

THE LANGUAGE OF POWER AND PRIVILEGE THROUGH LITERARY TEXTS: A SEMIOTIC APPROACH

Tatiana Ivushkina

MGIMO UNIVERSITY, Russia
Email: Tatiana.ivushkina@gmail.com

ORCID ID: 0000-0003-3024-9520

ABSTRACT: The paper draws on literature of the turn of the 21st century to verify the stability and relevance of the linguistic and non-linguistic characteristics of upper class language singled out before in a diachronic study. The discourse analysis and semiotic approach based on the indexicality principle introduced by Bucholtz and Hall allow outlining a semiosphere of upper class culture, a ‘universe’ of interconnected signs of verbal and non-verbal nature. Linguo-stylistic analysis enables to examine how language functions on different levels creating social meanings in upper class characterization. The research is carried out on the novels written by the authors belonging to the upper classes (Julian Fellowes, Jeffrey Archer, Charles Jennings, Kazuo Ishiguro) and those whose narratives focus on upper class life (David Nichols, Sue Townsend). The analysis has revealed a complex semiotic system of upper class culture built on: 1) *overt identity categories*: upper class titles and ranks, proper names of the privileged class institutions, the names of the upper class representatives used with their titles; 2) *implicatures and assumptions about one’s identity position* revealed in the names of the books and the authors, allusions to classical literature and upper class authors; the names of the magazines popular among the elite; social events; social attribution by describing appearance; 3) *evaluative or epistemic orientations and particular roles* expressed through modal verbs, evaluative adverbs, the manner of speaking, voice parameters and accent; 4) *ideologically associated structures* manifested in the use of foreign languages, borrowings, abstract nouns, and syntactically complex sentences.

KEYWORDS: indexicality, social identity, semiosphere, upper classes, turn of XXI c., British literature, explicit and implicit means

Introduction

Social structure of society finds its reflection in language; language always correlates with status and serves the means of social characterization. If lower middle classes are easy to detect as their speech is marked by “deviations” from literary language (in pronunciation, in the use of words and grammar), it is not the case with the upper classes of society speaking literary language without obvious irregularities. Still, they have their own speech characteristics, or ‘shibboleths’, determined by education and history of Great Britain. Among the most significant events affecting upper class culture were the Norman conquest which brought French to the status of the state language and the language of the aristocracy for more than three centuries and the activity of French aristocratic salons at the end of the 17th-18th centuries where aristocratic women elaborated a society code

based on the principles of nobility, gentility, and elegance, manifesting the highest achievements of human civilization and the model for communication. Though much has changed since then, and the efflorescence of aristocratic culture is in the past, the model of communication has not lost its relevance today, on the contrary, it is gaining even more weight, especially in the light of international interaction.

The paper is the continuation of the diachronic research carried out earlier on the material of 19th-20th centuries British literature (Ивушкина/Ivushkina, 1997, Квартовкина/Kvartovkina, 2004, Крюков/Krukov, 2001, Ivushkina, 2020, and many others). The research is also based on the book by Benedetta Craveri *The Age of Conversation* (2005), in which the author gives a historical background of the ideal elaborated by the French nobility in an *ancien régime*, which was characterized by elegance and courtesy and considered to be the model for the nation. This paper is aimed at getting a deeper insight into socially marked linguistic and non-linguistic indices of upper class culture, associated with power and prestige so that one would be able to identify them in speech, either oral or written.

This research is of a theoretical and practical significance as it reveals a universe of socially marked characteristics, universal and culturally specific characteristics, and traces the changes caused by social processes.

Methodology

The research is carried out on the material of literature of the turn of the 21st century subjected to discourse, semiotic, sociolinguistic and linguo-stylistic analyses in order to reveal verbal (most common features and characteristics of speech on different levels of language (phonetic, lexical and grammar)) and non-verbal characteristics (manner of speaking, voice, behavior, pastime, clothes, etc.) of the upper classes in Great Britain. The semiotic approach based on social identity theory elaborated by Bucholtz and Hall in their work *Identity and Interaction: A sociocultural linguistic approach* (Bucholz & Hall, 2005) allows seeing different levels of social identity construction, a 'semiosphere', the term first coined by a Russian semiotician Yury Lotman in his book *Semiosphere Culture and Explosion Inside the Thinking Worlds* (Лотман/Lotman, 2004). Semiosphere is a semiotic space with all communicative signs generating meaning, 'it is the result and the condition of the existence of culture' (Лотман/Lotman, 2004, p. 251). The principle of indexicality includes five main criteria: *emergence* (identity as the product rather than the source of linguistic and other semiotic practices, it is a social and cultural rather than primarily internal psychological phenomenon); *positionality* (identities encompass macro-level demographic categories (age, gender, occupation, income, education are the most important factor), temporary and interactionally specific stances and particular roles, and local, ethnographically emergent cultural positions); *indexicality* (identities may be linguistically indexed through labels, implicatures, stances, styles, or linguistic structures and systems); *relationality* (identities are relationally constructed through several, often over-

lapping, aspects and the relationship between self and other, including similarity/difference, genuineness/artifice and authority / de-legitimacy); and *partialness* (identity may be in part intentional, in part habitual and less than fully conscious, and in part an outcome of larger ideological processes and structures).

The principle of indexicality underlies the structure of the literary works analysis and comprises such sub-categories as 1) overt mention of identity categories and labels; 2) implicatures and presumptions regarding one's own or other's identity position; 3) displayed evaluative or epistemic orientations to ongoing talk, as well as interactional footings and particular roles; 4) the use of linguistic structures and systems that are ideologically associated with specific personae and groups. The indexicality principle approach allows a researcher to cover different aspects of social status manifestation, to see a semiosphere, a totality of interconnected signs of verbal and non-verbal nature in which meaning originates.

