Political power and insults in Turkish political discourse

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1. Introduction

Any speech act may impose on one's "face", a speaker's sense of linguistic and social identity (Goffman 1959, 1974; Ruhi 2006, 2007) or *"the public self-image that every member (of society) wants to claim for himself"* (Augsburger 1995). Speech acts may have impacts on either "positive face" the positive consistent self-image that people have and their desire to be appreciated and approved of by at least some other people or "negative face", the rights to territories, freedom of action and freedom from imposition – wanting your actions not to be constrained or inhibited by others. They may be therefore face threatening and impolite. In response to those face threats, speakers have strategies for lessening the threat or sometimes to avoid the direct responsibility of uttering rude statements. This is the point where politeness strategies appear. Defining politeness as redressive actions taken to counter-balance the disruptive effect of face-threatening acts (FTAs), Brown and Levinson (1987) regard communication potentially dangerous and antagonistic. That is why face threats are very common in politics in such a way that communication consists of positive politeness being complimentary and gracious to the addressee and negative politeness, ways of softening the imposition.

Having been studied in various discourse types, to name but a few, army training discourse (Culpeper 1996 cited in Culpeper et al. 2003), traffic warden-drivers discourse (Culpeper et al. 2003), parliamentary (political) discourse (Harris 2001; Ilie 2004; Yetkin 2006), impoliteness can be defined as the deliberate communicative strategies, negative actions or utterances employed to attack hearer's face thereby bring about social confrontation and disharmony between the interlocutors (Culpeper et al. 2003; Culpeper 2010). However, impoliteness can occur either intentionally or unintentionally. For instance, Kienpointer (1997 cited in Schnurr et al. 2008) defines two types of impoliteness: the instances of motivated impolitenes which are realized to deliberately attack the hearer's face, and the instances of unmotivated impoliteness which, by contrast, occur due to the violations of the norms of a particular culture unintentionally.

Claiming that Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory is not sufficient enough to account for the impolite utterances and behaviours, Culpeper et al. (2003) propose several impoliteness superstrategies which are 'opposite' in terms of orientation to face in Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness. They describe strategies designed or used to attack face rather than maintaining or enhancing face. Culpeper et al.'s (2003: 1554) taxonomy of superstrategies we adopt for our research, are given below:

1. Bald on record impoliteness: Unlike what Brown and Levinson stated for 'bald on record politeness, employed for polite purposes where there is little face at stake, Cul-

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peper et al. (2003) contends that this strategy is commonly used where there is much face at stake, and the speakers intentionally attack the hearer's face.

2. Positive impoliteness: This is the strategy used to attack thereby damage the hearer's positive face. Some examples of positive impoliteness are "ignore, snub the other, exclude the other from the activity, disassociate from the other, be disinterested, unconcerned, unsympathetic, use inappropriate identity markers, use obscure or secretive language, seek disagreement, make the other feel uncomfortable (e.g. do not avoid silence, joke, or use small talk), use taboo words, call the other names, etc."

3. Negative impoliteness: With this, the speaker has an intention to attack and damage the hearer's negative face. Examples for negative impoliteness can be classified as "frighten, condescend, scorn, or ridicule, invade the other's space, explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect, put the other's indebtedness on record, hinder or block the other – physically or linguistically, etc."

4. Sarcasm or mock politeness: This is the so-called politeness strategy used to realize impolite utterences and behaviors for the purpose of attacking hearer's face.

5. Withhold politeness: In this impoliteness strategy, the speaker keeps his/her silence or deliberately fails to use politeness strategies when expected.

However, Culpeper et al. also stress that 'impoliteness does not simply arise from any one particular strategy, but is highly dependent on context' (2003: 1555). Therefore, it's highly possible to encounter more than one impoliteness strategy in a single impolite utterance.

In the parliament, there is a tense and competitive atmosphere in which the opposing party and ruling party are most of the time in conflict with each other's ideologies, ideas, and performances. As Ilie (2004) points out while dealing with the controversial issues, it's naturally the duty of opposing party to suggest alternative solutions and criticize the ruling party and the Members of Parliament (henceforth: MPs) who in return defend themselves. In such an atmosphere which you could cut with a knife and where the cost-benefit is important to the speaker, MPs degrade, humiliate, and insult adversaries with certain underlying socio-pragmatic purposes in mind.

