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PRAGMATICS OF PHATIC TOKENS

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The task of the paper is to study theoretical aspects of the pragmatic use of phatic tokens. To achieve this aim, the authors review and specify the concept of phatic communication; describe the system of phatic tokens and provide a new approach to their structural organization; besides, they consider the usage of phatic tokens in different registers.

Key words: pragmatics, phatic function, speech act, phatic tokens, functional-semantic field, functional register.

Прагматика средств речевого контакта

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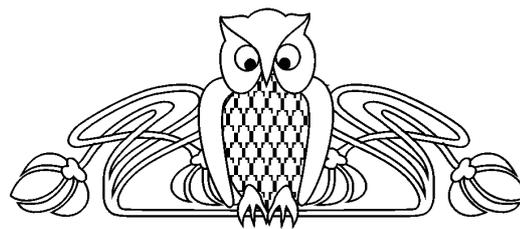
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В статье ставится задача рассмотреть теоретические аспекты прагматического использования средств речевого контакта. С этой целью обобщается и уточняется понятие фатического общения; описывается система средств речевого контакта и предлагается вариант их структурной организации; также исследуется их функционирование в разных функциональных стилях.

Ключевые слова: прагматика, фатическое общение, речевой акт, средства речевого контакта, функционально-семантическое поле, функциональный стиль.

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Communication is the fundamental property of human interaction. Everyone acknowledges its importance. Nonetheless, debate continues about the role of phatic communication. In this paper, we shall attempt to present a well-thought-out summary of phatic communication, to accomplish a systematic presentation of phatic tokens, and to analyze how phatic tokens function in different registers of the language. Hence, the paper is composed of three themed parts.



We will first give a brief overview of phatic communication and its interrelation with a speech act. The broad study of different aspects of phatic communication was performed by many linguists.

In linguistics, there are two interpretations of phatic communication. The first assumption is based on the ideas of B. Malinowski who postulated that the main function of the speech was pragmatic function¹ and who considered phatic communication to be “a type of speech in which ties of union are created by a mere exchange of words”².

This type of speech is centered on managing interaction between people and is aimed to worsen, enhance, or maintain their relationships. However, it does not involve exchange of information.

Phatic communication is opposed to informative communication as “an invariant of speech behavior”³. It often presents a difficulty to distinguish between phatic and informative communication provided that they are closely interrelated: phatic communication is included in informative one, and some information is communicated during phatic speech.

Throughout this paper, the term phatic communication will refer to the speech act and its structure: the beginning, the continuation, and the ending, where interaction is established, maintained and finally finished⁴. This viewpoint correlates with the idea of R. Jakobson who described the phatic function of the language as the function that is concerned mainly with the contact between communicating people: the sender (speaker) and the receiver (hearer) of the message⁵.

For the purpose of the paper, we did not take into account the type of speech act as the focus of the paper is phatic tokens, which are used both in phatic and informative communication thus providing an opportunity to advance our knowledge in their pragmatics.

We shall begin describing phatic tokens by laying out the theoretical dimensions of the research already made, and look at how they are understood in linguistics. There is a large volume of published studies describing phatic tokens performed by many linguists. Drawing on an extensive range of sources, the authors set out the different ways in which they provide us with a number of important features of phatic tokens.

Nevertheless, there are still some aspects to be specified. The first one is what can be attributed to a phatic token. We believe that typical phatic tokens are interjections, relative words, vocalizations, some introductory elements, sentence connectors, terms of address, etiquette formulas, and pre-announcement



sequences; the term was coined by A. K. Terasaki⁶. The following approach was applied while attributing the aforementioned language units to the phatic tokens: the process of communication is organized in different ways and entails different language units, which belong to various parts of speech, to various syntactic patterns, and the range of them is wide – from vocalizations to pre-announcement sequences. But there is a crucial function they all perform, i.e. they all acquire communicative function⁷.

One of the most commonly used phatic token is considered the term of address. Its importance in the process of communication is well established. Etiquette formulas are another phatic token that is significant and together with the term of address facilitate successful verbal *communication*.