In connection with the semiotic approach, Silverstein's theory of 'indexical order' should also be referred to (Silverstein, 2003, pp. 193–229), according to which any word apart from naming an object carries information of a higher level – from micro-level, that is the information of an area, temporary roles and interactional positions, ideological associations, to the macro-level information, which includes information about social status, and its place in a social structure of society. And Gumperz's interactional sociolinguistics (Gumperz, 1992), the emphasis put on the face-to-face interaction and the introduced notions of conversational 'inferencing' and 'contextualisation', as well as register shifts in speech which seem very productive in revealing social and cultural meanings in a sociolinguistic research (Rampton, 2017).

The analysis is carried out on the British novels of the turn of the 21st century: Julian Fellowes' *Past Imperfect* (2008), Jeffrey Archer's *Not A Penny More, Not A Penny Less* (2004), Charles Jennings' *People Like Us* (1998), David Nicholls' *One Day* (2009), Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* (1999) and Sue Townsend's *Number Ten* (2012). The selection of the novels was based on the authors' social status and education (Oxbridge in the first place), and, also, on the fact that the plot was centered on the representatives of the upper classes, which allowed authors of different backgrounds to be taken into account. It should also be noted that the narratives of selected authors from high society are considered on a par with speech portrayals. The writers of other social backgrounds usually stand out by ironic or even satirical attitude to the classes in question which does not lessen the objectivity in "shibboleths" representation; on the contrary, it makes it even more conspicuous as they bring forth typified characteristics, which differentiate them from others. The correspondence of literary delineation to real life speech was proved and verified in the process of diachronic study of upper class speech in the interviews of the British aristocrats from Cirencester, Great Britain, participating in the research work.

The analysis will consistently analyze the literary material in accordance with indexicality principles suggested by Bucholz and Hall and in the same order.

Analysis of literary texts

As it has been mentioned earlier, the analysis of the selected novels will be subjected to discourse analysis with the indexicality principle underlying it, and linguo-stylistic analysis. The four processes, or four classes participating in constructing identity, will reveal an overall complex system of social identity formation in the contexts of the novels. In some cases the illustration will be confined to separate lexical units, in others – to phrases or separate passages to show the implicit means of social identification.

CLASS 1. Overt mention of identity categories and labels

Class 1 consists of status words, which lie on the surface and directly refer to the status of a speaker. The reader immediately gets the information about social standing of a speaker by means of:

• The upper-class titles and ranks

On the pages of the novels we come across the following words and word-combinations explicitly indicating social status of the characters: *a rich young viscount* (Archer, 2004, p. 51); *a member of the British aristocracy* (Archer, 2004, p. 166); *tremendously trendy people* (Jennings, 1998, p. 64); *peers* (Jennings, 1998, p. 10); *the noble lord* (Archer, 2004, p. 84); *was reasonably upper-class* (Archer, 2004, p. 86); *quintessentially upper crust, upper crust men and women* (Jennings, 1998, p. 7); *the top set, the upper boys, a closed world* (Jennings, 1998, p. 44); *uppermost people* (Jennings, 1998, p. 10), *the upper boys* (Jennings, 1998, p. 63); *aristos and toffs* (Jennings, 1998, p. 59); *layabout aristos* (Jennings, 1998, p. 96); *real titles, hereditary titles* (Fellowes, 2008, p. 146); *debs* (Fellowes, 2008, p. 494); *paragons* (Jennings, 1998, p. 176); *grandeess and snobs* (Jennings, 1998, p. 190); *knightly class* (Jennings, 1998, p. 109); *smart society* (Fellowes, 2008, p. 147):

1. What's more, would you then institutionalize wealth and wealth-creation among these **uppermost** people? (Jennings, 1998, p. 10).
2. Let us take a short trawl through *The Sunday Times*' list of 500 richest people in Britain. You will not be surprised to find a terrible number of **peers** of the realm listed there, their extreme richness usually denoted by the word '**land-owner**' (Jennings, 1998, p. 10).
3. The nearest I ever got to them would be when I came across young, young, **upper-crust men and women** wearing evening dress, or some other cabalistic uniform... (Jennings, 1998, p. 7).

• The names of the upper-class representatives often used with their titles:

Grand Duchess (Fellowes, 2008, p. 152), *the ninth Earl of Claremont* (Ibid., p. 35); *Lady Dalton* (Ibid., p.100); *Princess Margaret and Lady Pamela Berry*

(Ibid., p. 47); *Duchess of Richmond* (Ibid., p. 136), *Great Duke of Moravia* (Ibid., p.137); *Lord Salisbury* (Ibid., p.127), etc.:

4. Her father was **the ninth Earl of Claremont**, a mellow, even charming, title and when I knew him, as I would do later, he was himself a mellow and charming man... (Fellowes, 2008, p. 35).

5. **Lady Dalton** was not her usual, cheery self, as she kissed and handed us down the line, and while all the usual forms were observed... (Fellowes, 2008, p. 100)

6. He would talk so freely of **Princess Margaret** or **the Westminster** or **Lady Pamela Berry**, that he would probably have been as surprised as his listeners to discover that everything he knew of these people he had gleaned from the pages of the *Daily Express* (Fellowes, 2008, p. 47).

•Proper names associated with the privileged class institutions:

the Old Etonian, *hardcore smart Oxford clique* (Jennings, 1998, p. 7); *Harrovians* (Ibid., p. 6); *Oxford University* (Ibid., p. 4); *the Christ Church and Magdalen* (Ibid., p. 8); *Eton and Harrow* (Ibid., p. 49); *Cambridge University* (Ibid., p. 60); etc.:

7. This was even more true when it came to hardcore smart **Oxford cliques**, like the Piers Gaveston Club (for grand transvestites), the Bullingdon Club (which had been banned from **the city of Oxford** when I was there, because of drunken depravity) and the **Christ Church Beagles** (dogs and alcoholism). (Jennings, 1998, p. 7)

8. I found that there were people from **Eton, Harrow, Benenden, Westminster, Marlborough, Sherborne School for Girls at Oxford** too. (Jennings, 1998, p. 5)

CLASS 2. Implicatures and assumptions about one's own or other's identity position

In order for the interlocutors to understand the indirect, non-literal meaning of a word, they must share background knowledge, education, lifestyle, interests and pastimes. Background knowledge constitutes part of a sociolinguistic code and serves to differentiate between the 'in-group' and 'out-group' members (the terms first introduced in 1906 by sociologist William Graham Sumner in his book *Folkways*, and later, in the 1970s, used by social psychologists Henri Tajfel and John Turner in their *Social Identity Theory*). A most difficult part of this code is created by literature, literary names and authors popular among the upper classes, often cited and referred to.

