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## **PHATIC COMMUNICATION AND ITS PRAGMATIC FUNCTIONS**

*Phatic communication depends on the recognition of a communicative intention. This statement does not link phatic talk to pragmatic functions, but does reflect the fact that phatic utterances should be interpreted not only linguistically but also pragmatically. Proceeding from the assumption that the main aim of phatic communication is to establish and maintain social relationships between the speaker and the hearer, the paper aims at revealing the pragmatic and communicative functions of phatic talk on the basis of examples being selected from popular films and literature.*

**Key words:** *phatic communication, phaticity, small talk, pragmatic function, interpersonal distance*

Phatic communication or communion, more commonly known as small talk, is a conversation for the sake of talking or conversing. The term *phatic* (from Greek *phatos*: spoken) originated in the writings of the British functionalist school of linguistics but the first usage is considered to be by Bronisław Malinowski in his essay “The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Languages” /Malinowski, 1923/.

Characteristic features of phatic communication have not undergone a systemic analysis in linguistics yet. Traditionally it is acknowledged that phatic utterances do not convey any important information. But the results of our research prove that they may serve as markers of interlocutors’ education, age and social status. Sometimes the way one person greets the other one may serve as an indication of whether the language of communication is native or foreign, whether the speaker is educated or not, whether he/she is a northerner or southerner etc. Phatic communication is described as a way for opening up social channels which can lead to a more serious, factual and substantial conversation between the speaker(s) and hearer(s). It is not socially accepted to begin and end conversations with facts. Thus, phatic communication is an important medium which serves to set the stage for more serious conversation. Though, small talk has little useful purpose, it is a very important bonding ritual for managing interpersonal distance. Its main pragmatic function is to establish relationships between friends, work colleagues and new acquaintances. Moreover, it helps new acquaintances to sense and categorize each other’s social position. The desired function is often dependent on the point in the conversation at which the small talk occurs. It can occur:

- At the beginning of a conversation

When the speakers do not know each other well enough, it lets them show that they have friendly intentions and desire for positive interaction. In a business meeting, it allows people to establish each other's reputation and position. In case of already existing relationships between the two speakers, their small talk serves

as an introduction which provides ground for engaging in more functional topics of conversation later. The main pragmatic function here is to signal their own mood and to sense the mood of the other person.

In the following example two colleagues meet in the elevator. As Tom likes Summer, he is a bit confused. Their conversation is not formal.

Tom: *Hi.*

Summer: *Hello.*

Tom: *So, uh, Summer...*

Summer: *Tom.*

Tom: *Yeah! How's it going so far?*

Summer: *The city or the firm?*

Tom: *Both... Either.*

Summer: *I'm happy. Still getting situated. How long have you worked here?*

Tom: *Oh, you know, 4, 5... years.*

Summer: *Really? Jesus. Did you always want to write greeting cards?*

Tom: *Are you nuts? I don't even want to do it now.*

Summer: *What is it you want to do?*

Tom: *I studied to be an architect actually.*

Summer: *That's so cool! What happened?*

Tom: *Eh, you know. Same old story. Moved to the city to work for a company. Company went under. Needed a job. My friend worked here. Got me this.* (<http://megashare.sc/watch-500-days-of-summer-online-TkRFMA>)

The following example from Salinger's "A Perfect Day for a Bananafish" is a good illustration of a small talk at the beginning of a conversation:

*"Hey. Hello, Sybil."*

*"Are you going in the water?"*

*"I was waiting for you," said the young man. "What's new?"*

*"What?" said Sybil.*

*"What's new? What's on the program?"*

*"My daddy's coming tomorrow on an airplane," Sybil said, kicking sand (Salinger, 1953).*

- At the end of a conversation

Suddenly ending an exchange may risk at seeming to reject the other person. The pragmatic function of small talk here is to mitigate that rejection, affirm the relationship between the two people, and soften the parting.

The following example shows that although the speakers say goodbye to each other, from the point of view of phaticity there is a possibility to meet again. As far as phatic communion is concerned all the rules are kept here:

Ngunda Oti: *I come to say goodbye. I'm going away.*

Benjamin: *Going away? Where?*

Ngunda Oti: *I don't figure that out yet. I will send you a postcard when I get to there.*

Benjamin: *What about your friend? The tall lady?*

Ngunda Oti: *We're not friends anymore. That's what happens with tall people.*

Benjamin: *Goodbye...* (<http://putlocker.tn/the-curious-case-of-benjamin-button/>)

- As a space-filler to avoid silence

In many cultures, silence between two people is usually considered impolite. This tension can be reduced by starting phatic talk until a more factual subject arises. Generally, humans find silence uncomfortable, and sometimes even unbearable.

In the following example Tom is listening to headphones in elevator. Summer enters the elevator and Tom actively pretends to ignore her. Summer hears the music.