Sometimes some language units become devoid of their lexical meaning, e.g. introductory elements “Look”, “Listen”, etc. They are not imperatives. They are not the main clause in a grammatically arranged sentence. They are used to attract the hearer’s attention to the utterance. Cf. “*Something is going on, sir. Look*”⁸ and “*Look, I’m having a busy day here...*”⁹. In the first example, the word “Look” is an imperative sentence used to make the hearer really look in the definite direction, act somehow while in the second example the word “Look” is used with the only purpose to attract the hearer’s attention to the utterance that comes afterwards because it is important to the speaker. Thus, we consider the word “Look” in the second example a phatic token.

Attributing different language units to phatic tokens, we strongly emphasize their communicative function, which prevails over other functions they perform. We do not ponder morphological and syntactic variety of language units that we attribute to phatic tokens. It does not necessarily mean that all these language units are phatic tokens per se. To attribute a language unit to a phatic token a thorough study of the context it is used in, is of crucial importance. As we do not consider neither morphological nor syntactic distinctive features of the language units, we only name them relative words, vocalizations, etc. In our attempt to demonstrate the variety of language units which facilitate the speech act, we treat every of the mentioned language unit as a phatic token. It is our understanding that it is impossible to work out a complete and thorough classification of phatic tokens due to the fact that they belong to different levels of language and they vary and diversify a great deal.

We bear in mind that language units perform different functions, and, consequently, we consider language units to be phatic tokens in case they perform communicative function under certain conditions. The speaker is interested in using phatic tokens because first they are addressed to the hearer as they provide him/her with a possibility to attract the hearer’s attention, and secondly, they are addressed to the speaker him/herself as they give an opportunity to gain some time to think over what to say or how to

say the utterance. The hearer also uses phatic tokens but in this case, they are used mostly to address the speaker. In general, every time there is a speech act, there are phatic tokens.

In view of this, all language units that we presume phatic tokens perform phatic function as well as other functions.

We present phatic tokens as specific microsystem with associated attributes. That said we assume they have definite attributes common to almost all of them. Primarily almost no phatic token conveys the information pertaining to the utterance. However, they demonstrate different levels of information load, cf.: *I can’t wait to tell you – Margie read me in cards today*¹⁰ and ... *Eh, Jack, I can look after myself*¹¹. In the first example the whole phrase serves the purpose of attracting the hearer’s attention. It is a pre-announcement sequence. In the second example, the interjection is used alongside the term of address for the same purpose.

No phatic tokens are necessary in any utterance structure, being additions to it. At the same time, most of them are highly predictable as in the case with etiquette formulas.

Phatic tokens possess other associated attributes. They are redundant, interchangeable, and synonymic.

Having defined what phatic tokens are and what attributes they possess, we will now move on to discussing the possible arrangement of phatic tokens. With regard to the phatic function all phatic tokens perform, we believe there is a possibility to arrange them in a functional-semantic field. This assumption is based on the theory of functional-semantic field developed by A. V. Bondarko¹², who postulated that any functional-semantic field is comprised of language units pertaining to different language levels, which perform similar functions. This assumption provided us with an opportunity to arrange phatic tokens in this kind of field as terms of address, interjections, vocalizations, etiquette formulas, relative words, introductory sentences, sentence connectors, and pre-announcement sequences belong to different language levels and have different semantics but at the same time perform the common function – phatic function.

Moreover, this functional-semantic field can be made up of several interacting and interrelated micro-fields¹³: micro-field of the speaker and micro-field of the hearer. These micro-fields define the structure of the field itself. Each of them has its own structure: the core and the periphery. Thus, every micro-field has specific phatic tokens attributed to the core and to the periphery. Phatic tokens included in the core of the micro-field of the speaker differ from those in the core of the micro-field of the hearer, and phatic tokens included in the periphery of the micro-field of the speaker differ from those in the periphery of the micro-field of the hearer.

In each of these micro-fields, phatic tokens, which are most frequently used, constitute the core while phatic tokens, which are seldom used, constitute the periphery.