To Ilie (2004), who compared insults and verbal aggrevation in British and Swedish parliaments in terms of rethorical, cognitive and, politeness theories, among ethos (ethic values of the speaker), pathos (feelings of the hearer) and logos (reasoning) oriented insults, it was observed that Swedish insults are basically ethos oriented in nature, while English insults are pathos oriented. Ilie (2004) proposes several mitigation strategies for insults in Swedish parliament. Swedish MPs are reported to juxtapose two opposite concepts like contempt vs. respect, to state insults as questions and to use a strategy she calls "the attribution transfer strategy", in order to soften the possible imposition of the insults on the hearers and notably not to take any direct responsibility for degrading and humiliating the adversaries.

The examination of English Parliamentary discourse indicated that the insults fulfill pathos oriented functions as follows:
- to strengthen one's own group cohesion and restore political balance on its favour

- to entertain the audience, both fellow MPs and the public at large normally by making political adversaries lose face,

- to directly affect the audience emotionally by sublimating and /or projecting more or less general underlying anxieties, worries, discontent of certain social and professional categories, lobbying groups etc. (Ilie 2004: 80).

David (2006) reports that in Malaysian Parliament the participants upon wishing to establish friendship and fraternity make use of various strategies to save public face of theirs and the hearers'. Specifically when they want to keep distance between the participants and to exert verbal power or show power, the MPs prefer to resort to FTAs. The powerful use such verbal acts towards the weak. From this standpoint, FTAs are given as components of power talk. To David et al. (2009), bald on record politeness strategy are ninety percent at work in Malaysian Parliament, which is typical in Malaysian culture.

To Kelley (1994: 198), insults in general are often ad hominem fallacies, which are verbal attacks on the person himself rather than his argument:

> "*In its crudest form, the ad hominem fallacy involves nothing more than insults – calling one's opponent idiot, slob low life airhead, fascist, pinko, nerd, fairy, bleeding heart, wimp, Neanthertal and so on through the rich vocabulary of abuse our language offers. (...) In politics, Ad hominem fallacies are a common technique of propaganda and a common device of politicians who try to enlist support by attacking their enemies*" (1994: 140).

Parliamentary insults, on the other hand, are the hostile and humiliating rhetorical acts employed in tremendously tense and competitive institutional environment (Ilie 2004); thus, insults realized in the parliament must have different functions than those employed in other discourses.

Gabriel (1998), stating that insults involve a perpetrator, a target and often an audience in an organization, notes that there are different insult dynamics such as an apology, a commensurate retaliation or a disproportunate retaliation and possible escalation, a retaliation against a surrogate and weaker target than the perpetrator of the initial insult, an affected indifference with a possible delayed retaliation or more commonly a resigned tolerance which starts subsequent insults. Insults are presented as the mechanisms that allow for the establishment of domination and subordination, finer gradation of power and status "a pecking order in the organization" as well as opportunities for building coalitions and alliances since, as he reports, insults enable audiences to take sides in the evaluation of group relations.

This paper roughly aims to explore FTAs in general in Turkish parliamentary discourse, specifically, delimiting FTAs to insults.

2. Aim and Methodology

Data for the study were readily available on the official website of Turkish Grand National Assembly of Turkey General Assembly Archive Records. All face threats in the given data were first identified and filtered. Considering Kasper's (1990) classification between intentional and unintentional insults, this study mainly involved intentional insults. We aimed to look at a particular face threatening behavior viz. insults. Thus, dia-

logues containing drafts of laws, proposals, and following discussions are scanned using a purposive sampling. Together with similar studies (Bayraktaroğlu 1992; Doğançay-Aktuna & Kamışlı 1995, 2001; Yetkin 2006; Hatipoğlu 2010), this paper contributes to the research related to the norms of aggravating pragmalinguistic behaviours in Turkish political setting.