Summer: *The Smiths.* (Tom, pretending not to hear or care, gives her an unenthusiastic wave).

Summer: *I love The Smiths.*

Tom: *Sorry?*

Summer: *I said. I love The Smiths. You have good taste in music.*

Tom: (amazed) *You like the Smiths?*

Summer: (singing) *"To die by your side is such a heavenly way to die." Love it.*

Tom: *Oh my god.* (<http://megashare.sc/watch-500-days-of-summer-online-TkRFMA>)

In this example, the elements of phatic talk at the beginning and end of the conversation have merged. The entire short conversation is a space-filler the pragmatic function of which is to reduce the tension. This type of conversation is often called chatter.

In some conversations there is no specific informative element. The following example of small talk is between a girl and a young man who love each other and their dialogue has no specific informative element:

Summer: *This thing. This whatever it is. You and me. Do you think this is normal?*

Tom: *I don't know. Who cares about normal?! I'm happy. Aren't you happy?*

Summer: *You're happy?*

Tom: *You're not?*

Summer: *All we do is argue!*

Tom: *That is such a lie!* (<http://megashare.sc/watch-500-days-of-summer-online-TkRFMA>)

In workplace situations or in educational institutions, small talk tends to occur mostly between workers on the same level. However, a boss who asks their

employees to work overtime may use small talk the pragmatic function of which will be trying to motivate them decreasing their difference in status.

The following example is between a teacher and a student who meet for the first time:

Ed: *So glad we chose this school. I'm Ed Freedman.*

Julie: *Nice to meet you. I'm Julie Goodwin, principal here at Fitch Senior High. And you behind there? You are?*

Ed: *Oh, right. Sorry. This little chicken pock here is Mike. Say hello, Mike.*

Mike: *Nice to meet you, Julie.*

Julie: *Around here you're going to have to use Ms. Goodwin. (<http://ffilms.org/17-again-2009/>)*

At the beginning the students did not know that they were speaking to their teacher, so the conversation was rather informal.

Small talk conversations are extensively used in phone calls. Here is an example from "Pretty Mouth and Green My Eyes" by Salinger:

*A man's voice - stone dead, yet somehow rudely, almost obscenely quickened for the occasion - came through at the other end: "Lee? I wake you?"*

*The gray-haired man glanced briefly left, at the girl. "Who's that?" he asked. "Arthur?"*

*"Yeah--I wake you?"*

*"No, no. I'm in bed, reading. Anything wrong?"*

*"You sure I didn't wake you? Honest to God?"*

*"No, no--absolutely," the gray-haired man said. "As a matter of fact, I've been averaging about four lousy hours."*

*"The reason I called, Lee, did you happen to notice when Joanie was leaving? Did you happen to notice if she left with the Ellenbogens, by any chance?"*

*The gray-haired man looked left again, but high this time, away from the girl, who was now watching him rather like a young, blue-eyed Irish policeman. "No, I didn't, Arthur," he said, his eyes on the far, dim end of the room, where the wall met the ceiling (Salinger, 1953).*

Here we see that all the rules of phatic communion are kept. For expressing sympathy Arthur asks for several times if he has woken Lee up.

The topics of small talk conversations are generally less important than their social function. The selected topic usually depends on the relationship between the speakers, and the situation in which the conversation takes place. Topics can be summarised as being either direct or indirect. Direct topics include personal observations such as health or looks: e.g.

Mike : *Way you shoot that might be midseason! Everything cool?*

Scarlet: *Oh yeah. Everything's totally copacetic.*

Mike: *Totally?*

Scarlet: *Totally*. (<http://ffilms.org/17-again-2009/>)

Indirect topics refer to a situational context such as the latest news, or the conditions of the communicative situation. They may include such topics as the weather, sports and television. The phatic talk here serves the pragmatic function of maintaining social relations.

Daisy: *What are you looking at?*

Caroline: *The wind, Mother... They say a hurricane is on its way... You've been asleep... I was waiting to see you...*

Daisy: *If it wasn't for hurricanes we wouldn't have a hurricane season.*

Caroline: *I've forgotten what the weather can be like here. I've lived with four seasons so many years now.* (<http://putlocker.tn/the-curious-case-of-benjamin-button/>)

It is of utmost significance to speak about conversational patterns. A study of small talk in situations which involve the chance meeting of strangers has been carried out by Klaus Schneider. He theorises that such a conversation consists of a number of fairly predictable "moves" /Schneider, 1988/. The first move is usually expressed in such a way that it is easy for the other person to agree. For example, the pragmatic function of an opening line such as "Lovely weather, isn't it?" is invitation for agreement. The second move is the other person's response. In functional conversations that address a particular topic, Grice's Maxim of Quantity suggests that the answer should not contain more or less information than is required /Grice, 1975/.