For better understanding the structure of this functional-semantic field, each micro-field is to be discussed. Micro-field of the speaker is made up of phatic tokens that are used to establish, to maintain, and to finish the speech act in accordance with its structure. The term of address: *Jack, it's Van. I heard the news...*¹⁴; introductory elements: *Look, I didn't bring you in here so you could preach to me*¹⁵; relative words: *Well, your turn next*¹⁶; etiquette formulas: *Hi, there...*¹⁷; sentence connectors: *Now, think about the repercussions to your ego of learning a second language*¹⁸ are attributed to the core of this micro-field. Introductory elements, sentence connectors, relative words, and terms of address are used to establish and to maintain speech act while etiquette formulas can be also used to finish the speech act. These phatic tokens are attributed to the core of this micro-field because they perform only phatic function, i.e. they are monofunctional phatic tokens. Interjections and pre-announcement sequences make up the periphery of this micro-field as they perform other functions alongside phatic function, i.e. they are polyfunctional phatic tokens.

Micro-field of the hearer is made up of the same phatic tokens. However, their distribution is different. Only relative words: – *We'll try to plan it, if I can pin Ellie down. – OK, you do that, Maggie*¹⁹, and vocalizations: *I nodded hesitantly. "Uh, thanks,"* ...²⁰ are attributed to the core of this micro-field as they are monofunctional phatic tokens in this micro-field. Introductory elements, sentence connectors, terms of address, etiquette formulas, interjections and pre-announcement sequences constitute periphery.

Overall, it seems reasonable to assume that the phatic tokens are also referred to the core or the periphery in accordance with the functions they perform, or whether they are mono- or polyfunctional.

This discrepancy in the number of phatic tokens constituting these micro-fields can be explained by different roles that the speaker and the hearer play in the speech act. The speaker intends to attract the hearer's attention to the utterance so as many phatic tokens with the prevailing phatic function as possible are used to meet this goal. To maintain the speech act

the speaker also uses a variety of phatic tokens. The fact that the micro-field of the hearer does not have many phatic tokens can be also attributed to the role the hearer performs in the speech act whose primarily objective is to show and to prove the involvement in the speech act. The hearer just do not need many different phatic tokens for this. Vocalizations and relative words are often enough to be used.

Another key thing to mention is the interactional roles the participants of the speech act play. The character of this interaction constantly changes and the listener and the hearer change their roles many times during a spoken encounter. Phatic tokens are used both by the speaker and by the hearer. With this in mind, we shall admit that they can either cause the change of roles or not. To determine it, the context should be thoroughly examined. In any case, the function of a particular phatic token depends on the intention of the participants of the spoken encounter. Figure 1 shows phatic tokens used by the speaker and the hearer as well as how they influence the change of the interactional role.

The third part of the paper is concerned with the function of phatic tokens in different functional registers of the language. In general, there is much terminological debate whether to name language varieties genre, domain, functional style or register. In this paper, registers are functional varieties of language as we consider different areas where language function. In Russian school of linguistics, there are traditionally five registers: the register of official documents, the scientific register that is further subdivided into educational and popular scientific, publicist register, register of fiction, register of colloquial speech. Accordingly, appropriate register requires specific language units, phatic tokens including as they facilitate interaction.

Qualitative and quantitative research designs were adopted to provide data on the phatic tokens in different registers. We studied phatic tokens in both written and oral discourses of registers.

First, phatic tokens in the written discourse were scrutinized. Generally, the speaker and the hearer, or the writer and the reader in this instance, do not employ many phatic tokens, e.g. vocalizations, as