• The names of the authors and the books about the aristocracy

The analysis of literary works reveals a common literary core shared by the upper-class group often serving as a literary jargon for the 'in-group' members.

The names of the authors and literary works are recurrent: they run through different novels by different authors in upper class speech portrayals, for example:

9. Why could do all these things, but you couldn't open your mouth without giving yourself away. Which is why Henry Higgins, in *Pygmalion*, is a genius. He is able to defeat this particular reality because he doesn't just dress up *Eliza Dolittle* in a ballgown and get her to use a knife and fork properly: he teaches her to speak a version of posh English – to use a kind of voice – which is (we're expected to believe) indistinguishable from the real thing (Jennings, 1998, p. 47).

A famous play by an Irish playwright Bernard Shaw has received popularity worldwide. Written in 1912 and based on the ancient Greek mythology where Pygmalion, a sculptor, fell in love with one of his sculptures, which came to life, Bernard Shaw depicts professor of phonetics Henry Higgins, a genius, similar to the sculptor: having educated illiterate Eliza Dolittle and turning her into a lady, he fell in love with her. But this allusion in Charles Jennings's novel implies a different aspect of the story – the difficulty, almost impossibility of emulating the upper-class accent if you are not born with it, and the despair of the aspiring narrator, a graduate from Oxbridge, who, going out of his ways to become one of "them", failed to achieve this.

10. Year by year he would comb the stud books, *Peerage and Gentry*, writing to the mothers of daughters, interviewing their sons, all to buy another few months for the whole business (Fellowes, 2008, p. 44).

The reference to *Peerage and Gentry* implies the manner of looking for a party for a deb (a young upper-class woman making her first appearance in fashionable society) and looking through the list of the titled families. In the country parents throw a house party for strangers, but in London, during the Season, parents of the deb provided dinners for a daughter and invited young men by a little postcard 'saying that the writer would be 'terribly' pleased if you would dine there' (Fellowes, 2008, pp. 130-131). Parents audition those young men 'who had come to attention as possible escorts and dancing partners for the deb'. Stud book, registered in the dictionary as 'the book containing pedigrees of horses' (AB-BYY), implies the same selection of a worthy party among the aristocratic families in the 20th century.

Socially marked are the names of Jane Austin, James Henry, Oscar Wilde, Nancy Mitford, Evelyn Waugh, Anthony Trollope, Bernard Shaw, Thomas Hardy, Virginia Woolf, Thomas Eliot, William Makepeace Thackeray, etc. Among the books about the aristocracy, it suffices to mention *Debrett's Peerage and Baronetage* (2003), *Burk's Peerage and Gentry*, *The Noblesse Oblige* (1956) by Alan Ross, Nancy Mitford and Evelyn Waugh, *The Sloane Ranger's Handbook* (1982), *The Pygmalion* (1913) by Bernard Shaw, *Brideshead Revisited* (1945) by Evelyn Waugh, *Past Imperfect* (2008), *Snobs* (2005) by John Fellowes, and others.

• **Allusions to different sources requiring knowledge**

The role of allusions in social characterization is hard to overestimate. It is completely based on the knowledge of literature, art, and theater, in other words, on classical education and well reading of a person. This element of social characterization is hard to acquire that is why references to literature are often used for establishing cultural contact and sustaining cultural conversation (dialogue) of different generations, also, for conserving their socio-cultural code. Allusions reflect lifestyle, tastes and values of the upper classes. There is an unspoken, agreed-upon body of work that creates this code, which is deployed through casual allusions and quotations in conversation. Dropping a perfectly apt line from Shakespeare or Wodehouse, or referencing a minor character in a Dickens novel, demonstrates that this knowledge is ingrained, not studied for an exam. It is not just knowledge of the works but the view, traditionally accepted view on them, which signals alignment with established taste. It is this element of background knowledge which is hard to acquire and easy to misinterpret. The following examples illustrate how allusions convey meaning:

11. The ninth Earl of Claremont ... he too lived in a benign mist, although, unlike Serena, he was not **a creature of myth, a lovely naiad, eluding her swain**. His vagueness was more **akin to Mr. Pastry**. Either way, he never had much grasp of hard reality (Fellowes, 2008, p. 35).

One of the main characters in Julian Fellowes' novel *Past Imperfect*, Serena, of aristocratic blood, is compared to a creature from classical mythology – a naiad, a water nymph, eluding her swain, to highlight Serena's spinelessness, indecisiveness and complete dependence on the opinion of her parents who were the only ones to decide who was worthy to marry. Her father, Earl of Claremont, on the other hand, is compared with Mr. Pastry, a character from a British TV series, where he is drawn as a clown, very popular among children in the 50s-60s of the 20th century. These allusions add touches to both portraits.

12. In truth, his stance drained my mother, since she was never allowed to discuss the private affairs and theoretical activities of their acquaintance, and this inevitably made their conversation very arid. "What business is it of ours?" he would say, and she would nod and agree with him, and say of course and how right he was, and thereby be silenced. After I'd grown up, I used to defend her and **quote Alexander Pope: 'The proper study of mankind is man'** and so on. The fact remained he felt uncomfortable and ungenerous delving into the murky waters of others' personal histories and she gave up trying to change him, retaining these topics to enjoy with her friends and her children (Fellowes, 2008, p. 194).

