

Web Based Authorship in the Context of User Generated Content, An Analysis of a Turkish Web Site: Eksi Sozluk

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Abstract

Recent developments in the Internet technology have offered various formations online, many of which can be brought together in the frame of Web 2.0. Among these, some applications have put the user on the foreground, placing him/her to a fairly active position. In that manner Eksi Sozluk (www.eksisozluk.com), one of the most popular web sites in Turkey, has attracted attention as an output of online collaboration. It's described as 'a collaborative hypertext dictionary based on the concept of web sites built upon user contribution' (Turkish Daily News Web site, 14th August 2006) enabling its users to express themselves in different ways. Although there are some similar (but different on a larger scale) worldwide web site formations, Eksi Sozluk is still unique with its format. This paper locates Eksi Sozluk among these other forms of online web applications via drawing the frame of its functions. Although it has emerged as a database with the catch-phrase 'sacred source of knowledge', it is used in a sense of a blog diary and a web forum at the same time. In this sense, attributes of authors are examined for the reason why they contribute to a such community by reproducing texts.

Keywords; authorship, user-generated content, Eksi Sozluk, Web community

Introduction

In the circumstances of open society, lifestyle and social relations of new media user have changed regarding the information bombardment. The quality of the mentioned information may be various, however this paper is into individualistic opinions, which are shaped in a network community. That is to say, people are influenced by the others' opinions and the written texts are mostly created in a wide frame of references. Regarding this network style of communication, virtual spaces are constructed to the extent that some particular

patterns of daily life are transferred. Especially in the manner of social relationships, this process of transfer can be clearly observed on interactive collaborative activities.

One of the collaborative works which require the active participation of high numbers of users is Eksi Sozluk.¹ With its distinct structure, Eksi Sozluk as a part of the active web environment, has become a reproductive basis of popular culture in Turkey. This fact can be readily noticed when the 'entries', a term which is used by the *susers* (Eksi Sozluk users) to refer to the written texts of authors, are examined on the web site. This web site can be regarded as a place in which daily social practices are transferred with Turkish cultural habits. Thus, the concept 'pluralization of life worlds' by Alexander², occurs in these kinds of spaces. Yet, the mentioned approach is not independent from the daily life of the individual. In other words, behaviours of the individual in the social networks are a part of his/her daily life and even an activity which seems to be irrelevant, gets involved into this life in the context of its influences. As a matter of fact, the phenomenon which are going to be observed, have a wide extent in the manner of the Internet user roles in generating content. This is why the frame of this study is limited to the web based authorship concept.

The dominance of writer over reader in reconstructing the social network, ends up with the manipulation of ideas. As the active side of this process, writer has the ability to define the way of communication flow. We shall remember that the new media texts are constructed within a broader field, in which we can find evidences from the outputs of daily life to the forming of social representations. And as the constructor of those fields, writer can be ranked as vital in the theoretical formulation. Especially, as a necessity of his/her role in forming the narrative structures on the social spaces of the Web, he/she is not unexceptional anymore as a regular user. In the current social environment, where discourses of media literacy must totally be revised, the decisive effect of the user has increased and this point has become to be clearly seen in structures like wikis, blogs, and MMOGs.

From the argument which says that *heterotopic* communication evokes a shift in the public sphere and by following Giddens's theory of structuration, we can arrive at the fact that individuals' behaviours should be observed in the process of reconstruction of social relations and social spaces. Though, it is possible to reach various data considering that individuals who share the same physical places may live in different information environments. At that point, dealing with the continuity of identities at virtual environments in the given space-time configuration has to be discussed. Also, finding answer to the question whether these kinds of social networks are a component or an alternative

in the process of socialization is an important matter.

Since Eksi Sozluk is a web community service created by its authors, their attitudes, perceptions and behaviours constitute the main subject matter for this study. That being the case, the reasons driving the authors to continue writing were surveyed from the authorship perspective. The matters like their motives of participation in Eksi Sozluk, the meaning of being an author in that community, the period of time they spend for writing were also dealt by reviews.

Just to make it clear, we shall point out to the difference between the uses of two concepts, *author* and *suser*. In this paper, we used these concepts to put forward the specific qualities about the Eksi Sozluk users. Here, 'suser' covers the meaning of author, but the groundwork depends on the Web 2.0 opportunities which are offered to users. So, in order to emphasize these functions, sometimes the word 'suser' is preferred. In fact, readers are also users of Eksi Sozluk, but they are limited in ability to participate in some extra features on the web site. Therefore, the words are chosen properly to refer to the primary function of these subjects and sometimes they are used interchangeably.

Eksi Sozluk

Eksi Sozluk is a web site founded by an employee of Microsoft Corporation, Sedat Kapanoğlu (known as *ssg* in Eksi Sozluk) at on February 15, 1999. As Kapanoğlu states, the web site was founded just for getting over his 'boredom' ³, but it was developed in the course of time with joining of his friends. In the beginning the web site was open to everyone. Then, enrollings started to be made a variety of criteria for the increasing interest.