The present study has three preeminent aspects:
- to find out how the face threats spread between two parties: the ruling party and the opposing party. As the former is supposedly the one holding power in the parliament, it is hypothesized that it is the party that commits more face threats. The frequency of occurence of insults in Turkish parliamentary discourse and its relation between power, is found worth investigating, adopting a corpus based quantitative approach.
- to see threat style preferences of two political parties in the parliament being restricted to the act of insulting within the framework of the (im)politeness theory regarding the direct or indirect commitment of the face threats accepted as insults. The way insults are achieved is described following Culpeper et al.'s (2003) taxonomy.
- Lastly, to find out socio-pragmatic functions of insults observed in Turkish parliamentary discourse. With this, we aim a preliminary classification of the functions of insults in the arguments in the given corpus.

3. Results

3.1. Insults spreading between two political wings; the ruling party versus the opposing party and their insult preferences

First, the quantitative dimension of the results primarily shows that the opposing party produces more insults. As they cannot speak out loud openly in the parliament rostrum, direct insults are delivered by interrupting the speaker. As power relations are balanced upon the identities of the opposing party and the ruling party in the assembly and the members of those parties are tied together with the feelings of solidarity, it is considered that the strategies adopted by two groups would be different and it is also looked into the scattering of the strategies among these two political groups. The results of the analysis revealed that the members of parliament are generally resorted to insults, accusations and disagreements. Insults are directed mostly by the members of the opposing party adopting bald on record strategy. The arguments involve myriad ad hominem fallacies, which attack on the speaker's positive face, threatening the speakers' self esteem and reputability. Insults center around unfavoured or weak personality traits and perceived incapabilities of the speakers rather than operations or performances.

In the data examined, most of the insults are commited by the opposing party (26 out of 43). Only 17 are produced by the ruling party. As seen in the Table 1, the majority of insults by both parties are open and direct, which fit into the strategy given as "bald on record rudeness" by Culpeper et al. (2003). They affect either positive or negative face of the hearer or sometimes both.

The implicit insults are mostly employed through the use of rhetorical questions (Dialogue 9) in which the ruling party MP actually attacks the minister's academic identity and indirectly humiliates him, 'sarcasm or mock politeness' (Dialogue 10) (Culpeper et al. 2003), which enables the ruling party MP to be so-called polite, but in fact he implies that they are totally good for nothing; or suggestions that seem to be polite advices; however, fuctioning as insults.

Table 1. Realization strategies and Scattering of the Observed Insults.

Insults: 43		
	Opposing Party: 26	Ruling Party: 17
Open and direct (On record)	15	11
Implicit and indirect (Off record)	11	6

Dialogue 1

M.Ö. (Continuing) – ...so are you preparing a position or a personel cadre for somebody?

M.Ç. (Manisa) – An embassy ...

M.Ö. (Continuing) – You certainly do that, will certainly do it. **As your limitlessness, ill-bredness and ignorance are so excessive that** ... (Noise from AK Party rows.)

M.Ç. (Manisa) – **and your meritlessness!**

CHAIR – Mr. Özyurt....

M.Ö. (Continuing) – ... You attempted to establish an embassy of health!

M.Ç. (Manisa) – *YOU ARE meritless!*

CHAIR – Mr. Özyurt, please, these words are not appropriate for the General Assembly.

M.Ö. (Continuing) – Dear Chair, President, plumping out a remark is appropriate, how come mine is not?

M.Ç. (Manisa) – **Because you are meritless, meritless**

CHAIR– I did warn you. Mr. Çerçi, please...

Dialogue 2

MINISTRY OF HEALTH R.A. (Continuing) – You had to think this while your colleague was talking a minute ago. Mr. Arslan.

A.A. (MP from Muğla) – Why do you criticize the speakers?

MINISTRY OF HEALTH R.A. (Continuing) – **You are like a dummy/dimbo, sitting doing nothing** (Sounds of "Bravo" and applause from AK Party and noise from CHP rows.)

A.E. (Antalya) – What do you mean by **"like a dummy"**?

