Talking Big About Small Talk: A Contemporary Theoretical Model for Phatic

Communication

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Abstract

This thesis views phatic communication as a discursive mechanism relevant to the establishment and maintenance of social bonds, even in contemporary times. The theoretical framework that guides this research is Thomas Scheff's sociological Bond Theory. Through it, the functional significance of phatic communication in interpersonal relationships and society at large is characterized. Further attention is given to phaticity in social media, where online social platforms are used to establish and maintain bonds through different mechanisms. The framework for this purpose comes from the work of sociologist Vincent Miller and his concept of phatic culture. A theoretical model for phatic communication is elaborated through a classificatory scheme that identifies the formal and structural characteristics of phatic communication and phatic gestures. In consort with this process, representative illustrations of phatic communication are presented and explained from fabricated and secondary data. Sources for analysis include social occasions, such as greetings and spontaneous conversation in transient space, dialogues in work places, and exchanges in private contexts.

Keywords: phatic communication, phatic, phaticity, antiphatic, antiphaticity, non-phatic, phatic culture, politeness, small talk, weather talk, chit chat, casual conversation, social bond, bond theory, social media, social network, phatic community, communication online, communication 2.0, Twitter, hashtags, connectedness, presence, linguistic tokens, phatic tokens, phatic gestures, Thomas Scheff, Vincent Miller

Dedication

To my grandparents: María Teresa Aguerrevere Orsini and Antonio Julio Manzo

Henríquez. Words are not even necessary when we share such a strong bond.

Acknowledgments

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Chapter 1: Introduction

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Communication is one of those research fields where some things are in constant change, and yet others seem to forever remain the same. Our need to communicate to others, the core and heart of the field of communication, is always worthy of study. Many look into it with a micro lens that allows for the most detailed observations in communicational dynamics, while others take a macro perspective and analyze such dynamics looking at the bigger societal picture; and somewhere in between, I find myself wondering how, after so many years of evolution in language and society, is the average user able to grasp, in a seemingly intuitive way, the meaning and applicability of decades of scientific research. We study ourselves by studying others, which means we are typically subjects before researchers.

Certainly through our socialization process we start by learning a few words, like "mom" and "water", the vital ones first. And then as our language and cognition grows, we are soon proficient in something as elemental as communication. And so at a young age we know communication helps us to ask for things, express our needs and desires, aspirations and dreams, and it also is an important tool we constantly use in order to relate to others. Sociability — which is largely about when to say what and how — is a skill harder to master, however. Of course, different learning theories offer different answers, but in any case, we do; we learn how to socialize and how to manage our socialization tools to make the most out of it.

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Phatic communication comes in this picture as a discourse mechanism that aids in social interactions in order to perform according to a cultural framework and obtain the expected outcome. Phatic communication is in our everyday life, and so interwoven in the fabric of social protocols that it is often overlooked. In fact, it is frequently referred to as *small talk,* implying it is of *little* importance, superficial, trivial, and sometimes even useless. Yet, the main function of phatic communication is the establishment and maintenance of social bonds, something definitely of *big* importance.

In order to bring justice to this discourse mechanism, here I explore the origins, nature, scope, functions, and types of phatic communication while developing an organizational scheme with special focus in the scenarios where it takes action, with a final focus on social media as a contemporary environment for social interaction. In an attempt to find out if phatic communication is still a relevant discourse mechanism today, I take it to online spheres of interaction to look for evidence of conversational and interactional dynamics that could denote the validity and use of phatic communication in a contemporary manner.

The present work accomplishes two innovative goals: it frames and organizes an extensive corpus of information on the phenomenon of phatic communication in order to offer a much needed theoretical model; and then it uses that theoretical model to look into the new ways in which phatic communication is still a relevant discourse mechanism today. These goals are part of the paradigm shift required to rethink phatic communication, a process that this thesis embraces.

This thesis is designed to fill epistemic lacunae in phatic communication, which mainly lacked the organization, typification, and specification needed to formulate a comprehensive theory of the phenomenon. By accomplishing this, I hope the reader finds it easier to understand the different features of phatic communication and becomes aware of the various manifestations and purposes it serves our society, as well as in specific communities, including those online.

Even though this is a phenomenon that has been studied in academic research, phatic communication online remains to be mostly uncovered, except for Vincent Miller's (2008) concept of *phatic culture,* which came 85 years after Bronislaw Malinowski coined the term "phatic communion" in 1923. Thus, in a way, this work bridges members of primitive tribes, who Malinowski studied, with contemporary technology users, whose online dynamics Miller observed, by addressing their common desire to establish and maintain social bonds.

Considering that even though there is an omnipresence of phatic communication in our *offline* world, where face-to-face interactions are paramount, when we switch our attention to the online world, we can expect similar levels of *phaticity* to be found, given that the way in which we interact online is meant to be, in many ways, an extension of our offline interactions. And such is the case indeed when we look at written communication online: a lot of the phatic tokens continue to be used, like greetings, contact phrases, and other markers of deference, and an interesting blooming of phatic gestures is found.

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In the online world, we find that social media is composed of different socialization platforms with various purposes, functions, and uses. Social media will receive in the present work special attention in order to illustrate the relevance phatic communication still holds in today's social interactional dynamics. In doing so, not only will I explore the nature of social media in and of itself, but also I will offer a brief analysis of a specific phatic token found in these platforms, which is the symbol of the "hashtag". Hashtags are a tagging protocol in social media with very high visibility, which make them a very accessible unit of study. This allows for rich insights about the way in which users interact through the use of hastags on social media. Hashtags are considered here as phatic markers or tokens that take place in online communication with the intention of connecting with other people with similar interests, needs, or feelings.

Feelings and emotions are both considered in Thomas Scheff's (1990) Deference-Emotion system, part of his sociological Bond Theory, which leads the theoretical frame of this work. Scheff's main argument is that social bonds are the foundation of society, the reason why it stays together. Conversely, if we look at the dynamics that rule social interaction, which is needed to establish and maintain these social bonds, we find that there is a normative structure that encompasses our different behaviours within a social system.

Knowledge of these structures and processes enable individual management of the expected outcomes of every action we perform in the various social spheres where we interact. Hence, understanding the features of phatic communication increases our social

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capital and aids in impression management and relationship management, all while

working as a socialization device that both speaks to one's own successful socialization,

as well as to one's ability to socialize in a variety of social scenarios.

In a situation where awkward silence would prevent us from engaging in

conversation, phatic communication can open the way for an amicus exchange,

introducing new relationships or maintaining existing ones; and in a setting where a user

faces a screen with endless possibilities, connecting with others through a topic, or an

idea of common interest seems like a great way to break the ice.

Chapter 2: Definitions

What is Phatic Communication?

Introductory Concepts

Phatic communion.

Malinowski first coined the term "phatic communion" while studying primitive African tribes as part of his ethnographic research in the early 1900s. His original essay *The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Language* was first published in 1923, as a supplementary essay in the first edition of C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards' book *The Meaning of Meaning: A Study of the Influence of Language upon Thought and of the Science of Symbolism*. Malinowski (1946) defined phatic communion as "a type of speech in which ties of union are created by mere exchanges of words" (p. 315). Malinowski here was hinting at a type of speech different from all other conceived types, like, for example, informative speech. According to this statement, we can conclude that in phatic communion what matters is not the content exchanged when interacting, but the act itself, which serves the social function of establishing and maintaining social bonds, which he called "ties of union". The symbolic meaning of language as a system, in this case, is triumphed by the symbolic meaning that the act alone has as a social function.

According to Vigara (1990), we have been trained to pay attention to meaning, rather than form. For this reason, most *phatic expressions*, and how they are used, are understood within a cultural paradigm that gives them meaning. Padilla (2001) notes that "the pragmatics of phatic communion varies across cultures and communities of practice,

unveiling differing underlying value systems" (p. 132). Thus, even though phatic

expressions are *normalized* in language, for a foreigner to learn them it would require

high communicative competency, and are therefore quite hard to master (Viagra, 1990).