Eksi Sozluk is an interactive web site that consists of the content created by its user. Enrollment periods to the dictionary and the criteria of acceptance are changeable. For instance, a first must for the 6th generation authors was to send some used books to the small library of a village school. But, there were no such obligations for the 9th and the 10th generations, which are called as 'sabir tasi yazar' (very patient author in English) as they have waited for a too long time to become an author. The *newcomers* of the mentioned generation, who applied to Eksi Sozluk for being an author within last six months (and logged in at least once within a month), have been accepted as authors on the birthday of the founder.

'Suser' Roles in Eksi Sozluk

There are some different categories of Eksi Sozluk users other than authors. Because authorship is a designation depending on the moderation approval. Other user profiles can be revealed under the following categories:

Newcomer (caylak): The author nominee registered with the aim of being one of the authors of Eksi Sozluk, but hasn't completed writing ten compulsory entries within the basic rules. Once Eksi Sozluk administration starts the period to accept new authors, it simply doesn't mean that everybody who applied for being an author will become eventually one of them. There seems to be no strict rule based process for these periods and author acceptance while the conditions are not clear.

After the approval of authorship, the new author becomes able to use all the facilities of Eksi Sozluk without any restrictions. These facilities include sending and receiving personal messages between authors, organizing the profile section, using the extensions of Eksi Sozluk, etc. Most of these facilities are not permitted to the regular user.⁴

Newcomer awaiting approval (onay bekleyen caylak): The user awaiting for his/her ten submitted entries to be examined and approved for authorship by the moderators. These ten entries are examined by a moderator when the newcomer's turn comes. When a moderator approves the newcomer's entries, his/her title is changed as 'author' with the generation info. If the moderator thinks that there are some problems with the entries, he/she may ask the newcomer to correct them, or simply rejects. A rejected newcomer can register again with a new account and another nickname.

Registered reader (kayitli okur): The users, who prefer to become registered, only for exploring the Eksi Sozluk content. By any chance, they can be potential newcomers. There is an essential explanation to be made on the registered users. Eksi Sozluk is open to everyone for reading, but the registered readers have some privileges that the regular users don't have. For instance, registered users can rate an entry as 'good, average or bad'. However, they are not able to use the instant messaging (IM) system. Besides, registered users have priority on some newcomer acceptance periods.

Eksi Sozluk is administrated by the people with specialized duties. Among them, *moderation* is the vital and the most distinctive one. As a matter of course, moderators are basically occupied with assigning the newcomers to become authors and deleting the incorrect entries that are violating the rules. If necessary, they have the right to dismiss an author.

Other than moderating, informing is another supportive duty. *Informer (gammaz)* helps moderators to carry out their job easily and faster. These are the authors of

older generations, well-informed on the format of the Eksi Sozluk. They report the incorrect or foul entries to the moderation to have them examined.

Another assigned group is the *praetors*. They are the attorneys affiliated to the laws of the Republic of Turkey. These law officers represent Eksi Sozluk on the legal ground with the possible lawsuits that are brought against and they also consider the entries to be labeled as legally controversial. They have the right to ask the moderation for deleting entries.

The least active group is the *hacivats*. They check the entries considering Turkish grammar rules and if necessary share their corrections with the authors.

Statistical Data

The ever-changing statistical data gives idea on the basics of the web site. Here are some figures⁵ which were categorized by the web site moderators.

Number of authors		22.105
Number of users (Authors + Newcomers + Newcomers awaiting approval + Registered readers)		192.579
Total number of entries		8.088.612
Total number of titles		1.486.388
Range of sex	Female	49.516
	Male	108.120
	Undisclosed	5.699
Age groups of users	<18	104
	18-25	108.501
	25-30	33.770
	30-40	14.778
	40-60	2.941
	60-100	613
	Not specified	2.634

Number of authors by generation	1. Generation	294	
	2. Generation	350	
	3. Generation	1.009	
	4. Generation	1.932	
	5. Generation	95	
	6. Generation	6.558	
	7. Generation	1.583	
	8. Generation	1.718	
	9. Generation	6.253	
	10. Generation	3.080	
	11. Generation	2	
Attendants	Moderator	7	
	Praetor	8	
	Hacivat	4	
	Informer ⁶		10.044

Rules of Eksi Sozluk

An author of Eksi Sozluk is able to write anything as long as the content is appropriate on the legal ground, which involves Turkish legal regulations and if the texts fit frame of the rules of Eksi Sozluk. Hence, the obligatory rules can be revealed in two broad categories; those regarding the law and the ones exclusive for Eksi Sozluk.

The first set of rules in Eksi Sozluk are related to the penal codes of Turkish Republic, which means that entries must be acceptable by the Turkish Penal Code. Even though the author seems anonymous with a nickname, he/she is responsible for the submitted content. Any contradictory information (e.g. any trade secret) is to be removed from Eksi Sozluk and the expressions that are counted as inconvenient acts regarding the Turkish Penal Code are forbidden to be included in the entries. When encountered with an entry regarding these conditions, moderation has the right to delete it without any notification. And if needed, they have to give information to the legal authorities with the name and the IP (Internet Protocol) number of the author. But, these kinds of problems are tried to be solved within the inner control mechanisms before they happen to become such excessive cases. If the author persists in writing these kinds of entries, then he/she will be totally dismissed. However, in a case of a lawsuit, moderation may delete the entry and dismiss the author or preferably keep the author only by removing the content in question. The application of this rule is

dependent on the dispute at law. Consequently, there is no certain rule for the matters like this.