Dialogue 3

Mr. Kart, as he usally does, preferred commenting instead of asking a question in fact. These are political messages. He adopts such an attitude to give political messages.

A.K.(Konya) – I am asking very clearly, you answer the question. **Learn how to do this anymore.**

İ.S.T. (Ordu) – Why do you offend /insult!

Dialogue 4

İ.S.T. (MP from Ordu) – No, I do not suppose it so.

T.E. (MP from Antalya) – What happened? What did you say now?

C.A.(MP from İzmir) – **What he says is all crab.**

MINISTRY OF HEALTH R.A (MP from Erzurum) – If you can wait, I am going to answer your question, Mr. Kart.

Table 2. Distribution of Insults Affecting Positive and Negative Face

	Insults threatening the positive face of the speakers and the hearers	Insults threatening speakers positive and negative face while threatening the listeners' positive face	Insults threatening speakers positive face while threatening listeners positive and negative face
Opposing Party	21	1	4
Ruling Party	14		3
Total	35	1	7

The examination of the existing insults indicated that most insults (N=35) show the features of positive impoliteness. Out of the insults damaging positive face, the opposing party commits the majority of such insults. The speaker insulting puts his own and the hearer's respectability at stake (Dialogues 5–8).

As in the Dialogue 3, some insults strike the speakers positive face and the listeners' both positive and negative face, in the dialogue, with the utterance "*I am asking very clearly, you answer the question. Learn how to do this anymore*", the opposing party MP attacks on the ruling party MP implying that he does not even know how to answer a question. As he endangers his public face and reputability he ignores his positive face as well. By indicating that he should learn how to answer and imposing him to achieve an action better and do it correctly in the future, therefore, limiting his freedom of action, the speaker also lowers the hearer's negative face.

There are insults in the data that affect both positive and negative face of the speaker and the hearer by nature. Therefore, those insults put the speakers' positive and negative face into jeopardy, while the hearers' positive face is at stake. In one insult, the opposing party scorns the hearer's capability to understand and attacks their respectability and self esteem, thus damaging positive face of the hearer, while equally damaging their own re-

spectability by taking the risk of not being approved and appreciated by the others. Here, the speaker puts himself in a situation which requires him to speak more clearly (Dialogue 5).

Dialogue 5

M.N.A. (Erzurum) – To me, it is wrong.

B.A.M. (Continuing) – Now, dear colleages, why is this needed? Now, imagine that we constructed this institution in Turkey. It needs time to be constructed. Why is it needed here? An institution exists, a Social Insurance Institution; there exists a Social Insurance Institution well established – well organized; there are engineers, electrical engineers, mechanical engineers, civil engineers in it. An established regime there stands my colleagues! This institution is not doing its job dear members of parliament. Dear friends, you took that unit from social insurance institution, no job. Doubtless to say that you understand what I say. But I don't wanna upset anybody in the closing day of the Assembly; however, this is all I can do not to upset you, I mean, this is what I can do, sorry about that. If you want me to talk as before, I'll speak a little bit more openly for you to understand.

C.T. (Diyarbakır) – Open! Open!

B.A.M. (Continuing) – I will, won't I.

Dialogue 6

B.A.M. – This means to parcel out the ministry of health to some people, dear friends, I call your attention dear members of parliament. In 81 cities are the hospitals and units of ministry of health. I established this institution in 81 cities, maintenance of the hospital, restoration, publicising, building new hospitals, buying the food ... Is there any other job flowing more than this throughout the history of Republic? I'm asking to you, dear friends.

This, with all due respect, I mean I couldn't contact with the minister of health. He is my townsman so I don't want to say anything, but there are lots of things to say indeed. I don't think he will be able to understand that much elaborate thing. I say it whole-heartedly.

A.Y. (Samsun) – Dear Minister, this is shameful.

B.A.M. (Continuing) – Are you aware of what I say? You aware of what I say?

Dialogue 7

MINISTER OF HEALTH R.A. (Erzurum) – Dear Chair, Thank you. Dear Kart actually preferred to comment rather than asking question as this is his habit. These are for giving political messages, I know he has such a manner.