The narrator alludes to Alexander Pope in this extract, an English poet of the 17th - early 18th centuries who was a prominent poet, satirist and translator famous for his poems *The Rape of the Lock*, *The Dunciad*, and *An Essay on Criticism*, and his poem *An Essay on Man* (1734), in particular, which reveals the importance of understanding a man, and self-understanding. The poet calls for the

study of human nature, their complex thoughts, passions and contradictions, rational and ethical existence, which is more important and meaningful than anything else. This allusion reveals learning of the characters, their acquaintance with poetry and philosophy of the 17th - 18th centuries.

• ***The names of the magazines popular among the upper-class people***

Socially marked are also newspapers and magazines targeted for the upper-class readers and reflecting their language, interests and hobbies. Among the ones found on the pages of the novels under analysis are *The Racing Post*, *The Country Life*, *The Shooting Times*, *The Field*, *Horse and Hound*, *Vogue*, *The Times*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Financial Times*, *The Economist*, *The Spectator*, *The Gentleman's Quarterly*, *The Sunday Times*.

13. This is less true of ***Horse and Hound***, given the way H&H comes across as a kind of ***Hello!*** for nags and their titled owners (Jennings, 1998, p. 162).

14. ***Shooting times***, I must confess, left me a bit uneasy ('Superb day for talented young guns') with its ads for British-made Live Catch Traps and various gunsafes – but then, what else did I expect in a magazine with the word *shooting* in the title? (Ibid., p. 162).

15. ***Country Life***, however, is odder than either of these. Sometimes it grips the nettle of change pretty damn firmly... (Ibid., p.162).

The titles of the newspapers reveal hobbies, interests of the upper class, and their preference for country life, which all together draw their semiosphere, each component of which can be explored separately and become a scholarly research in itself.

• ***Clubs***

Clubs are an important part of upper-class social life. They consolidate upper-class identity, and serve as powerful "The Old Boy Networking" venues for the graduates from the prestigious universities (Oxford, Cambridge). They are the institutions of power, politics and exclusivity that historically shaped the British elite and through which the elite consolidate their identity, exercise power and rule the society away from the public eye. They have acquired social and cultural implications and turned into social indices of status. In the novel *People Like Us* by Charles Jennings we find *The Piers Gavestone Club*, a dining club only for men; *The Bullingdon Club*, also an exclusive male dining club in Oxford for wealthy members, notoriously famous for their destructive behavior; *The Leander Club*, one of the oldest rowing clubs in the world, founded in 1818 in Remenham, Berkshire (Jennings, 1998, p. 7). In London the role of clubs has not waned, they remain an essential part of upper class life.

• *Social events*

Social events like clubs differentiate the upper classes from the rest. Not only does a sport itself (hunting, or shooting, etc.) but the whole sphere involved in this sport (or any other pastime) with its terminology and the place (Cowdray Park, etc.) acquire social meaning and significance. Each could as well become the subject matter for a separate research paper. In *People Like Us* by Charles Jennings they are represented widely and in detail: *Ascot* (the finest horse race in the world); *Henley* (the Royal Regatta); *Queen Charlotte's Ball* (on the 25th September at the Grosvenor house in Park Lane); *Polo at Cowdray Park*; *The Glorious Twelfth* (a term used to refer to 12th August, the start of the shooting season in Great Britain and Northern Ireland); the *Mirabelle Luncheon* ('hosted by the undead herself, Baroness Thatcher'); *the House of Lords versus House of Commons Speedo Swim* (charity swim) and the *Brittany Ferries Windsor Horse Trials*", *Cricket matches, etc.* (Jennings, 1998, p. 21-22).

• *Social attribution by describing his/her appearance*

Appearance of an upper-class person is a complex and sophisticated language, which can be described as understatement (never overt display of wealth), tradition and the correct, often unspoken rules. It is based on the principles: quality and longevity (investing in quality items that last a lifetime and are repaired), fit and fabric (clothes are impeccably tailored from natural fabrics), shabbiness as a status symbol (worn-in, slightly frayed clothes with some shabbiness is a sign of confidence and old money). Appearance is an implicit nonverbal means of social characterization, very efficient and widely used in literature. Class distinctions in appearance have not changed much since the 20th century or even the earlier times. The most distinctive features of a male dress is a suit often hand-made and sewn of natural fabrics like tweed, corduroy and silk, a white tie, a social emblem of the upper classes, headscarves, and a black top hat to be found in literature:

tweeds and ties and headscarves

16. "They wore **tweeds and ties and headscarves**: *the sort of clothes I'd only seen in period TV dramas*" (Jennings, 1998, p. 5);

a tailcoat and a black top

17. "As she went by, she appeared to be nothing more than a great pile of fag ash: **colourless hat**, grey hair, pallid complexion, **white gloves, and yards of pale, featureless dress**, bleached almost white in the hot afternoon sun. She was, I later found out, wearing **printed cream** by Mr. Frederick Fox, **with pastel apricot and green**, but all this was lost in the heat (Jennings, 1998, p. 26).

18. "When I first went to Ascot there were only three people wearing **grey morning suits** and one man always wore **a brown frock coat**.' It must have been **a sea of black**, like a state funeral. Nowadays, about 40 per cent of men **in morning suits**

wear grey at Scot, the rest black. But even allowing for this marginal variation, a morning suit is still **a remarkably standardized piece of clothing**, especially when there are thousands of them in one place, being worn by dukes, housebreakers and suburban dentists. I did spot a cleric in *some sort of bizarre Barchester Towers frockcoat and dog collar*, to vary the tone. And I also saw, in the Royal Enclosure, a tough-looking, thickset bloke with a beard and **an outfit of mildly distorted Teddy-bear drapes** (Ibid., p.28).

The adduced ironic extracts, drawn by means of hyperboles and metaphors, convey the atmosphere at Ascot, one of the most significant upper class events, and participants' 'a remarkably standardized manner' of dressing. The old-fashioned suits ('never quite fashionable, never quite unfashionable'), often hand-tailored, have turned into an upper class sign, or even a symbol, easily recognized.

