and tries to turn her order into an appeal. As this telling-off is mainly addressed to her, O'Brien feels the face-threat more than any of the others and feels the urge to respond. She goes too far, however, comparing herself to Lady Grantham. Finally, Cora loses her patience and raises her voice. She stresses her position as the lady of the house by explicitly telling O'Brien that she must not talk about Mr Crawley in a derogatory way in turn 12. She then even switches to giving her an order by an imperative. The threat to O'Brien's face is increased by the presence of all the other servants at this moment.

Similarly, in example (8) Lord Grantham feels the need to intervene at a concert that takes place at Downton during the First World War and to stress his role as lord of this house using his authority and power. In turn 3, he stands up and raises his voice against those girls who are handing out white feathers. He performs a direct directive speech act (imperative), the volume of his voice is an increase of the face-threat. The girls do not comply with his request right away, but rather answer insolently. Turn 5 thus is a dispreferred second pair part to the first pair part in turn 3, turn 4 would be an extension of the first pair part. In turn 5, Lord Grantham repeats his request, this time changing his mind and calming down a bit. He rephrases his request, still making it very direct, but this time more polite. The girls finally comply and leave. To ease up the whole situation, he wants the concert to continue and tells the conductor to do so, also using the rather direct way of requesting something by the use of *Will you....*

(7) DA S2E1 00:22:43-00:23:40, Concert hall

[Two women stand up on and start handing out white feathers. One hands a feather to William.]

1 William: What is it?

2 White Feather Girl 1: A white feather, of course, coward.

[Robert turns around and stands up.]

3 Robert, Earl of Grantham *[stands up and shouts]*: Stop this at once!

[William stands.]

4 Robert: This is neither the time nor the place!

5 White Feather Girl 2: These people should be aware that there are cowards among them.

6 Robert [shouting]: Will you please leave? You are the cowards here, not they.

[Mr Bates stands, also angry, and the women leave. Robert nods to William. William nods back and sits down.]

7 Robert: Leader, will you continue?

[William fingers the white feather the woman gave him. The exiting women hand Branson, the former chauffeur and now son-in-law, a feather on their way out. He smiles and takes it.]

The following scene between Anna and Lord Grantham is also interesting in terms of relational work. In the presence of Sir Philip and Matthew Crawley, his interaction with Anna is different to what it would probably be like if she had found him alone. His request for her to speak by saying her name seems very impatient. Her response presents a preferred second pair part; she tells him her concern in a very deferential way, which is indicated by her apology, the address form *milord* and the use of the modal verb *might* – probably being aware that her wish to talk to her employer when there are guests in the house is a face-threat. Due

to the presence of the other two men, he tells her to come into the library in a very dry and matter-of-fact way. When addressing Matthew, however, he chooses to make a very indirect request in the form of a question, keeping the threat to Matthew's negative face to a minimum. Lord Grantham seems the need to stress his position as Anna's employer and the great social distance between them, while his indirect address of Matthew shows that their social distance is rather low.

(8) DA S3E5 00:10:41-00:10:50, Hall

[Tom, Robert, Matthew and Sir Philip are coming out of the dining room, Tom leaves to check on his wife; Anna is already waiting for Lord Grantham – he approaches her; Sir Philip and Matthew remain in the background]

- 1 Robert: Anna?
- 2 Anna: I'm sorry to trouble you, milord, but I wondered if I might have a word?
- 3 Robert: Come into the library.
- 4 Robert: Matthew, would you take Sir Philip to the drawing room?

The negotiation of identity and relation work in conversation also becomes evident in the following extract from S3E1. The scene takes place at the wedding rehearsal, only a few days before the wedding of Lady Mary and Matthew Crawley. Bride and groom as well as their parents are distracted by several other subjects and do not focus on the rehearsal. They have, however, asked the archbishop himself to conduct the ceremony who now turns impatient. Instead of addressing the family, he urges the local reverend, Mr Travis, to move forward with the procedure.

(9) DA S3E1: 00:00:42-00:01:48, Downton church

[Mary and Matthew stand next to each other at the altar in plain clothes]

- 1 Archbishop: Mr Travis, can we move forward?
- 2 Reverend Travis: If I could just ask you to come down the aisle again.
[Matthew and Mary nod pleasantly to Rev. Travis and smile at each other as everyone turns and is shoved towards the door by the reverend. Matthew takes his place at his mother's side.]
- 3 Reverend Travis: Can we get the troops organized?
- 4 Robert, Earl of Grantham: That means me.
[Robert rises from the pew, but the party cannot stop discussing all sorts of personal matter. Finally, Robert and Mary walk to the back of the church.]
[Matthew and his mother also seem to have to discuss urgent matters until the archbishop calls down the aisle.]
- 5 Archbishop: Mr Travis, are we ready?
- 6 Reverend Travis: Er, any moment, Your Grace, any moment.
[Travis walks back up the aisle.]
- 7 Reverend Travis: Can we, please?