A.K. (Konya) – **I'm asking very directly, you answer the question, It's high time you learned it.**

İ. S. T. (Ordu) – Why are you insulting!

MİNİSTER OF HEALTH R.A. (Erzurum) – If you wait, I'll answer your question, Dear Kart.

A.K. (Konya) – **Learn to answer without taunting.**

Dialogue 8

A. K. (Konya) – Judges are rebelling against you there!

CHAIR– Dear Kart, will you excuse us?

MINISTER OF HEALT H – R.A. (Erzurum) – **Dear Kart, look, please internalize this democracy culture a little bit.** (The ruling party applauses.) You asked a question and I'm answering it. You're objecting to everything all I said. Then either do not ask or listen to me!

A. K. (Konya) – You're not telling the truth!

T.E. (Antalya) – But you're seducing while I'm answering.

MINISTER OF HEALTH R.A. (Erzurum) – You either won't ask any question or you should know and learn to listen while you're answered. Internalize this please. I mean, the aim of asking question is not to comment then object to answers given in return.

F. A. (Bursa) – **They have not learned this for five years. Will they learn, today**, Dear Minister?

Dialogue 9

K.K. (İstanbul) – While mentioning the reputability of members of the parliament, Dear Minister by addressing to the parliament accused MPs with listening pensively. I wonder 'To what extent does he associate this with his academic identity?**

Dialogue 10

B.A.M (İstanbul) – **Now, you're very talented.** May God rest his soul, Özal used to say to me "For God's sake, I congratulate you. You find such slogans that I sue you but they don't constitute a crime." Now, you own municipals, public treasury and the distribution as well, dear friends!

3.2. Underlying socio-pragmatic motivations for insults in Turkish Parliament

In the data, insults are found out to center around unfavoured or weak personality traits and perceived incapabilities of the speakers rather than operations or performances. Therefore, the insults in the data basically carry ad hominem fallacies as they are directed to perceived personal weaknesses regarding educational and cultural backgrounds and the intelligence quotients of the MPs'. They are the attacks on the identity of the other party members rather than the argument itself. By doing this, it appears that most of the

eminent socio-pragmatic motivations of parliamentary insults is to affect the audience by degrading the opponent's ideology and social status and identity or public face. Along with all others, Dialogue 11 is a very typical example of this socio-pragmatic motivation of the parliamentary insults exploited by the ruling party MPs. During the argument on the geothermal energy potential in Turkey and the performances of the ruling party about the issue, H.Ü. divulges their project on the geothermal power generation and its advantages both on the part of the government and the public, which is obviously a strategy to enhance their public face and a way to prove their superiority over the ruling party. H.Ü. in fact kills two birds with one stone with his statements and insults to the ruling party. First of all, he enhances their face and increases the group solidarity as opposing party referring to the distinction between "we" and "you"; secondly, he attacks the face of the ruling party, particularly by addressing to the public saying '*your prime minister and AKP group*' and belittling the ruling party both in terms of their ideologies and performances and incapabilities. Additionally, the efforts to persuade the audience are also apparent. Thereby, they try to achieve an emotional collapse or a devastating cognitive effect on the part of the listener. Furthermore, considering the opposing party who most insults in our data, insulting is used as a strategy to counterbalance political power in the Assembly. Additionally, as the opposing party tend to produce more insults, it can be said that they attempt to save and specifically enhance their face. Normally the so-called control is in the hands of the powerful part, which is the ruling party in this case. It can be claimed that in the elections by not having been elected, the opposing party has already lost face; therefore, they strive to gain both their face and the power as well. Therefore, it can be deduced from the insults done by the opposing party MPs that they make an effort to acquire the 'political power' the ruling party possesses by means of the insults attacking the adversaries' personal indeficiencies, lack of intelligence, ideologies, identity and performances and actions which have been done by the ruling party so far or/and haven't been realized yet.