19. '...they wear manifestly **hand-tailored suits**, never quite fashionable, never quite unfashionable, **emphasizing the traditional British pear shape of the well-bred male**'. They wear indestructible **corduroy trousers in murky yellow, and chunky pullovers** with a sort of regular black fleck on a pale fawn background.... (Ibid., p. 45).

The relevance of these social markers are proved by the descriptions of upper class men found in the Oxford Living Dictionary:

1) *Prince Alvin* was wearing a brilliant black, **velvet tailcoat and black britches** that looked stunning with his golden crown.'

2) Swirling dresses, and powered wigs adorned the ladies, and the men wore **tailcoats of beautiful silk**.'

3) Wednesday, the *ambassador's wife*, formally dressed in **top hat and tailcoat**, was scheduled to ride a stallion named High Voltage in an international horse show' (Oxford Living Dictionary, 2017).

In *Past Imperfect* the old-fashioned, or traditional upper class manner of dressing is emphasized by the metonymy 'a Jane Austen' in the following episode:

20. Lucy was dressed in **a Jane Austen, white frock, high-waisted and pure, with a ribbon round her throat and her artificial ringlets sewn with tiny, white silk roses** (Fellowes, 2008, p. 132).

A metonymic description of the dress created by alluding to Jane Austen, a 19th century widely recognized British writer, emphasizes her role in upper class literature and culture, and purity and innocence of her genteel characters. The author and her personages have become an embodiment of upper class culture, they created a valuable cultural and social code shared by the in-group members now.

21. Emma turned back to her reflection in the cracked mirror, plumped up **the puffed sleeves of her Empire line dress, removed her spectacles and gave a Jane Austen sigh** (Nicholls, 2009, p. 20).

The reference to Jane Austen is made not only to describe the dress of the character but also to convey the feeling of complete satisfaction, pleasure and relief which are read in-between the lines in Jane Austen's novels.

CLASS 3. Evaluative and epistemic orientation to ongoing talk, interactional footings and particular roles

This section of social indices conveys speakers' attitudes and knowledge about on-going talk and defining their position and signaling their roles within the interaction which is realized through evaluative words, adjectives and adverbs, modal verbs and manner of speaking, signaling alignment or opposition to another speaker's position, maintaining the conversation and managing the interaction.

ADJECTIVES AND ADVERBS

Socially marked are evaluative adjectives with both ameliorative and pejorative connotations, which are an essential and a remarkable part of upper class vocabulary conveying speakers' reading and position in society. There is a socially marked list of evaluative adjectives, usually borrowings, which convey upper class values and ideals created in the French salons of the 18th century. Like abstract nouns, they are difficult to use and emulate if not educated in the classical university, which make them a characteristic feature of upper-class speech. They create distance with out-group members and rapport with their own tribe. Adjectives used with adverbs can create overstatement or understatement, speech phenomena meant to hide the speakers' true feelings and signal other social markers of elite identity.

22. 'That is **SUCH** fun! Are you **REALLY** going to do it? You're **SO** lucky! Isn't she looking **MARVELOUS**?' (Jennings, 1998, p. 34).

Emphatic constructions with *such* and *so*, as well as the adjective *marvellous* are upper class 'shibboleths'. In the given example they are part of small talk serving to maintain conversation. Let us adduce more examples:

23. Her name is Sylvie cope, a **beautiful** name.... she is **great, just great, just amazing!** She is **beautiful** of course, but in a different way from the others – not lads-mag-bubbly like Suki Meadows, or **trendy-beautiful** like Naomi or Ingrid or Yolande, but serenely, **classically beautiful**; in an earlier TV presenter incarnation, he might have called her 'classy', or even '**dead classy**' (Nicholls, 2009, p. 248).

24. 'No reason, Em,' said Dex. 'I just **really, really** want to trip you, and Emma felt another small portion of her soul fall away (Nicholls, 2009, p. 60).

25. 'I know you think it makes you look like a film star, but it doesn't, it looks **awful**.' (Ibid., p. 30).

26. '...but I've been here in Wolverhampton for two days now and that's felt **pretty**

eternal (though I can reveal that the Pizza Hut here is *excellent, just excellent.*)’ (Ibid., p. 16).

In example (23) the beauty of Sylvie is described with the help of gradation, a stylistic device serving to intensify the quality: *beautiful – great – just great – just amazing* in contrast to the beauty of Suki, who is described as ‘not lads-mag-bubbly’ or trendy-beautiful Naomi, Igrid or Yolande. Then comes the explanation of this beauty – *classically beautiful, dead classy*, which corresponds to the long-time created ideal of beauty.

All the adduced adjectives or adverbs + adjectives are socially marked (*beautiful, awful, amazing, great, really*) and often used to form overstatement and understatement, the phenomena which serve to hide the true feelings of a speaker as ‘our strict prohibitions on earnestness, gushing, emoting and boasting require almost constant use of understatement’ (Fox, 2004, p. 66).

MODAL VERBS

Modal verbs express modality, ‘a particular mode in which something exists or is experienced, or expressed’ (ABBY). Modal verbs are powerful means in expressing opinion, maintaining relations, positioning oneself in a conversation and therefore their role is extremely important. Upper-class speech is marked by high modality of speech. Modal verbs in upper class speech are characterized by conveying very subtle forms of politeness and requests, hypothetical advice and higher forms of formality. Modal verbs are indicators of education and status. The following examples illustrate how modal verbs can create an order in a form of a question (27), the explanation of the Prime Minister ‘of being able to tell’ which conceals his dishonesty about traveling with his wife and three children (28), and a hypothetical situation (29).

27. He nodded to the butler who hovered near the door. *‘I wonder if we might have some of that champagne?’* it didn’t surprise me that even forty years later he still liked to wrap his orders in diffident questions (Fellowes, 2008, p. 13).

