

"Being addressed 'Abla' (Elder Sister) Makes One the Sibling of all Turks"

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I will illustrate different cultural meanings attached to terms of address in Turkish in comparison to Finnish in regard to the term 'abla' which refers to one's elder sister in Turkish. As Byram (1997) highlights integrating culture to language teaching is not a new idea but with the aid of globalization and the multi-media in recent decades it is easier to come in touch with the target culture and gain familiarity with the various usages of language by either bringing it into the classroom, or traveling to the target country. Seeing authentic usages enables the learner gain a better understanding of cultural differences and gain competence when experimenting with the specific language belonging to a context. A newspaper article in Finland mentioned about a Finnish journalist who, had studied Turkish in Finland and worked in Turkey, was addressed 'abla' in the street in Turkey not understanding why people were calling her like that. She realized that the term 'abla' she had learnt did not solely refer to the parental sibling in Turkey, and one easily could become the sister of neighbors, the greengrocer, or the minibus driver. After several months she got used to this term of address and started to use it too. She had gained linguistic and cultural competence by integrating 'abla' to her target language productivity. I brought the article to my classes at the University of Helsinki where I teach Turkish language and discussed the additional cultural meanings of the term of address by focusing on 'abla' and 'hocam' with 8 other terms of address. From that day on, by thinking analytically about the cultural relationships of these terms some students made the unfamiliar usage in Finland starting to address me 'hocam' just like my students in Turkey.