As in all other social networks, personal information like name and IP number besides a user nickname are important for the moderation of Eksi Sozluk. In the case of a violation of use, they provide an evidence for the moderation. This can be seen as a precaution to make people act more responsibly. On this wise, the argument of anonymity turns out to be a questionable matter. Since it is not possible to be anonymous and hide the ID completely, this issue will still remain as a contradiction for social networks.

Second group of rules are designed for writing the content within the rules of Eksi Sozluk. There are some rules on writing which are constantly explained and developed by the dictionary moderation. These rules cover the reasons for deleting entries, dismissing the authors from the web site. There is no final form of these rules, since they are changing and developing dynamically. New rules are generated or conceived for each new problem encountered.

Principally, the authors are expected to obey to the basic grammar and spelling rules regarding the language. But this is not a primary cause for deleting an entry or dismissing the author. The essentials are based on the quality of information. Even 'a trace of information' is sufficient for an entry to be a valid item in Eksi Sozluk.⁷ This is a very broad description for information itself to the limits and extent. For this reason, it is not easy to refer information as something rigid and structured in terms of Eksi Sozluk. Furthermore, it is not preferred to draw a certain frame for the content.

The Concept of Authorship

The need for the 'characterization of each text with its author' emerged with modernity. Earlier, it wasn't an essential association about the content. Then other aspects like rules and norms, plan and purpose, social sense with creating and representing a certain discourse for the community came to forefront. Thus, authorship started to be shaped through interaction with the beginning of the 20th century. Today, it gradually loses the significance to verify the source of information flow.⁸ What we call 'text' is turned into an unstable and dynamic form. As Chris Chesher remarks in his study;

The Author emerged in the West alongside a range of economic, technological, social, political and legal changes associated with the rise of individualism, capitalism, rationalism, democracy and rule of law. Authorship functions as a boundary abstraction that connects each of these

discourses. [...] Authorship marks gender, age and nationality, worldview and ideology. The author's name transcends the proper name of a living person to become, in some cases a signifier for an entire field of knowledge and field of practice.⁹

Theoricians like Foucault and Barthes also question the meanings of authorship with the rise of modernity. Their assumptions on authorship and its problematic positioning were used to explain the author function on the Web by many researchers.

Barthes suggests that the authors no longer carried authority over the meaning of the text and they were defined apart from their cultural contexts. He defines the fade of the originality as 'blending' or 'mixing'.

Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subjects slip away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing. [...] As soon as a fact is narrated [...] the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins.¹⁰

As he states, in the ethnic societies the narrator was an admired figure, but not with his/her creativity. Author is a completely modern figure which started to be mentioned after the debates on the individual's status. It was positivism which has attached the greatest importance to the 'person' as author.¹¹

Foucault indicates manifesting his arguments on the function of the author as;

We can easily imagine a culture where discourses would circulate without any need for an author. Discourses, whatever their status, form, or value, and regardless of our manner of handling them, would unfold in a pervasive anonymity.¹²

On the other hand, since the reader is positioned in an active role, all the aforementioned arguments can be considered as they are referring to the empowerment of reader as a contributor, namely 'Web 2.0 user'. Thus, it can be discussed under the title 'death of the author'. We should note that the authorship practice has not been dissolved, but it was transformed into something else with the hypertext system. Therefore, "the reader's freedom can never be absolute. Hypertext does not free readers from all authorial intention. In practice, hypertext simply entangles the reader in a new set of nets 'of a different order' ".¹³

Web is not linear, so there exists no reading and exploring order for the users. Ryan specifies, 'as a virtualization of the already virtual, hypertext is truly a hyper-text, a self-referential reflection of the virtual nature of textuality'.¹⁴ This is one of the key elements of hypertextuality. It is dependent on the user practices of reading and collaboration. Thanks to the hyperlink possibilities, users are able to explore any content among pieces of information freely.

Web Authorship: Scope and Boundaries

The facilities of Web 2.0 provided the user to create meaning and content more easily and actively than ever. With the innovations brought by Web 2.0, writing and expressing potentials have expanded in the social networks such as forums, blogs, discussion boards, video/image sharing web sites. Contributing to an environment which consists of user-generated content, by the way indicated, enables the users to post videos, share photos, write reviews, keep a blog diary and add comments to the forums. All of these activities give the opportunity to share personal narratives of the user by expressing lifestyle, worldview and ideology.