28. *‘I am delighted to be able to tell the right honourable gentleman* that I last travelled on a train three days ago, with my wife and my three children.’ (Townsend, 2012, p. 54)

29. ‘Friendships are based on shared experience. I don’t know *what we would all have in common now*. William isn’t very ... nostalgic for that time in his life. He prefers what happened later.’ Which did not surprise me. *If I were him, so would I*. ‘Do you see anyone from those days?’ I told her I’d visited Lucy (Fellowes, 2008, pp.160-161).

MANNER OF SPEAKING

“The obligations of “appearance” were, of course, not limited to producing physical style and elegant gestures but placed equal emphasis on the art of speaking.” (Craveri, 2005, p. 15).

This section of social indices includes the manner of speaking, polished by decades of society communication, and the society code elaborated in the 18th century French aristocratic salons where women took upon themselves the leadership in society as well as the resolution to “decide matters of manners, language, taste, and loisirs – the array of noble pastimes that included reading, conversation, theater and the arts, games, and dancing.” (Craveri, 2005, p. 11). The society code was based on harmony and equality, the laws of measure, elegance, and regard for the self-respect of others, a talent for listening.

The analysis of upper class manner of speaking found in literature of different time periods can be identified as *nose in the air, snobbish and arrogant, detached, prescriptive and condescending, graceful and with baronial confidence, as preening posh, and with a blend of pride and terror*. The narrators take notice of such distinctive characteristics as detachment from the conversation, a kind of ‘emotional platform ticket’ allowing the character to withdraw at any moment, cool, almost cold detachment, well-bred manner of speaking with vocalized sounds, the talent to answer a question quickly and easily, without a trace of mystery but without imparting any information. Let us adduce some examples:

30. ‘So, will you be doing the whole deb thing?’

‘I don’t know.’ She seemed to be looking into some invisible crystal ball, hovering in mid-air. ‘We’ll have to see,’ she added and, in doing so, gave me a sense of her half-membership of the human race that was at the heart of her charm, ***a kind of emotional platform ticket that would allow her to withdraw at any moment from the experience on hand***. I was entranced by her (Fellowes, 2008, p. 41).

31. Serena was in truth exactly what people reading historical novels... imagine aristocratic heroines to be, both ***in her serene beauty and in her cool, almost cold, detachment*** (Ibid., p. 42).

32. *Not only were there the authentic vocalized sounds of the well-bred, but the sole topic of conversation was establishing* (Ibid., p. 27).

The manner of speaking can have an opposite face – rudeness, callousness and insolence manifested in the following extract:

33. A Sloane boy brought me up short and said in ***the standard Sloane accent, clipped and drawling at the same time***, ‘Do you know the way to Warriner Gardens?’ I replied with my usual ***repertoire of shrugs and grimaces and nice-guy-but-useless gestures and said no***, I didn’t. He took a step and ***shouted at me, ‘THEN FUCKING WELL LEARN!’*** And sauntered off into the darkness. I was so affronted, so startled, I just stood there about a minute with my mouth open (Jennings, 1998, p. 9).

34. In James Lees-Milne’s diaries with Lady Bridget and Randolph Churchill – ‘Randolph Churchill appears, ***manifestly described as an ‘aristocrat’ because he ‘did not care a damn for everybody; was possessed of unbounded confidence***

which amounted to insolence' (Ibid., p.18).

35. Or ... 'the sort who bounce out of taxi with a cry of 'Bye, darling,' *and then tread on my feet* – the sort, in other words, who *remind me on a daily basis that I am a lesser person than they are and that*, taken as a whole, our society is based on a system of priorities which clearly made some kind of sense around the time of the Indian Mutiny, but is now a kind of madness, a desperate conservatism taken to insane lengths.' (Ibid., p. 20).

The manner of speaking reveals the role the upper classes play in society, their power and privilege. The manner of talking to a person 'as if he were talking to his stockbroker', with 'patrician baritone', a 'tone of friendly condescension' testify to the said.

36. 'He sounded *as if he were talking to his stockbroker* rather than a grimly amenable form-card saleswoman in overalls' (Fellowes).

37. 'He had precisely the sort of voice and bearing, of course, which *spoke of nothing but privilege and fifty-pound notes: patrician baritone, clear but restrained smile on the face*...' (Jennings, 1998, p. 24).

38. '*a tone of friendly condescension, or as a father would talk to his earnest but none-too-bright son*' (Fellowes).

39. ...his voice was more changed than his face. It had become important, *as if he were addressing the boardroom of a corporation, or a village hall full of grateful tenants*. 'How are you?' (Ibid., p. 162).

VOICE & ACCENT

Voice is the indication of upbringing, education and status, it has always been cultivated in the upper classes of society and it explains why the narrator in Charles Jennings' novel, a graduate from Oxford University, comes to the conclusion that it is impossible to acquire and cultivate such voice if not born one of "them". If words are easy to learn and assimilate in speech, voice is almost impossible to emulate, it always reveals an out-group member. As the character notices, 'the voice became my touchstone. The voice is incontestable: the one class identifier, which can't be traded, sold or borrowed' (Jennings, 1998, p. 35).

40. The voice was a voice *I could imitate but never get right* (Jennings, 1998, p. 35).

The voice is the difference between officers and ranks, between waiters and waited upon, between judge and accused, between superior and inferior. The voice is described in the novels as *soft, gentle and generous, mellifluous and authoritative, self important, condescending and with an upper-class drawl*, which render social roles played in communication with others. For example:

41. '... the posh people, the smart set, said nothing at all, in a constant, *gentle swell*

of verbiage...' (Ibid., p. 31).

Upper-class people have an easily recognizable accent, which is often criticized or made fun of for its mannerism, maybe, some psychological factors come into play as the result of not becoming one of “them”.

42. ‘Super! Super! Must press on! Got to lose some money!’; *vocables* (‘hice’ for house, ‘strawdinreh’ for extraordinary, ‘Quinmahthah’ for Queen Mother... (Ibid., p. 34).

Another visual mark of social identity is “...visibly paralysed upper lips, numb with permanent, unhappy smiles. Which must have helped with the accent” (Ibid., p. 45).

