Language and Society

Project Final Individual Submission

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Team Number: 2 → Social Hierarchy

1   Analysis

My task in the project was to study Hindi cinema. Till now, I have analysed a web series Paatal Lok till now. This series helped me to study the social hierarchy of a police station in outer parts of Delhi. It is clear from the analysis that under non-extreme circumstances, the social hierarchy plays an important role in affecting the way people speak.

By non-extreme conditions I mean that the participants are not in an emotional state like anger, sadness, they are not feeling left out etc. Because then the behaviour becomes very different and social hierarchy contributes almost nothing to the manner.

1.1   Methodology

I made some categories and sub-categories for the data to be collected:
- Under normal circumstances

    - Employee talking to his boss

        * At a higher level
        * At a lower level

    - Boss talking to his employee

        * At a higher level
        * At a lower level

- In some emotional state

    - Employee talking to his boss

        * At a higher level
        * At a lower level

    - Boss talking to his employee

        * At a higher level
        * At a lower level

Then I just had to note down all the features of the utterances in their respective categories. This made the analysis very easy.

1.2   Main Points

So I think that the main reason behind the effects of social hierarchy on Language can be:

- The employees can talk to bosses with respect due sometimes actual respect for the boss. But finding such good bosses is very difficult.

- So, the next reason for respect of employees towards bosses can be that the bosses have a lot of power in an office. So, if someone wants not to lose their job and get promotions would not mess up with their boss.

- The bosses at higher level try to be strict with their employees to establish their supremacy and they don't care if someone doesn't like them because of that as they have a lot of power.

- At lower levels, they don't have much power as the bosses at higher level have, so they try to make good relations with employees so as to have a peaceful time at office without any problems arising due to angry employees.

- But if an employee really gets angry because she/he feels discriminated or due to pressure of work, then she/he can be disrespectful.

- Even if the friendly bosses can become strict if she/he feels that the employee did something that friends don't do. (We see example of this in Paatal Lok when an employee with whom his boss is very friendly and vice-versa tries to call the boss to tell him about promotion. But the boss was not available on call that time. So the boss feels that he became the last one to know about the promotion. This combined with other things lead the boss to be rude with employee.)

- Among the employees at the same level, a strong friendship develops due to the time they spend together and they work in similar conditions so that adds to a topic of chat. So, their language is just like friends.

2 Observations Directly From the Data

- There is social hierarchy based on the post in the station.

- Under normal circumstances, there is a difference in the behaviour between consecutive levels at lower level and two consecutive levels at higher level.

- While talking to a person with higher authority, we tend to be polite, respectful, try not to sound arguing. One can also try to butter them up. And the person at higher level tries to be friendly as they spend a lot of time together (more at lower levels).

- If emotions come into play, then people can forget about the hierarchy. One can be disrespectful with the people on higher levels if they are angry. And a boss can become rude even when she/he has good friendly relations with his employees out of emotions.

- Mostly, unhappy bosses use sarcasm instead of scolding employees because sarcasm is lighter than scolding and scolding a lot can go against the purpose.

- In the web series, that I chose and also in many real life situations, bosses call the employees by their last name (specifically in North India) and employees call their bosses by Sir/Sahab.

- Among the people at same level, we see the use of first names in a news channel company employees at a top level. But last names are also used in the police station among the people at the same level. My observation is that the people who use English more than Hindi use first names more often at the same level as compared to people who prefer to use Hindi.

3 Challenges

The biggest and the only challenge that I am facing is that it is difficult for me to find some movies that have a lot of data regarding our topic that I can extract. I don't watch much movies or cinema so it is my greatest challenge for the project. Also, as we are at home, it becomes sometimes difficult to get time for work because one has to give family a little bit time also.