Relationship of Addressing Term and Personal Privacy

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Abstract: In some cultures kinship terms are widely used compared to other cultures. In Turkish culture elder sister and elder brother as addressing terms have different functions. They may have either solidarity or social distance function which includes personal privacy. The purpose of the study is to search to what extent research assistants and faculty members use these functions in their academic life in the school of Medicine which has a hierarchical structure. By means of the answers of the questionnaire the results are evaluated.

Key-Words: personal privacy, social distance, kinship as addressing terms

1 Introduction

Individualistic or collectivistic structure of societies shape the interpersonal limits and affect people’s world views; this results in the perception of society’s values. In individualistic view there are sharp boundaries between people with each person being a complete unit. People are considered to be independent. Whereas, for collectivistic view, people are not separate units, they are interdependent and person’s identity tends to be based on one’s roles and experience within the group context. Therefore, in collectivistic view people as being interdependent lead to emphasis on group oriented values and skills that contribute to filling roles within the family or other group [1]. In Turkish culture, family ties and the relationship among relatives are very important. This relationship is reflected in language, it is not unusual that we have name or addressings for every kin. Hence, this does not mean that Turkish society is completely collectivistic in nature: there are elements of both individualism and collectivism in any culture [2, 3].

As Leake [2] states any human characteristic falls along a continuum: A culture oriented to individualism might value collectivistic approach, while a culture oriented to collectivism might value individualistic approach. Hence, it is evident that in Turkish culture both of the values are valid. This is true also in work places. One can observe both of the values in different work places where social distance and personal privacy can be interpreted differently. These issues may be referred according to the relationship between the interlocuters. Personal privacy, in dictionary meaning has the significance of not being watched or disturbed by other people or public. People need private space psychologically; this applies in public as well as behind closed doors and drawn curtains. In Privacy Impact Assessment [4] it has been stated that people need to be able to glance around, judge whether the people in the vicinity are a threat, before performing actions that could be embarrassing or have other negative consequences in other contexts…So there has been an increase in the social distance between individuals in different countries. If two people are very close they would have a low degree and two strangers would typically have a high degree of social distance. In both of the terms, the power of the speaker to act with indifference toward the other party is expressed. When we consider the privacy of teachers in education, we know that teachers spend so much time with other people’s children, it is no surprise that administrators and parents have pushed to gain as much information about their teachers as possible [5].

Privacy can be expressed also by means of addressing terms. Turkish language is very productive concerning kinship terms because of the close relationship with the relatives. The most commonly used ones are abla and abi (elder sister-elder brother). These may be used either alone or with first names. They are also used as the linking function where they have the scope of initiating verbal communication and do not stop at the boundaries of physical kinship.

Abla-abi (elder sister or elder brother) reflect the personal privacy on the part of elders and superiors, because they include the meaning of implicit hierarchy. They are preferred by hierarchical societies and convey the meaning of power and status consciousness. Except every day usage as cliches, they are not used reciprocally: i.e. in an interaction the parties cannot address each other in the same way if they have an age and professional superiority differences between them, because respect is the key word which shapes their addressing type. Seniority and superiority are important issues which carry the duty of protection, training and leadership for those who are in the lower position. On the other hand, for people in the lower position it is expected to be respectful and faithful towards their
seniors and superiors. So the personal privacy is kept on the part of seniors and superiors, which is encouraged by the non-reciprocal relationship. Another function of these terms is that they carry the meaning of solidarity in an informal setting. Mostly they are used as: abla/abi + possessive marker as in ablam or abim where –m, -ım are possessive markers for first person singular.

However, in work places, such as in the professional life of education the use of these kinship terms may not be very common, other addressing terms are preferred such as masculine and feminine addressing terms, titles or first names (e.g. hanım, bey, hocam or Ali etc.)

The purpose of this current study is to search the usage of abla-abi in the education setting: in the school of Medicine.