43. After Professor Michael Argyll’s colourless ruminations (It is not known where posh accents come from. They could be a *hyper-correct version of received pronunciation*’), this was the real thing, the red meat I was after (Jennings, 1998, p. 19).

44. A Sloane boy brought me up short and said in *the standard Sloane accent, clipped and drawling at the same time...* (Ibid., p. 9).

Voice is a significant social identifier: the important conclusions to make are the following:

1. The upper classes never ‘put an accent not their own’, unless they leave their areas and live where their success and popularity depend on the local community or audience if it is work on TV or the radio targeted for a certain layer of society.
2. The voice parameters are stable, centuries old semiotic signs of upper class culture.
3. The voice parameters index distance, condescension and superiority in interaction, privilege, wealth and power in society.

CLASS 4. Language and linguistic structures

Language and linguistic structures of upper class speech are marked by U-words (words characteristic of upper class speech), borrowings, which are usually formal words (abstract nouns and adjectives), complex sentence structures; high modality of speech, understatement and overstatement. Since the last two have already been covered earlier, this section will include foreign language and borrowings, and complex sentence structures.

FOREIGN LANGUAGES & BORROWINGS

Knowledge of foreign languages and the ability to use borrowings are the result of the classical education obtained in the elite universities. The use of a loanword may cause misunderstanding on the part of an interlocutor. Narrators often draw a social divide between the characters only by using a pair of words of

different origin: a loanword to characterize an upper class person, and its synonym of Germanic origin to portray a character of other social layers (Ivushkina 2020).

45. Not to mention the fact that the padre gives a damn good sermon – even if he does seem to spend an inordinate amount of time on remorse.’

‘Padre?’

‘Army term for a priest,’ explained Nick.

‘Inordinate?’

‘Excessive, longer than necessary. What about you? Do you believe in God?’

‘Used to, before all this ‘appened.’

‘Happened,’ said Nick.

‘Happened,’ repeated Danny. ‘Beth and me are Roman Catholics.’

‘Beth and I are Roman Catholics; you can’t say me is a Roman Catholic.’ (Archer, 2004, pp. 142-143).

The adduced example brilliantly illustrates the social difference between the two characters – Nick, an upper class, and Danny, a low-middle young man, who both got to prison by being slandered and shared a cell. Danny does not understand the adjective ‘inordinate’ of Latin origin (17th c.) and had to ask Nick the meaning of the word; ‘excessive’ is also a borrowing of French origin, but ‘longer’ was a familiar word. Social difference is also drawn by substandard pronunciation (omission of ‘h’) and the use of the pronoun (me instead of I).

ABSTRACT NOUNS

Abstract nouns, mostly borrowings, are often used and overused by the privileged to distance themselves from common people, to avoid responsibility or any serious topic for discussion. Abstract words often blur the meanings of the utterance and cause difficulty for other social layers of society to understand them, for example:

46. Alex said, ‘Tell you what, Ed, it’s perhaps not a good idea to talk about Africa at the moment, not when we’re still trying to get the trains to run on time.’

But Edward was ready for him. ‘Africa is a **dark stain on the conscience of the world**. Somebody must lead the people **out of the darkness of dying economics and into a sense of fiscal responsibility**’ (Townsend, 2012, pp.12-13).

The function of abstract words is to represent tangible ideas, thoughts and emotions beyond the purely physical world, they allow people to distance themselves from others, to obscure or avoid any explanation required at the moment. This function comes to the fore and becomes particularly conspicuous against the background of negative processes in society, and the need to account for the actions and causes of failure. The switch into the topic of Africa and its dying economics in the given example just serves to avoid an unpleasant talk and responsibility for the collapse of the trains in London.

COMPLEX SENTENCE STRUCTURES

Complex structures of the sentences, reminding of a written speech, are the manifestation of a good education, serving to characterize an upper class speech. Sentences with subordination and coordination, logically connected and grammatically correct, high modality, the use of borrowings and abstract words are the result of the training obtained in the elite universities where students have classes in logic, classics, and debates as part of this education. The following extract from the novel *Past Imperfect* represents Serena's upbringing – the principles and concepts on which upper class culture rests. Not only does the language indicate her well reading and ability to easily express her thought and beliefs, but also honour, one of the main aristocratic principles on which aristocratic culture was built – once you have made a choice, stay true to this choice despite anything:

47. '...even if you weren't prepared to divorce, you could have gone on with the affair.'

She shook her head. 'No, I couldn't have been his mistress, making up lunch dates with girlfriends and pretending to miss the train. That wasn't for us. That wasn't who we were. We should have formed a union that bestrode the world and frightened anyone who stood in our way. We weren't a back-street number, with telephones being put down when the hubby answers, absolutely not. Once I'd decided not to leave Andrew, from second it was over.'

'I hope Andrew has some inkling of what he owes you.'

'No, but if he did it would wreck everything for him, so it would be rather self-defeating.'

Anyway, that night I got up and dressed and left, and I never saw Damian again. Finis.' (Fellowes, 2008, p. 494-495)

Discussion

Upper class culture is a universe reflecting life of a socially privileged group in its different manifestations, impossible to cover in one article. Each aspect of upper class life requires a separate in-depth analysis. The research of linguistic peculiarities of upper class speech through literature should not detract the significance of literary representation as it is based on typification and reflects the most significant, conspicuous and distinctive features.

A sociolinguistic study presupposes age, gender, professional differences, which were not (or partially) considered in the article, however, the speech of upper class individuals is heavily influenced by age, primarily because the sources of their capital, the pressures they face and their relationship to tradition change across generations. Age characteristics in speech were examined in the thesis written by Тисленкова/Tislenkova (2004), the research carried out as part of upper class studies.

The generational differences find their reflection in the terms ascribed to the language forms spoken by three – the older, middle and younger – generations: U-RP (Upper Crust RP), Mainstream and Adoptive RP, according to John Honey (1989) who coined these terms and in Alan Cruttenden's triad these are Refined RP (or Marked RP), General RP and Adoptive – Near RP influenced speech, or Regional RP (Cruttenden, 2014). Each of the generational forms of English could

become a separate field of research in the 21st century, which brought about new challenges connected with technologies and AI.