In John Laver's chapter Communicative Functions of Phatic Communion from his

1974 publication *Semiotic Aspects of Spoken Discourse* (accessed here through Kendon,

Harries and Ritchie's compilation *Organization of Behaviour in Face to Face Interaction*,

published in 1975), he offers an explanation for the literal meaning of phatic communion,

which is "communion achieved through speech" (p. 216), as indeed Malinowski framed

it. Etymologically, this comes from two words in Greek: "phatos", which means "spoken"

(Laver, 1974/1975, p. 216), and "phanai", which means "to speak" (Wang, Tucker &

Rihll, 2011, p. 47).

Laver (1974/1975) states language alone doesn't convey meaning when

communicating; particularly, he argues "gesture, posture, body movements, orientation,

proximity, eye contact and facial expressions" contribute greatly to determine the

meaning of a communicational exchange. He also argues that the study of phatic

communion can be performed under different disciplines (e.g. linguistics, phonetics,

psychology, anthropology, sociology), but they all "fall under aegis of a superordinate

discipline, that of semiotics, the general theory of communicative signs" (p. 217), or, as I

would call it, the study of meaning-making through signs. However, Laver leaves behind

other aspects like context, relationship, background or circumstantial particularities

pertinent, for example, to the scenario, that one specific act can have. This I will address later on.

Phatic communication.

Preference for the term "phatic communion" rather than "phatic communication" is generally not attended to often in the literature, and both terms are used almost interchangeably. Malinowski (1946) himself, when talking exclusively about communion, called it a *type of speech*, which is a definition clearly more in the realm of communication. However, Laver (1974/1975) states that with the development of linguistics as a subject, professionals in various communication-related fields were able to focus on functions of language, rather than on forms. According to him, the valuable purpose of phatic communion in the English language cannot be reduced to "a mere exchange of words" as Malinowski originally worded it (Malinowski, 1946, p. 315); it is achieved instead by "subtle and intricate means" (Laver, 1974/1975, p. 216).

Klaus Schneider's (1988) very detailed work *Small Talk: Analysing Phatic Discourse,* on the other hand, despite using the terms consistently in an interchangeable manner, explains that phatic communication can be seen as the means for phatic communion (p. 29), or, in his words, *small talk* as a means for bonding. Similarly, Senft (2005) ascribes small talk to a strategy for achieving phatic communion, and Laver (1974/1975) also notes that engaging in phatic communication is not the same as achieving phatic communion.

Senft (2005) also addresses this differentiation between communion and communication in order to offer an explanation for the *evolution* of the term. He says "communication" could be more frequently used precisely because people forget the meaning of "communion", which indeed is different from communication and was clearly intentionally phrased that way by Malinowski. For Graham (2013) the evolution of the term has to do with professionals using it through time. However, he also agrees the initial connotation of communion denotes a relational aspect, which is precisely what is outstanding in this form of interaction. By *coming together* as a way of communion, we see bonding in action, we engage in communion.

Small talk.

"Small talk" is a more colloquial way of referring to phatic communication. Graham (2013) considers phatic communication and small talk as synonyms, as do other authors (e.g: Burnard, 2003; Coupland, Coupland & Robinson, 1992; Laver, 1974/1975; Mullany; 2006; Padilla, 2005; Pullin, 2010; Schneider, 1988), including myself; and further identifies small talk with Malinowski's observation of a primitive function of language that is present in both savage and advanced societies (p. 1).

Schneider's (1988) work starts by addressing definitions of small talk, which accounts for the irrelevant nature attributed to this phenomenon precisely because it is categorized as "of little or minor consequence, interest or importance, trifling, trivial, unimportant" as the word "small" indicates (p. 4). He nevertheless initially defines small talk as "a form of interaction without real communication" (p. 13) governed by social

maxims, in particular politeness. Malinowski (1946) himself, by calling it a "*mere exchange of words*" (p. 315, my emphasis) set the tone for phatic communication to be considered in this way, and here is where controversy eventually arose. Laver (1974/1975) in fact states that by deeming phatic communication as the "triviality dismissively referred to as small talk" we do not contemplate that it is in fact a "very basic skill essential to a major part of the psychosocial transactions that make up daily life" (p. 233).

Justine Coupland's (2003) point of view is consistent with Schneider's statement, and she further claims, "sociality is marginalized as a 'small' concern" (p.2). She argues the reason for small talk to be deemed as an unimportant term is because it is the antithesis of "real talk", as she calls it, which is "talk that 'gets stuff done' where 'stuff' does not include 'relational stuff'" (Coupland, 2003, p.2), but rather more practical *stuff* that needs to get done. Taking a feminist perspective, in an earlier work Coupland (2000/2014) says, "the world of 'big talk' is a self-created man's world, and the 'big talk'/'small talk' distinction is either mythological or more evidence of men's obsession with size (or both)" (p. 48).

Nevertheless, Coupland (2003) believes, using the work of Goffman (1972) that we have "significant emotional investment in what others think of us, through the impressions others gain of us in our contacts with them"(p.2), so why should small talk be considered irrelevant, I wonder? Furthermore, she points out the capacity to engage in small talk is not considered an accomplishment or a skill; however, she later suggests it is

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an element for social success since "some conversations are perceptively better, whether because they are more practiced or more socially motivated at putting others at their ease or at filling potentially embarrassing conversational lacunae with enabling questions or interesting comment about 'safe' topics, for example" (p. 3-4). This notion lies at the very foundation of my argument here: small talk brings us closer together; it creates and maintains valuable social bonds.

Other terms.

Schneider (1988) also calls phatic communication "sociable talk" (p. 1), a term perhaps related to his assumption of predictability of linguistic behaviour in certain situations. He also uses the term "weather talk" since he found in his survey the weather was "the small talk topic par excellence" (p. 15). He also describes in great detail the topics people engage in when small-talking during travels and travel-related situations; this I have called "journey talk", and as specific as this one, one could also her the terms "elevator talk" or "water cooler talk". Another term is "casual conversation", but it is used in different ways. Some authors (Firth, 1972; Ritchie, 2011; Ventola, 1979) use it as a synonym for phatic communication, maintaining the main function of bonding as a key role of the interaction; and others (Maschler & Estlein, 2008; SturtzSreetharan, 2006) use it simply when referring to the circumstances of the interaction, even calling it "informal talk" and focusing instead, for example, on the meaning of the words exchanged (Cook, 2012). The term "chit chat" can also be found in the literature (Beck, 2010; Jones, 2011) with a demeaning treatment. In Spanish the term "contact conversation" [conversaión de

contacto] is also used (e.g.: Placencia, 2005, 2007; Sternström & Jögensen, 2008),

although it does not seem to be present in English literature.

Phaticity.

On a related note, in Spanish there seems to be a more versatile use of the word

"phatic", since it is seamlessly used to denote different aspects of social interaction like

"phatic elements" [elementos fáticos], "phatic purpose" [propósito fático], "phatic

function" [función fática], and all that which is phatic as "the phatic" [lo fático] (Padilla,

2005; Rodríguez Ponce, 2011, Vigara, 1990). Nonetheless, some authors in English do

find creative ways to use the word. Particularly relevant is Coupland et al.'s (1992) use of

the term "phaticity" to describe what they called "degrees of phaticity" as part of a

negotiation of engagement in the communicative act. *Phaticity* will be used herein to

denote the quality of phatic.

Phatic culture.

The superficial nature that was previously addressed as part of the dualistic

perception of the nature of phatic communication is perhaps what drove Miller to coin the

term "phatic culture" in his 2008 article *New Media, Networking and Phatic Culture*. He

referred to the "flattening of social bonds as we move into 'networked sociality'" in the

online world, where "communications which have purely social networking and not

informational or dialogic intents" are the characteristic relational paradigm (p. 387-388).

