



Examining the Cultuling of Iranians' Concerns for Others: From Apathy to Metapathy

Reza Pishghadam¹, Shima Ebrahimi²

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1. Introduction

Since birth and throughout all stages of development, humans have been social beings, as effective communication and interaction with others has been crucial for them. The capability to understand ideas, emotions, and views, and to be aware of and sensitive to them in social interactions, helps develop friendly relationships, promotes self-awareness and self-acceptance, and improves group cohesion. Living in an interconnected world means that we will inevitably face difficulties, and consequently, will regularly need the assistance of others. Iranians have long had a reputation for being kind and helpful to their fellow citizens. It is essential to remember that providing verbal support and assistance to others can also protect them from potential dangers (Andreoni et al., 2016).

When seeing other people's problems and issues, individuals use various verbal and functional approaches in accordance with their own perception and understanding of the situation, as well as the mental and emotional state of others. This indicates their level of care and concern for others. Concern for someone is defined as the emotional and cognitive ability to understand emotions and react to the mental and emotional states of others. Interpersonal interactions and socioemotional aspects help differentiate between "apathy" (having no feelings), "sympathy" (observing feelings), "empathy" (understanding feelings), and "metapathy" (changing feelings).

The current research aims to assess people's level of concern for others by analyzing the language expressions they use in various situations. In other words, the concept of 'cultuling' (language + culture) of concern for others introduces a new perspective on concern, which is influenced by both the extent of people's engagement with the problem and the closeness between individuals.

2. Materials and Methods

The current qualitative and descriptive study aimed to explore aspects of Iranian culture pertaining to the level of concern for others through the analysis of language expressions, focusing on the concept of "cultuling" at four levels: apathy, sympathy,

¹ Professor of English Language Education, Department of English, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Mashhad, Iran; pishghadam@um.ac.ir

² Assistant Professor of Persian Language Education, Department of Persian Language and Literature, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Mashhad, Iran (corresponding author); shimaebrahimi@um.ac.ir

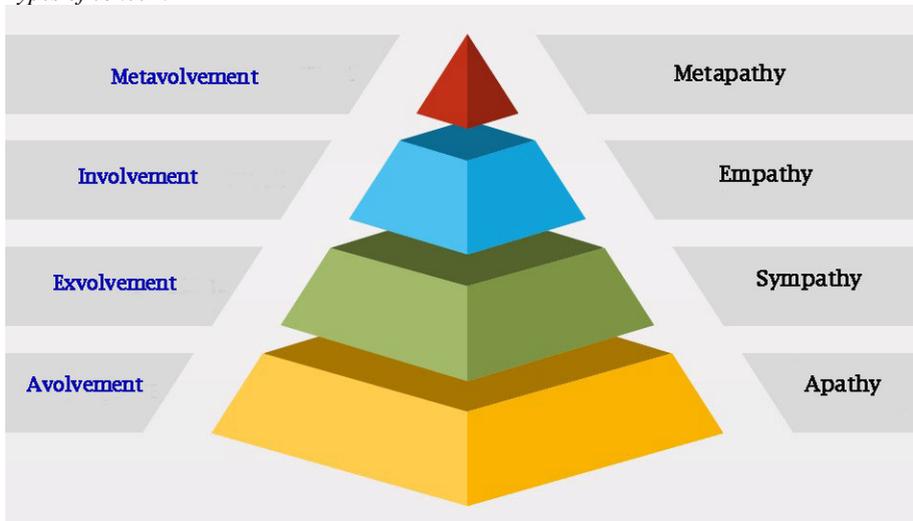
empathy, and metapathy. The research utilized a purposeful sampling method, gathering conversations from 30 Iranian social films and TV series, totaling 448 utterances related to concern. Additionally, natural discussions on topics such as education, relationships, and employment were collected from various social media platforms like Telegram, WhatsApp, and Instagram for further analysis. This comprehensive approach aimed to uncover nuanced insights into Iranian cultural attitudes towards empathy and interpersonal relations.