Analyzing the above mentioned examples, we may notice that small talk conversations have some gender, as well as cultural differences. Conversations between females tend to support each other's involvement in the talk. Their conversations are more likely to include compliments about appearance:

Regina: *Where did you get that bracelet? Love it.*

Cady: *Africa.*

Gretchen: *It's so fetch.*

Regina: (disdainfully) *What is "fetch"?*

Gretchen: *It's, like, slang... from England.* (<http://onlinemovies.pro/mean-girls-2004/>)

Phatic conversations between close female friends may contain a high degree of self-disclosure covering more personal aspects of their life, their troubles, and their secrets. By contrast, small talk between males is considered to be more competitive. Signalling that they are comfortable enough with each other's company, their small talk may contain playful insults, and putdowns. These are all signals of solidarity.

A conversation between a man and a woman is quite formal when they meet for the first time: e. g.

*On the sub-main floor of the hotel, which the management directed bathers to use, a woman with zinc salve on her nose got into the elevator with the young man.*

*“I see you're looking at my feet,” he said to her when the car was in motion.  
 “I beg your pardon?” said the woman.  
 “I said I see you're looking at my feet.”  
 “I beg your pardon. I happened to be looking at the floor,” said the woman,  
 and faced the doors of the car (Salinger, 1953).*

Small talk rules and topics can differ widely between cultures. Weather is a common topic in regions where the climate has great variation and can be unpredictable. Questions about the family are usual in some Asian and Arab countries. In cultures that are status-oriented, such as China and Japan, small talk between new acquaintances may highlight questions that enable social categorization of each other. In many European cultures it is common to discuss the weather, politics or the economy, although in some countries personal finance issues such as salary are considered taboo. E. g. the British use small conversations about the weather as a space-filler.

Phatic communication is realized with the help of specialized verbal means – speech stereotypes and non-specialized verbal and non-verbal means. Phatic function ensures effective and continuous exchange of information through the chosen communication channel, regulating the interpersonal and social aspects of communication. The information transmitted during the phatic communication is socio-regulative, its main pragmatic function is to express the addressor’s intention to continue or to finish the contact, but it does not deliver any cognitive information.

As it has been shown, the phatic function is most clearly reflected in a dialogic communication. Dialogue is a special kind of speech, characterized by specific types of lexical, grammatical and intonation patterns. The dialogical speech has a bilateral nature and has its characteristic features, such as: conciseness, ellipticity, reticence, inconsistency, abruptness, sometimes simultaneous exchange of remarks, asyndeton, widespread use of paralinguistic means. There are various dialogical types depending on the degree of participation of interlocutors, their relationship, conditions of communication.

Thus, summing up the pragmatic functions of phatic utterances, we can say that the following sub-paradigms of phatic communication are distinguished:

- Communication starters – greetings.
- Communication supporters – these are phatic units that express apology of gratitude, as well as pause fillers.
- Communication terminators – their main function is to establish a continuing consensus for the future encounters.

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**Ա. ՎԱՆՅԱՆ – խոսքարկային հաղորդակցության գործաբանական գործառույթները.** – խոսքարկային հաղորդակցությունը կախված է հաղորդակցական մտադրության գիտակցումից: Այս դրույթը չի կապում խոսքարկային զրույցը գործաբանական գործառույթներին, բայց արտացոլում է այն փաստը, որ խոսքարկային հաղորդակցությունը պետք է մեկնաբանվի ոչ միայն լեզվաբանական, այլ նաեւ գործաբանական տեսանկյունից: Ելնելով այն ենթադրությունից, որ խոսքարկային հաղորդակցության հիմնական նպատակը խոսողի և խոսակցի միջև սոցիալական հարաբերությունների հաստատումն ու պահպանումն է՝ սույն հոդվածում փորձ է արվում վեր հանել խոսքարկային հաղորդակցության գործաբանական գործառույթները հայտնի ֆիլմերից և գրականությունից ընտրված օրինակների հիման վրա:

**Բանալի բաներ.** խոսքարկային հաղորդակցություն, խոսքարկայնություն, դատարկ խոսակցություն, գործաբանական գործառույթ, միջանձնյա հեռավորություն

**А. ВАНЯН – Фатическая коммуникация и ее прагматические функции.** – Фатическая коммуникация зависит от осознания коммуникативного намерения. Это определение не связывает фатические разговоры с прагматическими функциями, но отражает тот факт, что фатический диалог должен интерпретироваться не только лингвистически, но и прагматически. Исходя из того, что основной целью фатической коммуникации является установление и поддержание социальных отношений между собеседниками, в статье делается попытка выявить прагматические и коммуникативные функции фатического разговора на основе примеров, отобранных из популярных фильмов и литературы.

**Ключевые слова:** фатическая коммуникация, фатичность, светская беседа, прагматическая функция, межличностное расстояние