In Miller's work, what can be conceived as bonding in the *offline world* when interacting

phatically, is best described in the online world as " networking". In the present work "offline" is conceived as all that happens without the intervention of technology. If we think about a pre-technological era, every interaction that could have happened then, and that as part of human behaviour still happens today, is considered here as offline. By conceiving both of these spheres of social action, Miller widened the scope of phatic communication into any means of communication in general, rather than only speech.

Graham (2013) takes on the work of Miller and implies our society today is not really engaged through this kind of communication, letting go of what we could describe as *genuine* bonding. To him, this also speaks for corporate communication and how companies resort to social media in a desperate attempt to *stay connected* with their audiences, even though the actual content of the interactions is generally quite meaningless. In fact, in a non-academic context, the most preeminent word in social media management from a corporative point of view is engagement; every blog and article about community management in the different social media platforms is all about how to keep your audience engaged and connecting with them. Companies today have direct access to their audiences and the possibility of connecting with them through the same channels they use to connect with their friends and family, and they are taking that opportunity to start a conversation and try to get their attention.

Another term Miller (2008) uses is "phatic media", to refer to those channels or products of communication that promote phatic interactions. Similarly, Wang et al. (2011) write about "phatic technology" as that which enables connectedness by

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"establishing and maintaining human relationships" (p. 46). Although their focus is in

social media, these authors recognize other technologies also serve phatic purposes, like

texting via cell phones.

Non-phatic.

Given that what is phatic has been defined, it can be established that everything

else is what will be considered here as "non-phatic". This includes, then, other kinds of

discourse, like informative, argumentative or even persuasive, but it is simply mostly

referred to any kind of *transactional talk* – the kind that *gets stuff done*, as Coupland

(2003) put it. It can also be defined as "big talk", being that it would be the *opposite* of

small talk. In Coupland's terms, discussed above, "real talk", "full talk" or "big talk" is

that which carries interpersonal messages, as opposed to the irrelevant meaning of phatic

utterances' content (p. 2). She will later say it is "talk of a more obviously 'full' or

newsworthy nature, or talk which carries forward business transactions" (p. 268).

Delimiting these concepts is important from a theoretical and organizational

perspective, but in practice the theoretical boundaries often overlap and one type of talk

can include elements of another, or the different types can be used indistinctively in a

larger conversational frame. Throughout the present work there will be other concepts

that will imply the idea of *other kind of talk*, different from small talk, in which

participants can engage in, and this is what I will be referring to.

Allow me to offer another illustration of this polarity between what is phatic and what is not, the non-phatic. In this flow chart of phatic communication we see what can be considered phatic and what cannot, relying on the most relevant aspects of it. We start at the first word of an interaction, here transcribed as "blah":
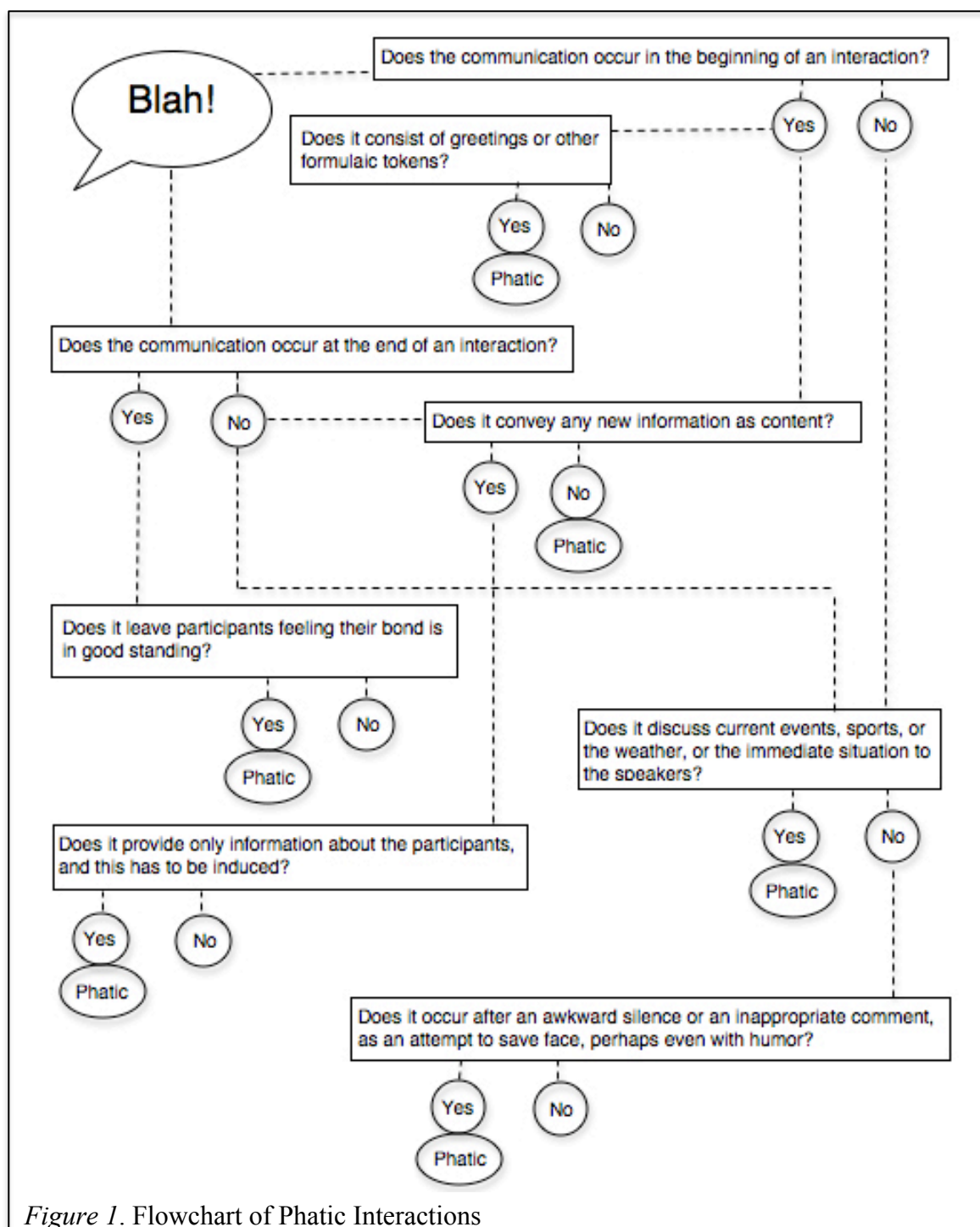
Figure 1. Flowchart of Phatic Interactions

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Defining Phatic Communication Today

Taking into account all the ways in which the terms mentioned above are defined and framed, we can identify five main characteristics that arise when defining phatic communication. The following are not comprehensive features of phatic communication, but pertain only to its definition:

I- Social bonds

The principal function of phatic communication is in establishing and maintaining social bonds; this is agreeably the most recurrent notion most authors refer to (e.g.: Berendt, 1997; Boyle, 2000; Burnard, 2003; Coupland et al., 1992; Coupland, 2013; Desalles, 2007; Endrass et al., 2010; Felice, 2013; Graham, 2013; Holba, 2008; Holmes & Fillary, 2000; Jakobson, 1960; Jensen & Scott, 2013; Laver, 1974/1975; McCarthy, 2003; Malinowski, 1946; Miller, 2008, 2011; Padilla, 2001, 2005, 2013; Penn & Watermeyer, 2009; Posmer & Hamstra, 2013; Pullin, 2010; Ritchie, 2011; Schneider, 1988; Senft, 2005; Ventola, 1979; Wang et. al, 2011). This category includes conceptualizations of phatic communication as building and maintaining human relationships, establishing deep connections, accomplishing a pro-social function, having a relational nature, working towards fellowship, and even its online equivalent: networking.