Web authorship has a technological dimension directly related with the writing activity. Authorship in the traditional sense has changed with the utilities of the Web 2.0 environment and has recently created the 'web authorship' concept through interactivity. As anticipated, the traditional relation between the author and text has changed. Depending on the transformations of author/reader(ship), the collaborative concept of this kind of web environment has a direct impact on the nature of the authorship. Authorship of user-generated content differs from the traditional practices of authorship and covers the readership specialities. It enables the user to participate in the content actively both as an author and a reader. Though, it is possible to combine the activities of these two roles just by being a member of the network. By this way, the participant will have the possibility to shape the online community as a contributor.

On the web sites like wikis, in which the user participates mostly by reading, texts are intertwined and the content is open for editing to other authors. On the wiki web sites, the private status of the author and the originality of the content are questionable. In some cases, the author is not more than an organizer of the content. Because the author contributes by composing informative essays on the subjects collaboratively, the name and the characteristics of the author remains in the background. On the other hand, on blogs, contributor may let his/her proper names or user names to be displayed under the submitted content.

Yet, the informative scale of the content depends on the blog owner(s). Warschauer et al. assert on the author status in blogs and wikis as;

If blogs served to suggest that the author is well and alive, wikis fulfill the prophecy of authorship fading away. In essence, the distance between the author and audience is eliminated when the audience can directly edit the author's work. In many Wikipedia articles, it is difficult to discern a principal author.¹⁵

Everything2 (commonly known as E2) is the most reminiscent web site formation of Eksi Sozluk among others. It is a web-based community where the information about 'everything' can be found. There are some restrictive rules and regulations, but basically the author is free to convey his ideas through E2. Bulkeley et al. compares the Web 2.0 applications in the center of E2;

Only registered users are allowed to post content, although anyone may create an account with no verification. Unlike in a wiki, however, only the author of a node can edit that node. This means that content cannot be modified by others directly. Instead, users are explicitly informed of how well they are following social norms by their ranking according to a reputation system. [...] Although it is less widely known than Wikipedia, Everything2 is equally large, with approximately 70,000 registered users, and it also attracts a dedicated community of regular contributors, including some who spend many hours a week on the site and consider it a source of social contacts and emotional support.¹⁶

According to Emigh and Herring, "Some regular contributors to Everything2 have more influence than others - the reputation system ensures it - but authors preserve ultimate control over their entries, rendering the site's contents diverse and, at times, 'noisy' and 'subjective' ".¹⁷ There are no restrictions while writing over subjective entries within the rules of E2, but it is not encouraged as opposed to the regulations of Eksi Sozluk.

Authorship in Eksi Sozluk

Eksi Sozluk is an online dictionary involving entries listed in an item type format. Under each of their entries, authors have nicknames as their

trademarks. After having completed the levels to become an author, users become a part of the community and start creating and producing meaning through writing. The most important rule of writing in this 'loose' dictionary form is to write the first sentence of each entry as a description or at least give information on the title in question. Author has a total freedom of speech (including usage of slang and swearing) at the rest of the entry. The entries are consist of anecdotes, essays, descriptive informations, related memories and any kind of empirical information. This is where the genuineness of the Eksi Sozluk comes from.

Eksi Sozluk is open to regular readers only for exploring its content. The hypertext structure enables them to jump between the numerous descriptions just by clicking the hyperlinked words, names or expressions without following a continuous line. There is a great shift from the centrality of the content to the system of links. The growth of the content is not strictly structured; it is not linear and solid. The interactive searching facility also brings a dynamism to the reading practice. The titles which attract the attention of the wandering reader at the first sight, make him/her get into the realm of texts by following the hyperlinks. Because the entries including hypertexts, both can be in accordance with each other and provide continuity under a certain title.

The speciality of Eksi Sozluk among other collaborative web communities comes from its text based content. There are no avatars or images describing a title. This is meaningful for the authors, because it is very similar to the traditional practices of authorship. Although they are recognizable through the body of their entries, no information on the authors can be found except the nicknames. A regular web surfer, who is not registered to the web site is only enabled to see the nickname of an author and he/she cannot have any more information other than the nickname. However, authors are totally able to see the generation of other authors, their entries and *karma* points (author credits). But, none of these capabilities provide any personal information on the author profile.

Eksi Sozluk gives no guarantee for the reliability of the information it contains. The motto 'sacred source of information' inholds some level of irony on this subject. But it doesn't mean that these subjective informations are incorrect, but it makes them impossible to be confirmed. Some authors write informative and comprehensive entries that are possible to be published as scientific papers, but at the same time they are free to write about the reason why they like the lyrics of a song. The most important issue is the writing skills and authenticity. The general structure of the Eksi Sozluk is informal, but there are no restrictions on the formal entries.

The titles that attract the most attention are the timely and controversial ones. For instance, some entries like the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting

2009 or a football game between Fenerbahce and Galatasaray may stay on the left frame, in which the very last written entries take place, since the authors continue to submit their entries. As the most voted entries, they have a big share on the karma of the authors.

Each author is a part of the whole with their own contributions for a subject. Besides, they submit their individual expression without interference. The only authority to interfere is the moderation aiming to keep Eksi Sozluk to continue production without any legal issues. By the way, this kind of an interference is also vital to prevent degeneration of the dictionary.