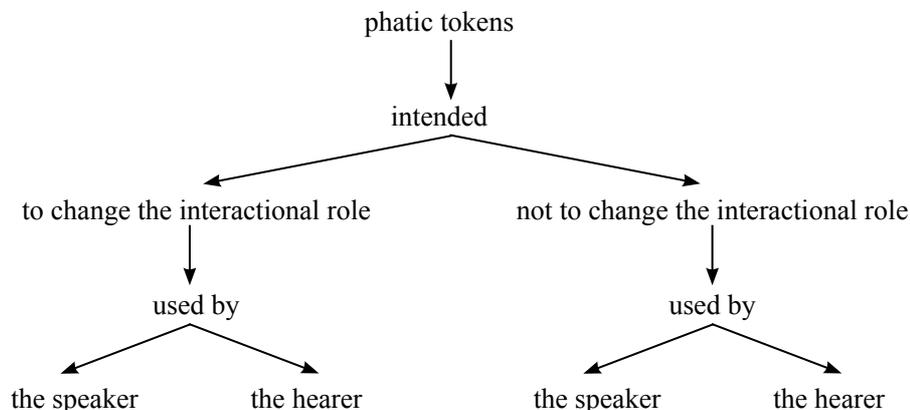


Fig. 1. Phatic tokens and the change of interactional roles in the spoken encounter



they make it difficult to comprehend the text. This mostly concerns the reader as there is no direct spoken encounter and hence, it is not necessary to maintain speech act and to show the involvement. Thus, only terms of address and relative words were found. However, dialogue in fiction is completely different. Almost all phatic tokens characteristic to the core and to the periphery of the two micro-fields, i.e. of the speaker and of the hearer, were found in fiction. It can be explained by saying that dialogue is distinct from conversation. While *people* have conversations, *characters* have dialogues²¹. Every writer tries to create authentic dialogues so that their works could be real page-turners. No phatic tokens were found in the register of official documents. The written discourse implies no reaction from the reader as there is no phatic interaction. Phatic tokens are commonly used in the scientific register both in educational and popular scientific registers. These texts are aimed to educate, to involve, and to engage people in taking interest in the subject of these text and phatic tokens maintain the reader's interest thus making it easier to meet the objective. Interestingly, publicist register does not employ many phatic tokens. We assume it is characteristic to the texts we studied, or to the individual style of writing. In any case, this is an area for further research. When we say register of colloquial speech in the written discourse, we mean personal letters because this register always refers to unofficial, personal and informal issues. Surprisingly, there are not so many phatic tokens here and among them are terms of address, etiquette formulas, introductory elements and sentence connectors.

The remaining part of the paper proceeds as follows: phatic tokens in the oral discourse of the registers were studied. A limitation in this paper is that the oral discourse of the official document register was not studied. The transcripts of official talks were nowhere to obtain. Comparing phatic tokens

in educational and popular scientific registers, we observed that all kinds of phatic tokens, including vocalizations, relative words, introductory elements, sentence connectors and pre-announcement sequences. We attribute this fact to the main aim of the scientific register, which is to educate, to give facts, and to entertain in case popular scientific register. It is a well-known fact that publicist register has two forms, i.e. of monologue and dialogue. Contrary to expectations, we encountered only monologue. Therefore, phatic tokens were seldom used. Probably it was because we studied transcripts of TV political programs. People who watch them are interested in politics and there is no need to attract their attention. It is more necessary to maintain their interest. For this purpose introductory elements, sentence connectors, and pre-announcement sequences were used. We did not consider phatic tokens in the register of fiction, as there is none in the oral discourse. The register of colloquial speech employs all phatic tokens characteristic to both formal and informal types of spoken encounters. The observed increase in phatic tokens could be attributed to the main function of the register itself as colloquial speech is aimed at facilitating interaction between people primarily in informal situations. Most of phatic tokens were noted except for pre-announcement sequences. We believe it was due to their complexity. The speaker understands that it requires time and effort to use this phatic token while in informal spoken encounters people tend just to interact smoothly and effortlessly whether it is informative or phatic communication.

To obtain quantitative results text samples, which were one thousand words each, were arrayed. The results obtained are shown in Fig. 2 and Fig. 3.

A comparison of the results of quantitative research reveals that the usage of phatic tokens and their number correlate with the main function of every register as well as the type of discourse, written or oral.