II- Superfluous

Some authors see phatic communication as trivial, non-reflective, simple, meaningless, unimportant, consisting of empty words and fill-in phrases, disengaged, informal, aimless social intercourse, or mundane (e.g.: Beck, 2010; Cook, 2012; Holba,

2008; Jensen & Scott, 2013; Jones, 2011; Malinowski, 1946; Maschler & Estlein, 2009; McCarthy, 2003; Mehl, Vazire, Holleran & Clark, 2009; Miller, 2008; Stenström & Jörgensen, 2008; SturtzSreetharan, 2006).

III- Culturally determined

As with any type of communicative interaction, phatic communication is framed within a normative system, according to the social structure in which it takes part in; this includes the notion of politeness, which is also part of the relevant social norms within a culture (e.g.: Aijmer & Simon-Vandenbergen, 2004; Alquinai, 2010; Banda, 2005; Berendt, 1997; Boyle, 2000; Cook, 2012; Coupland, 2000/2014; Desalles, 2007; Drazdauskiene, 2010; Endrass et al., 2010; Firth, 1972; Haugh & Schneider,2012; Holmes & Fillary, 2000; Laver, 1974/1975, 1981; Mak & Chui, 2013; Malinowski, 1946; Maschler & Estlein, 2008; Mullany, 2006; Padilla, 2001, 2005, 2013; Placencia, 2005, 2007; Placencia & Lower, 2013; Rodríguez Ponce, 2012; Senft, 2005; Schneider, 1988, 2011; Stenström & Jögensen, 2008; StrutzSreetharan, 2006; Ventola, 1979; Vigara,1990; Wang et al., 2011). However, further distinctions will be made later on between culture, context, and normative structure.

IV- Complex

Different sets of skills are required to understand, and thus be able to engage, in phatic communication; they can be social skills or cognitive skills. Some authors (e.g. Coupland, 2000/2014, 2003; Coupland et al., 1992; Drazdauskiene, 2010; Holmes & Fillary, 2000; Hunter, 2011; Laver, 1974/1975, 1981; Mak & Chui, 2013; Padilla, 2001,

2005, 2013; Ritchie, 2011; Schneider, 1988; Senft. 2005; Ventola, 1979; Vigara, 1990;

Wang et al., 2011; Žegarac & Clark, 1999) acknowledge the complexity that underlies

this type of communication, given that it requires pragmatic competence, especially when

learning a second language. It is cognitively engaging, and conveys information that can

only be deducted by considering many different variables that take place in each

interaction.

V- Social lubricant

Phatic communication can be often seen as a tool to ease awkwardness, avoid

silence, and aid in the introduction, transition and culmination of conversations (Coupland

et al., 1992; Laver, 1974/1975; Padilla, 2013; Penn & Watermeyer, 2009; Posner &

Hamstra, 2013; Schneider, 1988).

Proposed working definition.

These five characteristics fall into three of the classificatory features of phatic

communication this thesis conceives: nature ("superfluous" and "complex"

characteristic), function ("social bonds" and "social lubricant" characteristics), and

scenario ("culturally determined" characteristic). In addition to these three features, I will

offer in the forthcoming model two other: scope and typology.

Considering this, and the shortcomings of the available definitions, due to being

dated or having a specific practical frame, I suggest here a more comprehensive definition

of phatic communication:

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Phatic communication is a discourse mechanism with a primarily relational function, aiming at establishing and maintaining social bonds. It can take place both in offline and online settings, and amongst a variety of participants, including individuals and brands or corporations. There is a degree of phaticity that can be encountered, which stands for how phatic an interaction can be. The nature of phatic communication is sometimes seen as superfluous or irrelevant, but its functionality reveals a complex cultural, normative, cognitive and linguistic structure behind it, which speaks to its importance from communicational and sociological perspectives.

This new definition can be further broken down as follows to showcase the features of the proposed theoretical model of the present work:

1. Nature: there is a contrast in the literature between authors that find phatic communication to be superficial, and those who find it to be complex, as well as some who recognize there is a duality in the nature of phatic communication. Siding with complexity, it is explained here how phatic communication follows an intricate social organization that includes a normative system and the maxim of politeness. Considering it is framed socially, this means it is culturally determined, since social structures and norms change across cultures. In fact, in some cultures, the main relational purpose of phatic communication described here is not seen under the same light, but rather as annoyance or disrespect. Complex nature is also evident in pragmatic research, such as second language acquisition studies, which led authors to conclude that mastering phatic communication requires cognitive and linguistic skills.

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2. Scope: with the exception of those authors that deal directly with social media, phatic communication is generally conceived within the realm of verbal exchanges. By introducing the notion of offline and online, I establish that phatic communication can take place in both spheres of social action and, thusly, it can take on oral and written forms of communication. The other two forms of communication, non-verbal and visual, are covered in the present work under "gestures"; non-verbal applies for offline, and visual for online. Conceiving this in this way has triggered an undeniable need to contemplate that participants can be both natural persons, or one of them can be a brand or a corporation that behaves like a natural person online with the intention of connecting with its audience. This notion is absent from the literature.

3. Function: there is a primarily relational function of phatic communication, which can be identified within the theoretical framework chosen here as establishing or maintaining social bonds.

4. Typology: from the function above, it is worth clarifying that the establishment of social bonds implies there is not an existing bond between the interactants; and in the case of the maintenance of bonds, engaging in phatic communication preserves an existing bond, which lets interactants know their relationship is still standing.

5. Scenarios: although explicitly only the cross-cultural scenario is specified in the definition of phatic communication, social media and everyday life scenarios can be inferred as well, and also others will be further included in the model.

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      All of these five features of the theoretical model of phatic communication will be analyzed and explained in depth in the fourth chapter, after the following theoretical framework.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

Between Bonds and Connections

Given that the present study brings together two different concepts, the theoretical

frame is twofold as well. First, I will look at phatic communication through the lens of

Scheff's (1990) social Bond Theory, and second, I will discuss Miller's (2008, 2011)

notions on phatic culture to address online communication.

Scheff's Bond Theory

In his 1990 book *Microsociology: Emotion, Discourse and Social Structure,*

Scheff develops a theory of social bonds, which I will refer herein as Bond Theory. His

main argument is that we are not isolated individuals, so the principal reason underlying

social cohesion is the maintenance of social bonds, which are ties achieved through

individual processes that are framed within a very specific social structure (Scheff, 1990).

The book begins with an important observation: even though in sociology motivation is

not always explored, any study of human 22ehavior involves the study of motives; and, at

the same time, psychology which typically studies motivation does not seem to take too

much into account the environment of the individual, an inherent characteristic of

sociology (p. 3-4). Scheff (1990) argues that "interactants appear to use the resources of

an entire society in each encounter; their ability to understand any given moment in

reference to the extended context in which it occurs provides the link between the

individual and social structure" (p. 96). This is why he takes on a micro-social approach

for the study of society and looks closely at this indispensable unit of social currency: the social bond.

Indeed, bonds can be seen under an economic light, very much in tune with Bourdieu's (1986/2002) use of the word "capital" when he describes the structure of society. Of course, in the economic sense, capital refers to accumulation either of labor, or of active or passive assets; but Bourdieu introduced two other forms of capital: cultural and social, which are both subject to *conversion* into economic capital. Very succinctly, we can say cultural capital is associated with accumulation of knowledge of different kinds related to culture; and social capital is associated with accumulation of social relations, or connections within a social system (Bourdieu, 1986/2002). Bonds are part of social capital, which means that managing bonds properly can help us gain social capital and increase our own social worth.