Authors are more than just users contributing to the web site. They are able to get feedback for their entries and to communicate using the IM facility. Also with the extentional sites such as ek\$ibition or sourberry, authors become able to experience the other forms of online socialization facilities. They can participate to the meetings in real life - these are arranged for any simple reason - to establish personal contacts. The mentioned options make Eksi Sozluk more than just a virtual community.

Web Communities Within the Borders of Social Networks

In his work *The Virtual Community*, Rheingold asks if CMC [Computer Mediated Communication] is a publishing medium or a communication service or an informal public space.¹⁸ Perhaps Eksi Sozluk can be taken both as a publishing medium and an informal public space. Approaching from the first definition, Eksi Sozluk can be seen as a multifaceted social platform enabling its users to express their opinions without limitations of subject titles. The entries are chronologically ordered (the latest entry on the top) in this free space to provide its users to make entries considering the former texts. And it is this chronological format that gives Eksi Sozluk its blog-like appearance. By this structure, discussions are promoted especially in up-to-date events as touched upon at the previous section. The second approach drives forward the social aspects of Eksi Sozluk. As it is an open source for discussions and exchange of ideas, Eksi Sozluk draws the line of an informal space. This point of view settles Eksi Sozluk users as a community which build up a public opinion.

Networked interpersonal interaction is the core of more complex engagement with the society's mediating institutions, that is, social action or participation.¹⁹ Opposing to the common belief about isolation of individual that occurs with Internet and computer, socialization can be referred as one of the key points for Eksi Sozluk. Because, people withdrawn from society with the change in the daily relationships are no more exposing the routine behaviours.

As Agre comments with reference to Neuromancer, the Internet is not

growing apart from the world, but to the contrary is increasingly embedded in it.²⁰ The social networks, that work on the Internet basis explicitly approve this idea. And when the real life experiences are reviewed, it is possible to observe the continuum of identities on the cyberspace. But, this is a more complex process than it seems on the first sight, cause online and offline relationships are intertwined in the daily practices of the individual. Eksi Sozluk, as an open space, gives chance to observe this kind of connections of user with the real life activities.

Wilson and Peterson suggest that individuals within any community are simultaneously part of other interacting communities, societies, or cultures.²¹ Yet communication media are often assumed by definition to be socially integrating, producing a homogeneous popular culture depicting social 'mainstream'.²² Taken within the state of Eksi Sozluk, it is possible to meet people of various subcultures and world-view.

Web users display a certain mode of identity to be a part of a web community. They need something fake or real to represent themselves on the web sites. So, user name can be regarded as the signature of web authors. Though, it can be called as 'online identity' composed of multiple personas. Dick Hardt states on this personas that, web environment imitates the identity transactions in the real social life. People display only some parts of their identity in a certain social circle.²³ This kind of an approach evokes debates on the quality of online identities. As Smith and Kollock suggest;

[...] groups are both large and well developed, but critics argue that these groups do not constitute *real* communities. Something is missing, they argue, that makes these online groups pale substitutes for more traditional face-to-face communities. Others respond that not only are online communities real communities, but also that they have the potential to support face-to-face communities and help hold local communities together. [...] Critics describe online communities as more isolated than 'real-life' groups, their comparison seems to be to an ideal of community rather than to face-to-face communities as they are actually experienced. There is a great deal of loneliness in the lives of many city dwellers.²⁴

Eksi Sozluk is an inhomogeneous web community presenting multiple views in the same context. It cannot be expected to be representative of a certain

class, view, ideology or a group. The characteristic that keeps the people together in this formation is the freedom of speech and a shared mode of content creation. Eksi Sozluk is a living organism with its changing, rich and flexible style.

To recall, the use of Eksi Sozluk is available to everyone as readers. Although, regular readers have no functions other than exploring the content, they know very well that they can find what they look for on the dictionary. Even the search engines direct the users to Eksi Sozluk. This is why regular readers keep on visiting the web site. Besides, authors of the dictionary are totally active by voting or applauding for an entry and reporting in Eksi Sozluk. A special jargon and a certain writing form of entries provide a freedom of expression within bounds. Thereby, the authors feel attached to the web community by creating a common sense and develop a behavioural pattern to express themselves.

Methodology & Findings

While conducting the research, both participant observation and in-depth analysis methods were applied to set forth the specifications of Eksi Sozluk and figure out the attributes of its users. Findings from the two methods of research are interpreted under this same title, since the former one supports the latter. Therefore, the assumptions and findings from the research are interpreted within a cross-process method.

First stage of the research was about proceeding the user observations. Two authors²⁵ of this paper are already members of Eksi Sozluk, therefore they participated deeply to get details about the user modules of the web site and user behaviours. (We shall note that most of the modules are closed to the access of regular users.) This process was carried through a period of two months. Patterns of the web site and some points about user generated texts were conducted in this phase.