Conclusion

The sociolinguistic study of upper class language and culture through the prism of semiotics allowed outlining the semiosphere of upper class culture, a semiotic space of signs and meanings with a border distinguishing the upper classes from the rest. Exterior contacts of the English with other languages, French in the first place, having had a lasting impact on British culture as the state language and the language of the aristocracy for more than three centuries, left their imprint on upper class sociolect. It manifests itself in the use of foreign languages and borrowings: nouns and evaluative adjective; also adverbs in conjunction with adjectives forming overstatements and understatements in speech.

Foreign languages impart formality to speech and render the air of distance, authority and power in communication with others, which affected the manner of speaking turning it into a social indication of status.

In the semiosphere of upper class culture, the background knowledge of literature, theatre and art is of paramount importance as referencing and allusions require more than just knowledge on part of a speaker but also sharing the traditionally accepted view on work in a casual manner.

Politeness, sensitivity, knowledge of psychology as well as elegance and gentility were inherent part of the code. High modality as a form of politeness, expressing opinions and making requests constitutes the semiosphere of upper class culture and is actively used for social characterization in literature.

The Semiosphere of upper class culture includes U-words, which are quite stable, though may be replaced if the middle classes successfully assimilate them.

The semiotic space also reflects occupations and pastimes of the elite, which is revealed in the names of the magazines and newspapers, clubs and social events – social indices of upper class culture.

Signs inside this semiotic space do not have fixed meanings; their meaning is defined by their relationship to other signs within the system. It is a closed but not passive, self-referential system of meaning, the primary purpose of which is to perpetuate it and ensure that its members can recognize one another and distinguish themselves from those outside. The semiosphere of upper class culture is highly distinctive, it is represented by various signs – linguistic and non-linguistic, explicit and implicit, on ‘surface’ and ‘in-depth’ level thus generating meaning of social privilege and power, with education underlying their social distinctiveness.

REFERENCES:

- Ивушкина Т.А. (1997).** *Язык английской аристократии: социально-исторический аспект*. Волгоград: Перемена, 157 с. (**Ivushkina, T.** *The Language of the English Aristocracy: Socio-historical Aspect*. Volgograd: Peremena, 157 p.).
- Квартовкина, Ю. (2004).** *Речь английских и русских аристократов в произведениях художественной литературы XIX века: социолингвистические характери-*

- стики. Автореферат диссертации на соиск. уч. ст. канд. филол. наук, Волгоград, 20 с. (**Kvartovkina, Yu.** *The Speech of the English and Russian Aristocracy in Literature of the 19th century: sociolinguistic characteristics*. Abstract. Volgograd. 20 p.). РГБ ОД, 61:04-10/1613.
- Крюков Д.В. (2001).** *Социолингвистические характеристики писем английской аристократии Викторианской эпохи*. Автореферат диссертации на соиск. уч. ст. канд. филол. наук: Волгоград, 2001. 20 с. (**Krukov, D.** *Sociolinguistic Characteristics of Letters of the English Aristocracy of the Victorian Era*. Abstract of a dissertation for the degree of Candidate of Philological Sciences: Volgograd: 2001, 20 p.).
- Лотман Ю.М. (2004).** *Семiosфера*. С.-Петербург: Искусство СПб. (**Lotman, Yu.** *Semiosphere*. S.-Petersburg: Iskusstvo SPB.).
- Тисленкова И.А. (2004).** *Возрастные характеристики речи персонажей современной английской драматургии: 80-е годы XX века*. Автореф. дисс. на соиск. уч. ст. канд. филол. наук, Волгоград, 2004. 19 с. (**Tislenkova, I.A.** *Age characteristics of speech portrayals in modern English drama: the 1980s*. Abstract of a dissertation for the degree of Candidate of Philological Sciences, Volgograd, 2004, 19 p.).
- Archer, J. (2004).** *Not a penny more, not a penny less*. St. Martin's Paperbacks, 305 p.
- Bucholz, M., K. Hall, K. (2005).** Identity and Interaction: A sociocultural linguistic approach. *Discourse Studies*, DOI: 10.1177/1461445605054407.
- Craveri, B. (2005).** *The age of conversation*. New York: New York Review Books.
- Cruttenden, A. (2014).** *Gimson's pronunciation of English*, 8th ed., Routledge.
- Fellowes, J. (2008).** *Past imperfect*. Phoenix.
- Fox, K. (2004).** *Watching the English. The hidden rules of English behaviour*. Hodder.
- Gumperz, J.J. (1992).** *Discourse Strategies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Honey, J. (1989).** *Does Accent Matter?: the Pygmalion factor*. Faber & Faber.
- Ivushkina, T. (2020).** Literary words of foreign origin as social markers in Jeffrey Archer's novels. *Russian Journal of Linguistics*. V. 24. № 4. P. 816–830. DOI: 10.22363/2687-0088-2020-24-4-816-830.
- Ishiguro, K. (1999).** *The remains of the day*. Faber & Faber.
- Jennings, Ch. (1998).** *People like us a season among the upper classes*. Abacus.
- Nicholls, D. (2009).** *One day*. Vintage Books.
- Oxford Living Dictionary (2017).** <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/singularity> (accessed 17 November 2025)
- Rampton, B. (2017).** WP205 Rampton 2017. Interactional sociolinguistics, *Working Papers in Urban Language & Literacies*. https://www.academia.edu/30796363/WP205_Rampton_2017_Interactional_Sociolinguistics (accessed 17 November 2025)
- Silverstein, M. (2003).** Indexical order and the dialectics of sociolinguistic life. *Language & Communication* 23, pp. 193–229, doi: 10.1016/S0271-5309(03)00013-2.
- Townsend, S. (2012).** *Number ten*. Penguin Books.