2 Problem Formulation

This is a case study designed to determine the usage of abla-abi in academic life in the school of Medicine in Eskisehir Osmangazi University-Turkey. Questionnaire is given to research assistants and to faculty members of the School of Medicine randomly. It included the questions concerned with age, professional superiority, respect, cliché usage and if they liked to be addressed by these terms. Twenty-five questionnaires were given to research assistants and twenty-five questionnaires were given to faculty members. The purpose of choosing research assistants and faculty members lies on the fact that both of the parties have age and professional superiority differences between them.

The causes for choosing the school of Medicine is that it has a hierarchical structure where the students and novices i.e. research assistants have to stay in the hospital sometimes 36 hours for their duty. Sometimes they see their colleagues more than their families. So the social distance may not be so big, but we cannot say the same thing with their superiors when age and professional superiority are under discussion. Their teachers transmit and discuss the medical knowledge in front of a patient or a case, where knowledge transmission is strongly influenced by social hierarchy, therefore, teachers have a respectful place as they are the source of knowledge besides the lessons. In Turkish Education system teachers hold the floor for respect, they have their personal privacy on the other hand, from students it is expected to be respectful. So from teachers point of view they have the right to question the personal privacy of students, but on the other hand, from the students’ point of view respect for the teachers’ personal privacy is important.

On the other hand in every society medical doctors are thought of carrying power in front of a layman. They are considered of being powerful in front of patients where health problem is concerned. As a matter of fact, the members of this profession keep their personal privacy in front of patients although they can learn patients’ privacy while they are doing their job. So, the question is to what extent they keep this personal privacy between each other in academic life in addressing each other as abla-abi in professional life.

2.1 Results

The results of the study using abla-abi as addressing term, according to age, professional superiority, respect, cliché usage, liked to be addressed in the same way, are as follows:

Table 1: Results according to age:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>research assistant</th>
<th>faculty members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>number</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The frequency for research assistants is %80
The frequency for faculty members is %64

Table 2: According to professional superiority:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>research assistant</th>
<th>faculty members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>number</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The frequency of research assistants is %36
The frequency of faculty members is %48
### Problem Solution

In Turkish culture, age and the notion of respect are included in politeness strategies. Brown and Levinson [6] attempted to correlate language usage with the notion of FACE which is controlled by cultural factors. There are two desires which comprise the concept of face. Positive face refers to the desire of approval and negative face refers to the desire of autonomy. In the heart of positive face lies intimacy and solidarity whereas for negative face social distance is important. When we consider the results, we see that the items of negative face include the social distance where age and respect factors play an important role. For research assistants the usage of abla-abi in age section is %80 and as respect factor it is %56 when compared to the faculty members %64 and %40. From the results it is clear that also the faculty members use abla-abi as an age and respect sign. This means that there is always somebody before them who are aged and respected. But, as the research assistants are younger and are expected to show respect, the frequency is higher in this section.

On the other hand, for the evaluation of professional superiority we can say that for the faculty members it is more important than research assistants to use abla-abi (%36 to %48), for those who are considered to have more superiority in the profession. This may be due to the experienced years of hierarchical structure.

Cliché usage of these terms is also higher in research assistants than faculty members (%28 to %16). This usage does not require any special factor, used only for addressing anybody to start a conversation and can be used reciprocally. When we think that young people prefer to use speech variation [7] especially ‘jargon’, this cliché usage seems popular among them. So both of the parties use them in a certain amount.

Both of the parties like to be addressed by these terms. However it is %68 to %56. This difference may be due to the expectation of research assistants to be addressed as abla-abi by novices. This is an example of the continuum of the hierarchical structure.

### Conclusion

This research as a case study tried to describe abla-abi (elder sister and elder brother) usage as an addressing term in The School of Medicine. These addressing terms apart from their real meaning conveying solidarity also imply social distance when the interlocutors have different levels of age, and professional superiority, hence personal privacy can be the key term in this situation. From the age and respect point of view these addressing terms keep the personal privacy on the part of the elders and superiors because they are not used reciprocally.
The Medical School having a hierarchical structure still keep the values of age differences respect and professional superiority among colleagues. As a matter of fact, personal privacy is the important issue among faculty members which is used or kept differently among members according to the superiority and seniority of the members.

References