The environment in which the users perform their activities and the concept of authorship were defined in the previous chapters. Briefly, it can be said that the virtual space, which is a subject to the research, is a gathering point of users with different points of views. Yet, the mentioned active users share some common ideas and background knowledge. They sort their facts and opinions by a jargon in a kind of space for open discussion and reflect their ideas using the facilities of the web site. When giving facts and data, the facilities and the possibilities of Eksi Sozluk were examined. However, some major points about user attributes were defined within their social frames.

In the second part of the research, in-depth reviews were conducted. A variety of authors - including *ssg*, the founder of Eksi Sozluk - were interviewed to get idea about their usage habits. When selecting the interviewees, various

points have been considered like age, sex, and user generation to provide heterogeneity. Beyond the peculiarities of individuals, some common properties were taken into account for selecting them by their characteristics that fit the active Internet user profile. In other words, all of the selected six interviewees are active Internet users, who spend a considerable time surfing the Web.

Of course, there were some limitations for these research, especially in the manner of identities brought by the jargon. But this requires extra work on psychology and linguistics and it is only understandable in a larger context of culture. Though, this issue could be a subject for another research. And perhaps user behaviours - in general, including the readers - could be examined, but this paper is merely into the attributes of users in the manner of authorship.

Building the questions was a complicated issue, since we had to prepare questions which would turn out to answers for our needs. So, these were designed to understand the author behaviours. In particular, we tried to discover why do authors write for such a web site. When collected data were organized, we were able to find answer to this question and more.

Time spent: The participants who were interviewed usually spend 1 to 8 hours on Eksi Sozluk. This period of time is limited to the time remaining from daily routines. However, while being online, almost every participant spend much of this time on Eksi Sozluk. But, the ratio of the time spent for reading/writing cannot be precisely defined. After all, each participant is essentially a good reader.

Basic criteria for reading and writing: Reading activities are common to the participants especially in the manner of following the entries of another writer. So, it can be said that, reading the texts of favored authors is among the priorities of users. One of the participants nicknamed *likeaplayer*, defined the reason to follow a specific writer as keeping an eye on the agenda, so that she can be informed of up-to-date events without watching television or reading newspapers. Another participant, *ssg*, expressed that he monitors a specific writer since he knows that this specific writer's entries are well-written.

We observed that while writing, participants mostly prefer giving opinions on their personal interests. In this context, they said to have considered readers' frame of knowledge as a priority when choosing topics for their entries. By this way, they can decide on what to write considering the information gaps of the readers. However, participants did not declare their opinions on the instantly updated titles, which take place on the left frame of the web site layout. The reason for this is that interests within Eksi Sozluk have a very wide scope. For

instance, writing under the titles like ‘evolutionary theory’ or ‘men obsessed with the name Zeynep’ can be regarded as area of interests. Though, some participants define the limit of interests by their professions and others by their immediate attention on various topics.

Eksi-like formations: Eksi-like formations can be analysed with two aspects: The first one involves Eksi-like formations in Turkey, which appeared after the birth of Eksi Sozluk. These formations (called as ‘clones’) try to adopt the Eksi Sozluk model by the means of the interface and jargon. The second aspect is constituted of Web 2.0 applications.

Regarding the first aspect, clones are far more undersized than Eksi Sozluk and users of clones do not have the diverse outlook as in the original formation. Most of the participants found clones unnecessary in the presence of Eksi Sozluk. On the contrary, *ssg* defined clones as a wealth of opinions.

To mention the second aspect of Eksi-like formations, we can say that none of the participants have stated opinions on any forum web sites even when asked. They talked more on other Web 2.0 applications over blogs and wikis. They are mostly interested in the blogs that are owned by Eksi users. It must be indicated that these blogs are mostly accessed by using the hyperlinks which are involved in the entries on the Eksi Sozluk web site. As previously mentioned, participants’ relationship with wikis is mainly based on reading. Most of them use these applications as a search engine to reach the information that they cannot find on Eksi Sozluk. And almost none of the participants had contributed to wikis as a writer. Those who have written for wikis for a short while, have quit when they became authors of Eksi Sozluk. It can be said that the main difference between Eksi Sozluk and other Web 2.0 platforms is the variety of point of views. As one of the participants nicknamed *tulay_1959* said that Eksi Sozluk represents like 1600 different colors and it is not limited to the colors of a rainbow.

When the clones are excluded, the most Eksi-like web site is Everthing2. Among the participants, the only experience on Everthing2 is the attempt of *ssg*, but it didn’t last for a long time, because one of his entries was deleted by the moderators and his knowledge of English language was not good enough to write for that given period.

Eksi Sozluk is still popular for being the first one among the similar formations. Due to the effective control mechanism the dictionary maintains its stabilized structure. Therefore, being an author of Eksi Sozluk is prestigious, since the entries of authors can be found in the results of search engines.

Reliability of texts on Eksi Sozluk: All of the participants think that reliability of

entries cannot be dependent on a single specified parameter. Such that, Demirkiran and Alkan define Eksi Sozluk as a platform, which makes the reader criticize true knowledge again and again.²⁶ However, if the author of the entry is known by the reader, then the credibility of the text increases. In addition, susers think that true information can be found on the dictionary.