As opposed to perhaps learning to manage investments in the stock market, bonding is innate. Just as the trees are bonded to the earth to obtain nutrients and survive, in the same way we are bonded to each other; and not only can we see evidence of this in the historical shift from nomad to gregarious nature of man in order to survive, but we experience it in every way society is structured. We need some form of interconnectivity for the bond to exist; and, of course, the opposite can be stated as well: we can endanger the bond, jeopardize it, or diminish it, like pulling the roots out of a tree.

Even though it can also be achieved by other means, bonding depends on some sort of language, a vast system of signs and signals, mostly arbitrary in nature, and

therefore ambiguous in meaning. For humans, it is a highly sophisticated system, but for animals, for example, it is more rudimentary. Besides affectionate forms of physical contact, communication is the most evident way in which we can see bonding in action, an idea also observed by Malinowski (1946), when he described phatic communion as *ties of union created by a mere exchange of words* (Malinowski, 1946, p. 315). When we interact, a bond is being built or protected, or maintained, but it can also be or threatened, or repaired; and this happens with discourse alone, with what we say rather than how we say it. We speak to facilitate the bond, but we also accompany this with other indicators that make any interaction a collection of semiotic, linguistic, contextual, and cultural cues that have to be instantly deciphered in order to grasp its meaning.

Scheff (1990) distinguishes his work from the works of those who have studied pathological manifestations of the bond; however, a definition of what a "healthy" bond is was not given in his book. Nonetheless, he does propose the notion of an *intact* bond, which works conceptually in the same way as that of a healthy bond. By categorizing it as "intact", Scheff suggests there is an inherent nature of the bond which is ideal for the health of a social structure; this implies the other side of the coin would be plausible as well: when the bond is damaged by unsuccessful interactions, it can be detrimental to society.

In order to keep bonds in good standing, and make sure our bonding interactions are successful, we engage in the constant monitoring process that is *bond management*. Despite being an ongoing process in which we engage in a way that seems to be

instinctive – and whose routines can be ritualistic, as will be discussed later – bonding is nevertheless an intricate process that requires competency in different aspects of social interaction. Due to this complexity in bonding, Scheff (1990) indicates the bond should be "constantly tested and renewed if it is to remain intact" (p. 8), which is why he sees each interaction as having an effect on the existing bond, either positive or negative.

The intact bond is, at the same time, related to the notion of secure social bonds, which Scheff borrows from Bowlby. They define them as those bonds where participants are neither dependent nor independent from each other, but interdependent. Scheff proposes the maintenance of bonds as "the most crucial human motive" and consequently says, "secure social bonds are the force that holds a society together" (Scheff, 1990, p. 4). This involves being able to maintain ties with others who are different from self, a process that often requires management of needs and relations to achieve a delicate balance between closeness and distance (Scheff, 1990): close enough to recognize each others' needs and far enough to accept those needs, while balancing individual and group needs. This is known as *optimal differentiation*, a concept Scheff takes from Bowen; it encompasses both internal and external factors in order to achieve "attunement".

Attunement can be briefly defined as a synchronicity in the purpose and nature of human relationships: "[it] does not imply agreement but knowledge and acceptance of both agreement and disagreement" (Scheff, 1990, p. 4), a concept very much like Erik Erikson's (1966) *mutuality,* which is meant to indicate a deep feeling of care for others, a term frequently used for romantic relationships, but it also refers to the relationship with

other generations different to our own. For Scheff (1990), attunement is "the process through which interactants achieve (or fail to achieve) joint attention and feeling" (p. 96), so it is part of bond management. He seems to have borrowed the notion of attunement from Stern, Hofer, Haft and Dore, who described it, according to Scheff, as "the sharing of thoughts and feelings" (p. 97), a very integral part in establishing deep and genuine bonds, and a requisite of healthy, intact bonds, which take part in the very foundation and stability of society.

For Scheff, attunement is about "empathic intersubjectivity", a state of "single focus of thought and visual attention" where there is mutual mental and emotional understanding, and which comes as a result of successful *face work* (p.7). Face work is a concept developed by Goffman in 1955, and became widely popular after he included it in his 1967 work *Interaction Ritual.* He defines "face" as "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact" (1955/1972, p. 319), where "line" is the way in which we have chosen, in different degrees of consciousness, to present ourselves. Face work designates "actions taken by a person to make whatever he is doing consistent with face" (Goffman, 1955/1972, p.319), with the added intention of avoiding threatening of face, alluding to the ability to perform and control our actions and consequences. Face work, Goffman says, is also commonly known as "tact, *savoir-faire*, diplomacy, or social skill" (p. 324). Goffman also uses a similar term, "front", in his reputable 1959 work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, where he defines it as "that part of the individual's performance

which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance" (p. 32).

Scheff (1990), as do many other authors in various academic and research fields, quotes Goffman often throughout his work and even published a book in 2006 called *Goffman: Unbound! A New Paradigm for Social Science* dedicated to his work. Goffman is most certainly the central author for presentation of self and social performance, which is an unavoidable aspect of communication, especially phatic communication. If we consider small talk is framed within a cultural, social, and normative structure that determines what is desirable and what is appropriate when it comes to social interaction, this certainly has apparent implications on how one must present oneself. In fact, pertinently, Scheff (1990) quotes Goffman as follows:

> … the human tendency to use signs and symbols means that evidence of
>
> social worth and of mutual evaluations will be conveyed by the very minor
>
> things… There is no occasion of talk so trivial as not to require each
>
> participant to show serious concerns with the way in which he handles
>
> himself when others are present. (Scheff, 1990, p. 76-77)

Face work came to the attention of Holmes (2000/2014) as well. He said, "small talk is an obvious example of discourse which is oriented to the addressee's positive face needs" (p. 115). In every aspect of our interactions, no matter how trivial it may seem, we are giving a performance, doing face work, presenting ourselves; this does not only imply a constant

state of social performance of the self, but also a permanent monitoring of bond status as we interact with others and they offer as well their own performances.

Since this becomes a permanent task, we have developed certain mechanisms within our cultural frame that allow for bonding to be less excruciating, helping us prevent *bond anxiety*, the feeling of worry to lose the bond. Phatic communication can certainly be regarded as one of those mechanisms because it allows people to maintain an existing bond, and also offers the opportunity of creating new ones with a certain level of certainty, if we follow the right protocols.

Phatic communication works as a social ritual by offering ready-made codes of conduct to prevent threatening of the bond and bond loss; it gives us the opportunity to monitor our existing bond and guarantee its health. The health of a bond is important because it extrapolates into healthy societal dynamics. Therefore pathologies and disfunctionalities of a bond can be dangerous:

> Threats to a secure bond can come in two different formats; either the bond is too loose or too tight. Relationships in which the bond is too loose are isolated: there is mutual misunderstanding or failure to understand, or mutual rejection. Relationships in which the bond is too tight are engulfed: at least one of the parties in the relationship, say the subordinate, understands and embraces the standpoint of the other at the expense of the subordinate's own beliefs, values or feelings. (Scheff, 1990, p. 77)

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Some of the pathologies that can arise are characteristic of modern societies, like

excessive individualism derived from neglecting the importance of bonds; others are

many centuries old, like engulfed relationships. In fact, Scheff (1990) attributes wars to

alienated relationships characteristic of our civilization (p. 115), linking these sort of

destructive conflicts to "threatened social bonds and unacknowledged shame" (p. 147),

which can lead to powerful emotions like anger, consequently blinding our judgment and

triggering reactivity in our actions. An emotional reaction comes in a visceral way, and

this is what justifies its intensity; emotions are felt, certainly, but their interpretation by

the individual is what shapes them into something that can be expressed.

Following Cooley, Goffman, and Lewis' conception of pride and shame as the

main *social emotions*, Scheff (1990) makes a central use of the two in his Bond Theory:

"pride is the sign of an intact bond; shame, a severed or threatened bond" (p. 15). If we

consider the theoretical premise that emotions are socially constructed, we can establish

pride and shame work not only viscerally, but also within a social frame that gives them

specific functionality.