Dialogue 11

H.Ü. (İzmir) – However, by asking 'What projects did CHP generate so far? **Your prime minister and AKP group, who supposedly attack CHP,** ignored our effort to bring in at least 2 billion dollars per year to our country and obliged all of our regions rich in terms of geothermal energy to natural gas, and left Turkey to the mercy of foreign countries.

An underlying goal of the insults by the opposing party might be to convince the audiences that they have made the wrong choice. They seem to be designed to give messages to the audience indirectly about their political choice. This motivation is evident in the insults that are intended for any future imposition such as teaching a lesson, urging a behaviour and indicating a responsibility.

One other socio-pragmatic function of the insults realized by the opposing party MPs might be to attack both personal and institutional ideologies of the ruling party. With this conscious and/or inconscious purpose in mind, the opposing party MPs aims to degrade the ruling party MPs individually or the party as an institution with an attempt to prove

that they themselves are superior. The ruling party hesitates in insulting, but they usually respond to what is directed to themselves.

Therefore, a socio-pragmatic taxonomy of motivations of Turkish Parliamentary insults might be as follows;

- By degrading the opponent's ideology and social status, the opposing party saves and enhances their face in order to counterbalance and acquire political power.
- The opposing party is in a struggle to convince the audience and to send implicit messages to the voters or the audience outside the Assembly about their political choices.
- The opposing party strives to prove that they are the superior part in the Assembly, who knows better and are able to improve all the governmental troubles with a thorough perception leading to healthy solutions.
- It also seems that insults are frequently handled to strengthen group identity and to escalate intergroup conflict. Acting together with the group means agreement and a shared world view. Additionally, insults support the spirit of solidarity as they are instances of power talk; they dictate power which binds the group members together.

4. Conclusion

The present study has three major considerations: Power and insults as a subcategory of face threatening acts, the way insults are realized by two political polars in the parliament, and finally the socio-pragmatic motivations of insults in Turkish parliament. As the primary concern of our study, we should state that in contrast to the hypothesis that the powerful always commit more face threats, the results of our study displayed that the opposing party in Turkish parliament retains the right to insult other political group members. In the second place, the results indicated that insults of intelligence, capability and identity rather than the performances and arguments of the adversaries are prevalent in Turkish Parliament. Thirdly, it is of interest that the majority of insults by both parties are overt and straight, which takes us to the strategy given as "bald on record impoliteness" by Culpeper et al. (2003). They affect either positive or negative face of the hearer. In our study, a larger part of insults are found to damage positive face of the individuals and the political groups although there exist insults which have cross effects on the individual and public faces of the group members. Finally, since insults are one of the most frequent used face threatening acts in Turkish Parliament, it was thought that there should exist various socio-pragmatic motivations that trigger their use.

To sum up, insults by the opposing party are resorted to due to the opposing party's desire to raise their socio-political status in the Parliament in order to re-save their face they apparently lost in the elections. In the same vein, they insult so as to persuade the audience that they have a better intellectual capacity to solve the governmental problems. Moreover, by degrading the ruling party member, they might aim to cause emotional collapse on the part of the ruling party to make them feel weak and create a tenser atmosphere to prevent them from defending themselves in a healthy way of communication. All in all, insults are supportive of group solidarity as they reveal a common agreement on a point of criticism generally approved by the other group members in the competitive atmosphere of the Parliament.

From a broader perspective, additionally, one inevitable implication of this research lies in the contradictory evidence for the view that politeness or impoliteness is usually more indirect in Turkish society as a member of eastern speech communities when compared with western communities who are more analytic and pay attention to particular objects and categories. It is conventionally agreed on that Eastern way of thinking is associated with holistic thought and there is increasing evidence that Asian culture is collectivist which promotes group harmony and contextual understanding of situations (Winerman 2006), it is generally thought that Asians refrain from clarity of expressions. It is also pointed out that traditional Asian communication norms depreciate direct and explicit expressions but value expressing negative feelings or disagreements in a vague manner (Park & Kim 2008; Nelson et al. 2002). Contrary to popular opinion, our study indicated that the MPs do not bother delivering direct and clear impolite insults frequently in the parliament, which is of value in the culture-cognition connection.

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