Interpretation of author generations: Categorization of authors as generations is perceived as a technical allocation. In spite of this understanding, participants have accepted the differences between generations in the manner of contribution to the dictionary. For example, 50 years old *tulay_1959*, affirmed that she has consulted other susers of various age and generation about the use of the dictionary. *ssg* told that the intellectual maturity of users between the ages 18-25 is reflected to the debates. But, the common idea is that the matter of generation has no relation with the differences based on age.

Changing the cast of minds: Eksi authors, who were interviewed, believe in general that being an author of the dictionary does not lead to significant changes in the way of their thinking. But *ssg* and *galadnikov* believe that, they had a change in their point of views with Eksi Sozluk, although they were not able to engage this belief with the authorship concept.

Karma feature: All the participants indicated that they are certainly not interested in their own karma points. However, they rate points for the entries that they like or dislike. Here, we can say that karma feature has a function for the susers especially when rating for other authors' entries instead of being credited.

Authenticity of Eksi Sozluk: All the participants portrayed Eksi Sozluk as original. Among various reasons for this opinion which became prominent, are the diversity of its users and accessibility to the information demanded. According to the author nicknamed *average*, originality of Eksi Sozluk comes from its meaning, which he defines as; "possibility of encountering a topic [on the dictionary] that can be thought individually, but cannot be shared with anyone else".

Freedom of speech: Participants do not take the rules of Eksi Sozluk as a means of limitation. Because, they have the chance to express anything within the frame of the dictionary and the laws. Such that, *tulay_1959* thinks that the authors of the dictionary are still able to criticize facts even after the prohibitions on May 2006 and September 2008. Though, none of the authors have developed a self-control

mechanism against the attempts for censorship of the government. Because, they believe that they are able to write within the current rules of the dictionary.

Jargon: All the participants admitted the fact that they use jargon when contributing to the dictionary. But, use of jargon is chosen for the most specific situations, not for the whole entries. Again, they stated that they do not use jargon in their real daily lives, but they prefer it merely in the dictionary ambience.

Abuse in language use: Most of the participants indicated that they absolutely are not being disturbed of profanity use. In fact, they find it eligible to use profanity if not directed to a certain author. Hereinbefore, in the case of an attack on the personal rights and insulting, moderation takes some precautions or warns the author about the content. *tulay_1959* denoted that, she began using profanity both in the dictionary platform and in her real social life after becoming an author of Eksi Sozluk.

Stating the things that cannot be declared in real life: On the Eksi Sozluk platform, most of the participants state the things that cannot be declared in real life. Therefore, Eksi Sozluk has an important function in the justification of user attributes on the cyberspace.

Anonymity: All the participants stated that no author can truly be anonymous in technical sense. Because each user's IP number can be detected in a related criminal case. Therefore, anonymity is merely valid in relation to the context of the dictionary, for the while the real name of author is not declared by another user.

However, the majority of the participants do not announce their identity on Eksi Sozluk authorship, unless a discussion related to the dictionary in real life is broached. Some participants such as *likeaplayer* explained the reason for this kind of behaviour as a matter of restraint. "To be known as an author of Eksi Sozluk may turn out to be a means of pressure" she said. She has realized that the entries are also read by unexpected individuals and institutions. For example, when *likeaplayer* had written under the entry of a Haluk Levent's song, the famous pop artist found her to give thanks.

Participating in the gatherings: Authors of Eksi Sozluk meet each other once in a period of time. They have the opportunity to participate to those meetings by using the Limon facility, which takes place on an external site of the dictionary web site. Participants are asked to pin an ID card noting their user nickname in

the gatherings. And according to the opinions of the interviewees, this kind of an act cannot be approved. This is why they don't prefer attending to the meetings. However, they sometimes declare their real names in these kind of activities depending on the situation.

Conclusion

In this study, we tried to examine Eksi Sozluk from the authorship perspective considering its facilities and hierarchical order. The structure and duties are designed to motivate the writing practice. Besides, freedom of expression gives Eksi Sozluk an opportunity to become a sample of exquisite independent culture. Therefore, it can be inferred from the Eksi Sozluk phenomena that this social space is a formation created by users in the frame of its using habits.

Rather than writing, reading can be considered as the primary author activity in the dictionary. This choice locates Eksi Sozluk in a unique level within the practices of web reading and participating. It turns out to be a place where users read the items on the global agenda through the dictionary's internal view. So, the wish of regular users to become a member of the dictionary must be taken normally, since they may want to contribute and share their opinions on such a platform. Approaching from view of authors, we can say that the power of Eksi Sozluk is the main factor stimulating the desire to make them continue writing. Most of the authors agree on the idea that being a member of Eksi Sozluk as an author is prestigious. We shall emphasize that, to be an author of Eksi Sozluk implies a lot many aspects about the user from lifestyle to political attitude.