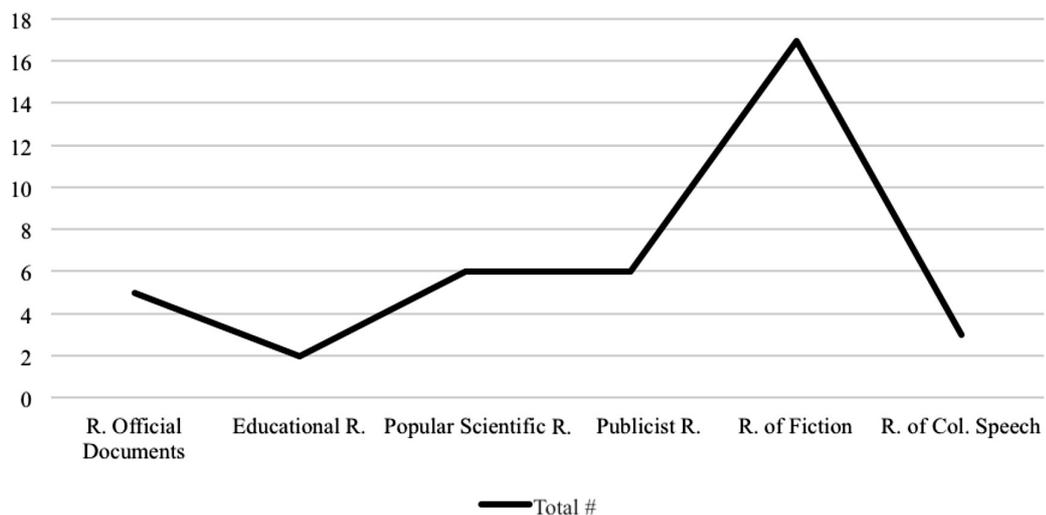


Fig. 2. Total number of phatic tokens in the written discourse in all the registers

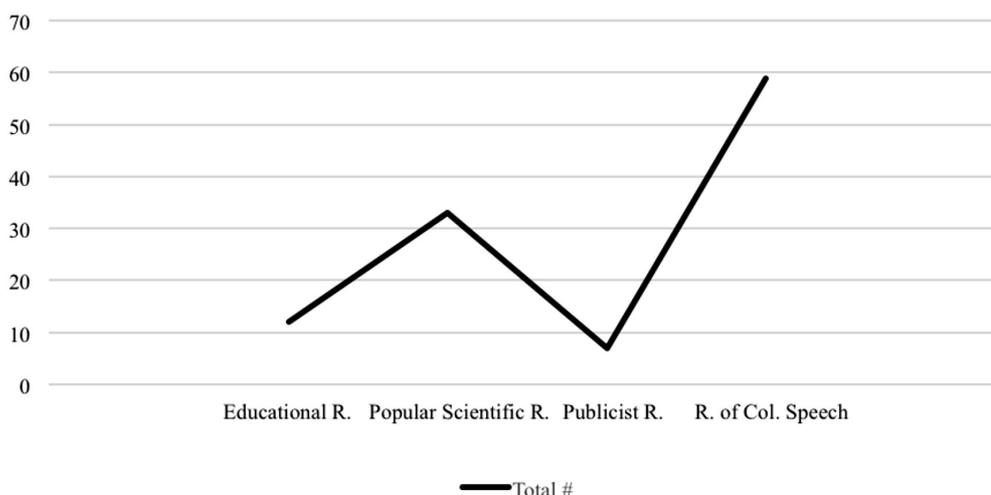


Fig. 3. Total number of phatic tokens in the oral discourse in all the registers

These findings further support the idea that phatic tokens facilitate speech acts and manage interaction between people as ultimately they are aimed to worsen, enhance, or maintain their relationships

The study suggests that phatic tokens are used in other languages as well because their function is not related to the structure of the language.

Notes

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- ⁹ Connelly M. *The Scarecrow*. Orion, UK, 2010. P. 259.
- ¹⁰ Steinbeck J. *The Winter of Our Discontent*. Penguin, NY, 2008. P. 17.
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- ¹³ See: Щур Г. *Теория поля в лингвистике*. М., 1974.
- ¹⁴ Connelly M. *Op. cit.* P. 80.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.* P. 502.
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- ¹⁷ Connelly M. *Op. cit.* P. 452.
- ¹⁸ Brown H. D. *Breaking the Language Barrier*. Yarmouth, 1991. P. 77.
- ¹⁹ Steinbeck J. *Op. cit.* P. 97.
- ²⁰ Connelly M. *Op. cit.* P. 124.
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