Based on this, Scheff develops a Deference-Emotion system, which is helpful for

looking into the dynamics of interactions. This system is composed of a structure of

sanctions (punishments and rewards) that work based precisely on pride or shame, given

that there is no other system that acts in the omnipresent and continuous way emotions

do. Emotions are embedded in our social structure and are thus able to compel individuals

to conform to them as part of the social norms. These emotions work as a substitute of

more explicit ways of punishment or reward: pride works as a reward and shame as a

punishment. This system works because it exists within a social structure where norms

are exterior and constraining, a notion Scheff takes from Durkheim and develops with the

help of Goffman's theory (Scheff, 1990, p. 71-75). We can establish that besides our own

proactive engagement in bond management, there is a tacit established system that, as

Scheff suggested, works as a regulatory device for social interactions.

Scheff also completes his vision of shame with the arguments of Cooley, who also

works with the shame-pride dyad. These are feelings one experiences as a consequence of

what one infers others feel; a process so automatic and naturalized within us, that "many

people of balanced mind and congenial activity scarcely know that they care what others

think of them, and will deny, perhaps with indignation, that such care is an important

factor in what they are and do", ignoring that in fact we live "in the minds of others

without knowing it, just as we daily walk the solid ground without thinking how it bears

us up" (in Scheff, 1990, p.81). Cooley also conceives an ongoing imaginative process

where we see ourselves in others' minds and even speculate their judgment, which can

lead us to feel a sort of anticipatory shame. He calls it "social fear" (in Scheff, 1990, p.

82- 83).

As pride and shame serve a social function, according to Scheff (1990), by that

same rule within a culture and a social system we can also learn to disguise and deny all

indicators of pride and shame, as a way to camouflage our emotions depending on our

needs, since "in modern societies adults seem to be 'uncomfortable' about manifesting

either pride and shame" (Scheff, 1990, p. 84). A very interesting observation is made by Tomkins, which would explain why the manifestations of pride and shame are often disregarded in our daily interactions: adult emotions are much more sophisticated than children's. As we grow up, our emotions tend to be less primitive, and we even learn to camouflage or dismiss some emotions because they are not socially appropriate, unless under specific domains. The example Tomkins gives is crying. It is indeed rare to see an adult cry, unless, for instance, at a funeral; in all other circumstances where a kid would cry (when feeling frustrated, disappointed, scared, anxious), adults have developed other coping mechanisms: "the adult has learned to cry as an adult. It is a brief cry, or a muted cry, or a part cry or a miniature cry, or a substitute cry, or an active defense against the cry, that we see in place of the infant's cry for help" (in Scheff, 1990, p. 83). And Tomkins even provides a specific example: "an adult suffering in the dental chair might, instead of crying, substitute muscular contractions: clamping the jaws, tightly contracting the muscles in the abdomen, and rigidly gripping the arms of the chair with his hands" (in Scheff, 1990, p. 83).

In the same way in which these emotional cues are not only managed, but conventionalized, we find in Scheff (1990) another related notion when he introduces the idea of "pseudo-bonds" to indicate those bonds that are maintained simply for the need of companionship, purely because they are better than isolation:

Rather than attunement, which balances the needs of the individual with the needs of the society, pseudo bonds in nations, sects, cults and other exclusive

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>groups furnish only the semblance of community. In such sects, the members
>
>give up significant parts of themselves, their individual points of view; they
>
>are engulfed. Engulfment damages both the individual and the group because
>
>competing points of view are needed for adaptation and survival. (Scheff,
>
>1990, p. 14)

Just as the illusion of community can be achieved, so can as well the illusion of the bond,

and the illusion of emotions. This "semblance of community" Scheff critically alludes to,

is precisely where Miller's (2008, 2011) critical theory stands.

Considering Scheff's (1990) notion of pseudo-bonds, we could be prompt to

assume that bonds created through phatic communication are pseudo-bonds. As with any

other theoretical formulation, conceptual limits must be drawn in order to offer an

epistemic organization, but these limits are often overlapping in practice. Nevertheless,

here I propose that there is a third kind of bonds. Consider the following continuum in

regards to the intimacy of the bond:

Secure Bonds ▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬ Pseudo-Bonds
Maximum Intimacy   Minimum Intimacy

Figure 2. Bonds Spectrum

Certainly the space between these two allow for an array of different levels of intimacy

that can go from maximum to minimum. I chose intimacy as a descriptor, but this variable

— the one that differences secure bonds from pseudo-bonds — might as well be called

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"commitment", or "truthfulness", or even "trustworthiness". It is precisely in that area in

between the two polarities of bonds where I locate "phatic bonds":

Secure Bonds ━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━ Phatic Bonds ━━━━━━ Pseudo-Bonds
Maximum Intimacy   Minimum Intimacy

Figure 3. Phatic Bonds in the Spectrum

Note that phatic bonds are not exactly in the middle, but rather a little more towards the

pseudo-bonds. And this implies that also there can be another type of bonds more towards

the secure bonds side, as well as many others in between. Depending on the *degree* in

which we engage in phatic communication, and thus the intimacy that arises, we can

create either pseudo-bonds, phatic bonds, superficial bonds, regular bonds, meaningful

bonds, secure bonds, and everything in between. Since one of the ways through which

social bonds are created is communication, it is logical to consider that phatic

communication creates phatic bonds. Contemplate the phrase "You can tell me anything",

which is a common phrase in consolidated, deep relationships where basically nothing

can threaten the bond, because it is a secure bond. In contrast, when the bond is not

secured is when we need politeness and conventions to ease the interactions and offer a

warranty in bond management. In these bonds, perhaps we cannot tell *any-thing*, because

certain *things* that can be told could jeopardize the bond.

Phatic bonds are, evidently, bonds established through phatic communication. I felt the need to create a concept of their own because the notion of pseudo-bonds Scheff (1990) offers contemplates not only the extreme polarity I presented here, as in the figure above, but also other notions, like that of loss of individuality. Phatic bonds do not imply a loss of individuality, or a commitment to a system of belief like that of a sect, and do not come into place merely because they are better than isolation, like Scheff (1990) established for the pseudo-bonds, but rather because of a desire to establish and maintain a specific bond, regardless of its purpose. For example, it would not affect me, in terms of isolation, if I do not greet a coworker from another department if we meet in the break room; we do not work closely together, we barely see each other. Yet I can chose to establish a bond with this person, in order to be polite, to do face work, and to better manage all my relationships at work. But this is precisely where the Community-Network debate arises: keeping Scheff (1990) in mind, at one end of the spectrum, we have secure bonds, those that are the foundation of society and that maintain a sense of community, those that promote attunement; however, towards the other end, we find bonds that are established solely because the are better than isolation, the ones that can be found in sects and lead to engulfed relationships; and somewhere in between we are merely maintaining a network of contacts through rather superficial communication — if we chose to leave it at that.

Phatic communication is an *artificial* way — socially constructed, not instinctive, but reenacted, since it is ritualized — to signal to others the most basic human emotions,

evidenced in a desire to connect, to bond, albeit sometimes merely instrumental. We have

developed different mechanisms to manage bonds and reduce bond anxiety by easily

relating to others, but that has also led as well to a tendency to a more superfluous

engagement in the bond. Even though Scheff's interest lays in how emotions underlie

social action, he uses Goffman (1959) to explain the choice of shame over any other

emotion: "the idea of impression management, crucial on most of Goffman's writing,

made the evidence of embarrassment a central motive of interpersonal behaviour" (p. 55).