There is a great amount information flow from the users feeding Eksi Sozluk. These are the reflections of the characteristics of authors' attitude towards life. The quality that makes Eksi Sozluk special is the variety of content and expression of styles. Considering the specific conditions of Turkey, we can talk of Eksi Sozluk as a medium for those who were unable to express their opinions in the past. Because a great number of users, who have grown up in 1980's Turkey, constitute the first author generations of Eksi Sozluk. Even they are usually commemorated with an apolitic view, it's those people who spiritualized the dictionary by their critical thinking. Basically, Eksi Sozluk is the most efficient online space to express themselves among other Web 2.0 environments. In fact, Eksi Sozluk enables its users to reflect their ideas better and more freely than the real life. This is a reciprocal process, shaping the author along with the things he/she reads and writes.

Notes

¹ Sour Dictionary <<http://sozluk.sourtimes.org>> or <<http://eksisozluk.com>>

² J C Alexander, 'Differentiation Theory: Problems and Prospects' in *Differentiation Theory: Problems and Prospects*, J C Alexander and P B Colomy (eds), New York, Columbia University Press, 1990, pp. 1-15.

³ <http://sozluk.sourtimes.org/show.asp?id=452>

⁴ The extensions available only for the author use are; *Limon* (the community notification bulletin for the meetings called 'zirve', <<http://limon.6degreesunder.com>>), *Ek\$ibition* (the web site for image sharing, <<http://www.eksibition.org/anasayfa>>), *Eksi Sozluk Birinci Pazar Ligi* (amateur football players' web site of authors, <<http://www.esbpl.com/default.asp>>). The extentional sites available to anyone are; *World Community Grid* (public computing grid, <<http://www.worldcommunitygrid.org>>), *Eksi Duyuru* (bulletin board, <<http://www.eksiduyuru.com>>), *Sourberry* (Internet streaming radio - Some features of this facility are not available for regular users, <<http://www.sourberry.org>>)

⁵ Data were received on January 6, 2009 at 11.00 pm.

⁶ Number of informers has increased dramatically after the acceptance of newcomers as authors on December 21, 2008. On that date, *ssg*, the founder of Eksi Sozluk, has assigned the first six generations of users who became authors between 1999-2005 as informers. There were approximately 200 informers before the mentioned date.

⁷ <http://sozluk.sourtimes.org/show.asp?id=14709598>

⁸ M Warschauer; D Grimes, 'Audience, Authorship, And Artifact: The Emergent Semiotics of Web 2.0' in *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, Cambridge University Press, USA, 2008, 27, pp. 1-23, p. 4.

⁹ C Chesher, 'Blogs and the Crisis of Authorship', viewed on 2 February 2009, <http://incsub.org/blogtalk/?page_id=40>

¹⁰ R Barthes, 'The Death of the Author' in B K Grant (ed), in *Auteurs and Authorship, A Film Reader*, Blackwell Publishing, 2008, pp. 97-100, p. 97.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 98.

¹² M Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, D F Bouchard, (ed.), New York, Cornell University Press, 1977, p. 182.

¹³ M C Tuman, *Literacy Online: The Promise (and Peril) of Reading and Writing with Computers*, Pittsburgh Series in Composition, Literacy, and Culture, University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, 1992, p. 60.

¹⁴ R Marie-Laure, 'Cyberspace, Virtuality, and the Text', in *Cyberspace Textuality: Computer Technology and Literary Theory*, Marie Laurie Ryan (ed), Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1999, p. 97.

¹⁵ Warschauer; Grimes, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

¹⁶ W Emigh, S C Herring, 'Collaborative Authoring in the Web: A Genre Analysis of Online Encyclopedias', in *Proceedings of the 38th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences*, 2005, p. 3.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 10.

¹⁸ H Rheingold, *The Virtual Community*, The MIT Press, 2000, viewed on 2 February 2009, <<http://www.rheingold.com/vc/book/3.html>>

¹⁹ L A Lievrouw, 'New Media and the 'Pluralization of Life-Worlds': A Role for Information in Social Differentiation', in *New Media & Society*, vol. 3(1), 2001, pp. 7-28, p. 16.

²⁰ P E Agre, 'Life After Cyberspace' in *European Association for the Study Science and Technology*, 1999, viewed on 2 February 2009, <<http://www.easst.net/review/sept1999/agre>>

²¹ S M Wilson; L C Peterson, 'The Anthropology of Online Communities' in *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 31, 2002, pp. 449-467, p. 455.

²² Lievrouw, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

²³ P Giger, *Participation Literacy*, Unpublished dissertation, School of Technoculture Humanities and Planning Division of Technoscience Studies, Blekinge Institute of Technology, Sweden, 2006, p. 46.

²⁴ M A Smith; P Kollock (eds), *Communities in Cyberspace*, Routledge, 1999, p. 16.

²⁵ Zehra Ziraman (suser nickname; karakedy) and D. Emrah Ziraman (suser nickname; balikci filozof)

²⁶ E Demirkiran and T Alkan, 'Bes Yildir Eksimedi' in *Aksiyon*, viewed on 2 February 2009, <<http://www.aksiyon.com.tr/detay.php?id=11277>>

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