The study encompassed a total of 211 utterances contributed by individuals aged 18 to 69, representing a diverse range of educational backgrounds and professions, including students, freelancers, doctors, university professors, housewives, engineers, and others. These utterances were collected from written texts across various sources. Subsequently, the expressions related to concern were meticulously analyzed utilizing the *Conceptual Model of Cultuling Analysis (CLA)*. This approach allowed for a thorough examination of how individuals communicate their levels of concern for others within the context of Iranian culture, considering linguistic nuances and cultural influences.

3. Results and Discussion

Linguistic styles, expressed through utterances, serve as indicators of individuals' levels of concern for others and their reactions to various challenges. Pishghadam et al. (2022) have delineated concern types into four categories, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1.
Types of concern



Sympathy entails understanding from one's own perspective, while empathy involves stepping into the other person's shoes and comprehending why they may feel a certain way. The distinction is often explained by stating that sympathy entails sharing another's feelings, whereas empathy involves understanding those feelings without necessarily sharing them. Empathetic and sympathetic are similar terms, but they differ. Being empathetic involves swiftly and fully understanding another's perspective, whereas being sympathetic involves demonstrating concern for

someone when they experience adversity. Sympathy entails observing and accepting another person's experiences, while empathy involves experiencing someone else's emotions. Empathy is generally considered superior to sympathy because it involves a deeper level of understanding and connection. Both empathy and sympathy are valuable traits as they provide support to those in need. Viewing apathy as introspection and sympathy/empathy as outrespection, metapathy is a form of anterospection, enabling individuals to anticipate future needs (Pishghadam et al., 2022).

The findings of the data analysis based on the CLA revealed that individuals across various settings, formal and informal, public and private, exhibit diverse linguistic goals. These include expressing sympathy, providing counsel, offering assistance, promoting cooperation, as well as absolving oneself of blame, denying guilt, changing opinions, humiliating, shaming, and blaming others. Remarkably, individuals demonstrate self-awareness when using these expressions in contexts such as protesting, expressing concern, complaining, and defending one's reputation. Particularly noteworthy is the prevalence of sympathetic expressions, indicating individuals' efforts to offer comfort and empathy. This underscores Iranians' complacency (Koutlaki, 2002) and collectivism (Pishghadam & Ebrahimi, 2024), where emotional trust is sought within relationships (Meyer, 2014). In cultures valuing interpersonal bonds, verbal expressions of care contribute to the establishment of meaningful social ties. Moreover, individuals endeavor to verbally soothe others, aiming to prevent further distress in those grappling with internal struggles (Mohammedaminzadeh et al., 2017).

The findings indicate a shift in Iranian society towards individuality, with individuals striving to establish their own identities and avoid unnecessary interference in others' lives, moving away from traditional collectivist values. However, at the metapathy level, individuals may initially feel discomfort with the speaker's suggestion (Pishghadam, 2022). Over time, they come to understand the speaker's genuine concern and desire to protect them from potential harm. In essence, the speaker expresses concern for the audience's well-being and aims to assist them in navigating challenging situations. Nevertheless, the audience may initially resist or feel upset about the situation, lacking a strong inclination to accept help. This dynamic reflects the complexity of social interactions and the nuanced interplay between individual autonomy and communal support in Iranian culture.

4. Conclusion

Culture, akin to a hereditary gene, profoundly shapes the trajectory of individuals across generations (Ferastkhah, 2014). Effectively presenting and promoting a language of care for others, particularly at the levels of empathy and metapathy, can significantly enhance euculturing and mental health (Pishghadam & Ebrahimi, 2024). Cultuling analysis delves into the cultural nuances conveyed through language, including dialogues, stories, poems, and parables, to identify and address deficiencies. By raising awareness and, if necessary, engineering changes, this approach aims to cultivate a society marked by empathy and metapathy. Exploring contemporary poetry, music, and literary works through cultuling analysis offers insights into understanding the root causes of declining empathy and metapathy, paving the way for solutions to foster their advancement in society.

Keywords: cultuling; concern; apathy; sympathy; empathy; metapathy