However, I will further contend that an even more primal emotion than shame — which is

socially constructed — plays a part in both of their theories: fear. In the case of phatic

communication, fear of awkward silence, fear of being alone, fear of hurting others, fear

of saying the wrong thing, social fear, fear of rejection. Phatic communication avoids

these fears by opening a path for communicative engagement, lightening up the

atmosphere, introducing strangers and keeping friends; it maintains and creates bonds, it

grants us our desire to connect with others.

Following Scheff's Deference-Emotion system, we can determine that phatic

communication promotes low-visibility pride (by strengthening bonds) and avoids low-

visibility shame (when weakening of bonds occur). I have chosen low-visibility

modalities of both emotions because phatic communication is a subtle mechanism. If we

consider the opposite instead, a high-visibility example of pride-exalting communication

could be a congratulatory remark, and a high-visibility example of shame could be an

insult; both situations show the intention and content of the interaction in a much more

evident way. However, in the case of phatic communication, precisely because of the many ways in which we engage in it, the many mechanisms that take place, and the non-evident nature of the interaction, low-visibility is typically the way it manifests itself.

Allow me to explore another example: when we ask a coworker "Hey, how was your weekend?" we are promoting pride by engaging in a very subtle form of deference evidenced by manifesting interest for our coworker's activities. In fact, the other day at work, someone asked a coworker I was next to "Hey, how was your vacation?" while she smiled and kept on walking. The coworker I was next to smiled back at the inquiring coworker and said "It was great!" but then turned to me and asked me, "Why did she even ask me if she didn't have time to stop and actually listen to my stories?" I contained the need to explain what the gesture alone meant, as superficial as it could seem, and I said, "I guess she's just acknowledging you're back", to which my coworker simply said "Yeah". Holba (2008) tackles this notion in her work: "phaticity in acknowledgment allows for people to feel a connection to others, however superficial" (p. 37) in fact, in her article, she herself offers a similar example. Holba recognizes the relational function of phatic communication, here represented as acknowledgement, but believes it is in itself superficial – which it can be.

Scheff (1990) dedicates most of his book to the analysis of shame, thus neglecting the counterpart of this emotion in Bond Theory, pride. However, my take on Scheff is precisely that we signal pride with phatic communication, so pride is more relevant here. In other words, phatic communication stands for the opposite of when he says "shame

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appears to be the stereotyped emotional response to a threat of loss of connection to another person or persons" (p. 170); hence pride would be the stereotypical emotional response to an existing connection with another person, a healthy bond, a bond that we recognize and cultivate because we want to keep it.

Within the Deference-Emotion system, phatic communication is considered here as a marker of deference, a way to let others know we respect them, and we cherish the bond between us, regardless of its nature. It can be the merely transactional bond that binds us to the clerk at the train station we go to every morning, or the romantic bond that links us to our husbands and wives. In fact, Scheff (1990) believes "the basic human bond involves both communication and deference, exchanges of thoughts and feelings" (p. 103); indeed with phatic communication we communicate deference, exchanging little thought and low-intensity feeling.

The low-visibility characteristic of this process is regarded by Scheff (1990) as having "strongly recursive character" (p. 84), and I have maintained throughout that phatic communication indeed uses repeated patterns as a way to convey its meaning. The workplace example given above works as well to illustrate this: when the coworker asks "Hey, how was your vacation?", she did not intend to inquire in depth about what happened in our coworker's vacation, but it was more of an acknowledgement of her presence, and a manifestation of intention of maintaining their bond by signaling low-visibility pride, like saying "I know you, I know what's going on with you, we are friends". Scheff explains how the mechanisms that are signaled by bonds have become so

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automatic in our nature, as a consequence of an internalized socialization process that they work in an almost invisible way if not for some markers we can detect from our interactions.

Indeed, bonding is very much like language in that aspect. Constant monitoring of the bond is necessary to assess its status and maintain it, promote it, or repair it. Of course, given the ambiguity of language, this process requires constant adjustment and verification, and it is enriched with a holistic approach that requires we consider not only what is being said, but also many other tangential cues. Specifically, Scheff (1990) talks about the paralanguage that accompanies words in a communicative act: everything from pauses to intonation, with, of course, the added component of nonverbal communication and gestures; it all contributes to an overall emotional appreciation of the interaction that will affect one's evaluation of the status of the bond, as it would with any communicative exchange. He explains that interactants perceive turns in talking, pauses and rhythms of conversations as indexical indicators and signs of deference from the other person. For example, too lengthy pauses can be read as the actor being disrespectful or uninterested; and excessive gestures or slow rhythm can be perceived as the sender underestimating the receiver's capacity to understand (Scheff, 1990, p. 98).

Scheff (1990) also proposed the concept of "implicature", which he defines as "the unstated implications of [participants'] words and gestures" (p. 113), a process that includes analyzing utterances, but also every other component of the interaction (body language, pauses, tone, gestures, context, relational background, etc.), and imagining

inner experiences (feelings, perceptions, interpretations) of the interactant, allowing a comprehensive view of a communicative event. This ties in with another pertinent concept of Scheff's called *extended context,* which he related to Schutz's Retrospective and Prospective method for inferring the possible meanings of an interaction, which takes into account all the other extralinguistic aspects that are part of an interaction: "one must forage backward in memory, over what has happened, and forward, in imagination, to what might happen" (Scheff, 1990, p. 40). Scheff believes an analysis of every encounter should be made in-situ by the interactants: "in order to understand any given utterance, the interactants must have access to the extended context of the utterance, all events that took place or could have taken place before, during, and after the particular moment" (Scheff, 1990, p. 115).

The complexity of meaning-making that takes place with each social interaction is indeed an intricate process that requires, as has been suggested here, pragmalinguistic skill in the form of communicational management. This, Scheff (1990) says, humans are able to do through intuition, in what he called *intuitive understanding*. The notion of intuition is mentioned again in Scheff when discussing Freud's unconscious, which he states comes from Emerson's (1837) aboriginal self. Emerson, Scheff explains, uses the term "involuntary perception" to denote:

> … intuitive thought [which] is unsolicited and nonverbal... It appears and
>
> disappears so rapidly as to seem instantaneous; and finally, it is always the

first thought, rather than the second, third, or later thought that is unedited and

uncensored and therefore uncompromised by bias. (Scheff, 1990, p. 165)

He is talking about what George Lakoff (2008) refers to as "the 98%". Lakoff maintains

that more than 98% of what we perceive is done in an unconscious way because we have

already internalized "a system of concepts that structure our brains" (p. 43), as it has been

suggested here, as part of our life-long socialization process and the corresponding social

imaginary that comes with it.

The need for this process is justified in the ambiguous nature of language and

human behavior. Even though some social interactions are technically deemed as

ritualistic, to construct meaning all variables must be taken into account in all situations:

"unlike the expressions of all other living creatures, the meaning of human expressions is

not fixed; it only indexes a relationship between the expression and the context in which it

occurs" (Scheff, 1990, p. 37); which is to say meaning is contextual, and thus interactants

must "contextualize" (Scheff, 1990, p. 38) the meaning of the interaction. In addition to

this permanent challenge, Scheff reminds us the permutability of language is also

something to be aware of, given that new uses and meanings are created constantly,

something that is very common in certain social segments (teenagers and young adults,

for example), especially in the online world, as we will explore later.

Miller's Phatic Culture

The immediacy that technology grants, and the growing accessibility to remote

devices that allow constant connectivity, seem to have led us to a significant shift in the

way we communicate, interact, and consequently, form bonds. In his work *Understanding Digital Culture*, Miller (2011) offers a detailed description of media and society in our contemporary information age, including the economics behind it, and what this whole change of paradigm implies to our identity. Miller also includes a critical analysis of the less democratic aspects of digital environments, like inequality and surveillance, and controversial examples of online activism and other ways of subversion.