[Mary and Robert stand ready and take each other’s arm before walking down the aisle.]

The archbishop, who is of course higher in rank than the local reverend, wants to move on with the rehearsal and signals this to Mr Travis by performing an indirect request by asking a question – leaving the ‘dirty work’ of approaching the family to his subordinate. Aware of the high social ranking of the family at Downton and that his request is going to present a face-threat, he mitigates it by means of as many hedges as he can think of, embedding it in an *if*-clause and adding an additional *please* to further decrease the face-threatening nature of a request. Mary and Matthew comply with the request – their non-verbal reaction can therefore be seen as a preferred second pair part. Lord Grantham does not, however, get up right away, which is why Mr Travis has to repeat his request. Probably feeling uncomfortable to reprove Lord Grantham, he is careful not to address him personally, but asks to *get the troops organized*. This time Robert responds verbally as well as non-verbally and gets up. The party still seems to have more important things to discuss, however, and the archbishop seems to get even more impatient with them, once again asking whether they were ready. Mr Travis, feeling responsible for what is going on, and a little embarrassed by the family’s inattention, responds in a very deferential way. Now being impatient himself, he stops using mitigation strategies to save the Crawleys’ face but becomes more direct in his address, merely saying *Can we, please?* Thus, in the beginning of the conversation, Mr Travis posits himself linguistically as a faithful servant to both the archbishop and the Crawleys, but when he does not experience their immediate co-operation he has to rethink his priorities and loyalties. He continues to comply with the archbishop’s requests and adjusts his linguistic choices accordingly. When it comes to interacting with the Crawleys, he, however, changes his linguistic behaviour to being more direct and less deferential. Thus, the factors of P and D play a rather important role for the choice of linguistic strategies in this conversation.

4 Summary and conclusion

The object of the preceding analysis was to find in which ways obligation is expressed in the series DA. As the example scenes in the previous sections showed, characters in DA employ a number of strategies in order to express obligation – ranging from very indirect requests to very direct ones. Vine (2009: 1398) points out that the “[p]urpose of interaction influence[s] the frequency and density of directives with directives being much more frequent in problem-solving and task-allocation meetings”. The examples from DA also show that the choice of direct or indirect directive speech acts is highly dependent on context and situation. Direct

directives such as imperatives are mainly used when immediate action is required, and when power and social difference need to be stressed. Otherwise, indirect directives seem to be preferred. They are mitigated by a number of strategies, for example the use of modal verbs such as *would*, *can* and *could*, the use of *if*-conditionals and other modal items such as *had better*, which have the connotation of advice-giving rather than forceful direction.

Amongst the servants, imperatives are more frequent than among the members of the family and in interactions of family members with servants, a fact that confirms Haiman's hypothesis that the longer the message, the greater the social distance between interlocutors. It is, however, the job of characters such as Mrs Hughes and Mr Carson to give orders and the job of the other servants to take these orders. Even though this would also be expected from interactions between the Crawleys and the servants, the family is very careful to place indirect orders or to at least mitigate them in one way or another. These results seem to confirm that the mostly indirect nature of requests is iconically motivated: indirect requests are much longer than simple imperatives and therefore, as "[t]he social distance between interlocutors corresponds to the length of the message" (Haiman 1983: 783), reflect social differences between family and servants.

Regarding the question whether decreasing social differences and events such as a war and strokes of fate affect the linguistic behaviour in DA, it is difficult to find a clear answer. There are no signs that social changes have great impact on the every-day lives of the characters at Downton. Of course, they have to get used to electricity, the telephone, cars etc., but the Crawley family and parts of their staff are rather conservative. They are not yet ready to give up their traditions and ways of life, which is why their ways of interaction, which are of course highly conventionalised, hardly change. In fact, one of the anonymous reviewers correctly notes that the timespan of only a few years might be far too short for individuals to be able to change their linguistic behaviour noticeably; such changes would manifest themselves maybe only in a next generation – if at all. Thus, the context-dependence of such utterances seems to weigh more heavily than general relations between the characters. Indeed, everyone seems to move closer together, but when it comes to placing orders and requests – in whatever constellation – it is the situation that mainly determines the linguistic items used.

In conclusion, even though we are dealing with mediated performance language, it should have become evident that modal items other than the central modal verbs play an important role in expressing deontic modality – a development which should, ideally, be reflected in research on modality in general. "[A]s media become ever more embedded in day-to-day experience, it seems increasingly likely that there are circulating relationships

between performed and everyday language" (Bell & Gibson 2011: 559), the former providing material to be adopted in the latter and vice versa. Performed language "packages up stylistic and socio-semantic complexes and makes them transportable" (Coupland 2007: 155) and is therefore to be considered and to be promoted as an important source for on-going linguistic change.

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