It needs to be noted that Miller's (2011) comments on the use technology as a consequence of capitalism, and the consequences it implies for the economy, the self, identity and society at large, are very critical; this is an approach present also in other works of his that are not relevant here. It is pertinent to highlight this characteristic because the criticism of the lack of community or community-like bonds in modern society is typical of a certain school of thought and here I try to bring together different perspectives on the matter. Further analysis on this debate can be found in the following chapter.

Although what is central here from Miller's work is his concept of phatic culture, which came from an earlier work (Miller, 2008), the reason why he came to the conclusion that the culture developed online is phatic, is intrinsically related to the notion of community, which is explained in his later work (2011) in more detail. The relation between social media and community is apparent, hence the term "online communities" to refer to virtual places where users gather, sometimes with a specific purpose, other times

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with a rather general one. Gruzd, Wellman and Takhteyev (2011) also call them "virtual communities" (p. 1295).

Online communities can be formed in different online mediums, like blogs, websites, and in various online socialization platforms, such as the well-known Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Another term for these platforms is "social networks", although I believe this is shorthand for "social network services". The following is a definition for social network, and social networking, found in Mashable.com, a highly reputable marketing website:

> A social networking service is an online service, platform, or site that focuses
>
> on facilitating the building of social networks or social relations among
>
> people who, for example, share interests, activities, backgrounds, or real-life
>
> connections. (via Mashable.com)

The term used to allude to all these different platforms in general, as genera, is "social media". The term "social media platform" is also used as a synonym for social network services; these refer to the medium, and "online community" as well as "social network" (without the "services" this time) refer to the product of interconnected bonds formed as a consequence of the interaction in such platforms. The critique to the indistinct use of these terms comes from the debate between network and community as different structures. Furthermore, the professionals (or non professionals) that manage them from an organizational, corporate, or branded perspective are called "community managers".

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The concept of online community was first attributed to Rheingold in 1993, when he referred to the process of coming together online as "virtual communities", which he defined as "social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace" (in Zappavigna, 2011, p. 789). Of course, the remark on human feeling is the node where bonds and online space meet as far as what is pertinent to the present work. In fact, Java, Finin, Son and Tseng (2007) maintain that users connect with each other because they share similar intentions or interests: "a user's retention and interest in blogging could be predicted by the comments received and continued relationship with other active members of the community" (p. 2). That sense of belonging that arises from being connected to others is what is the core of what are thought of as online communities.

In a 2000 study, Armstrong and Hegel came up with four types of online communities (in Miller, 2001, p. 190):

- "Communities of transaction": those that facilitate the exchange or buying and selling of goods and information.

- "Communities of interest": those that bring together participants who wish to interact about specific topics of interest to them.

- "Communities of fantasy": those that allow participants to create new environments, identities or imagined worlds.

- "Communities of relationship": those that focus on intense personal experiences and create networks of support.

Due to the fast pace at which things, like terminology or new software, change today, this typology is somewhat dated, judging by how things have changed in the past 15 years. Specifically, in 2000 social media had not been born and the main social networks we use today would not fit entirely into any of the categories above, but rather on a more general one. Ergo, I propose here a name for a fifth category of its own: "Communities of general socialization" where people can extend their offline social relationships, but also create new ones with people they have not met in person, celebrities or personalities, as well as organizations, and brands.

Using the critical sociological notion that contemplates the possibility of a *real* community revival in the offline space as almost utopic, Miller (2011) hints at the online space as an opportunity to recreate communities in the online setting, following a "hunger for community spirit, which is no longer provided in the offline world", a notion he takes from Rheingold's work (Miller, 2011, p.191). This seemed to be indeed what happened since the beginning of the popularization of the Internet and which has been intensified with the emergence of social media platforms in the last fifteen years. As a matter of fact, many people started to gather online decades ago as a way to connect with others who shared similar interests or had relatable problems, with the priceless advantage of anonymity, or at least less of a burden without the face-to-face interaction. Chat software, chat rooms, forums and blogs were the first platforms that offered this possibility to a

globalized audience. However, as Miller (2011) notes, some researches (e.g.: Anderson &

Tracey, Howard et al., Katz & Rice, Tutt, Wellmam et al.) haven't actually found a strong

correlation between online and offline social lives as being too different; if anything users

were found to be equally sociable online and offline (p. 196).

As part of his critical analysis, Miller (2011) points out that "community" is not

perhaps the most appropriate term to denote that which happens in online gatherings,

groups or platforms, and instead he proposes they should be called networks (p. 197).

Briefly put, he takes on the work of Castells, Wittel, and Granovetter to conclude that as

a consequence of a fluctuating economy that had to become more flexible to satisfy an

equally fluctuating demand, the workforce was affected, becoming more nomad and thus

having a lesser possibility of establishing strong ties, and instead building a substantial

collection of weaker ties anywhere people went, which helped them to stay connected

with those that could offer them non-redundant information that could be beneficial for

them (p. 198). This way of connecting with others is known as networking, and it is an

instrumental phenomenon, pursued with a utilitarian purpose.

In his earlier work, Miller (2008) also references the contributions of Wittel to

come to his concept of phatic culture. Wittel, Miller says, also conceived the type of

exchanges present in this new online context as a reflection of the type of relationships

created and maintained there: superfluous and instrumental. Wittel called the nature of

these social relations 'informational' and not 'narrative', given their tendency to

communicate simple data bits on each interaction, as opposed to generating a "deep,

substantive or meaningful communication based on mutual understanding" (in Miller,

2008, p. 390). Even though phatic communication is not typically informative, but in fact

the opposite, what Wittel observed in 2001 was a change in the interactional dynamics

that back then was primarily reflected in briefness of contact and communication

exchange. This could be because technology itself did not allow for the kind of

connectivity and quality that we can afford today, but it could also be because the

medium was too new and artificial, so mimicking social interactions in the same way as

we perform them offline did not come naturally. Most likely the reason was a

combination of both. In any case, what Wittel noticed was increased connectivity, but less

engagement than occurs offline, and this is precisely what phatic communication does: it

allows us to bond with more people in a brief manner, so the interaction occurs easily and

allows for bond management. These network connections Wittel and Miller observed

could be considered as a type of phatic bond, which would make the so-called online

communities *phatic communities*.

Miller also later quotes the work of Wittel, to refer to the concept of "network

sociality", which denotes the networked way of socializing and maintaining social

connections that are instrumental, as Miller points out. Communication is the tool that

makes it possible to maintain or establish those connections with the network, or, as

Miller called it, "maintenance of *presence* within networks" (Miller, 2011, p. 200, my

emphasis). He will also refer to this paradigm of constant interconnectedness as

"connected presence", a term related to Jakobson's (1960) work, which focuses on *being*

present, as a way to highlight the relational component of phatic communication. The process of networking depends on technology and it is ongoing to a point where, according to Licoppe, we are not only present, but *with a connected presence* (in Miller, 2011, p. 203) that forms an almost continuous channel of communication and gestures that we permanently engage in, in order to "catch up", "keep in touch", or "stay connected".

Miller (2011) uses the work of Howard et al. and Vetere et al. to conclude networking should help staying connected to others without producing much information, in order to enhance social presence across distances; and since dispersed people use technology to stay connected with their network of friends, family and acquaintances, "phatic communication in online contexts has become central to digital culture" (p. 204), and hence his concept of phatic culture. He realized there is a distinction between "content-focused" versus "contact-focused" conversational interactions, which is coherent with Malinowski's *reflection* and *action*. According to Malinowski, "language appears to us in this [phatic] function not as an instrument of reflection, but as a mode of action" (p. 315). Miller further elaborated on this:

> The point of the social networking profile is blatantly to establish (and demonstrate) linkages and connections, rather than dialogic communication. Thus, what is seen here is a shift in emphasis from blogging technology which encouraged the creation of substantive text *along with* networking, to social networking profiles which emphasize networking over substantive text, thus

> shifting digital culture one step further from the substantive text and dialogue
>
> of the blog further into a realm of new media culture which I refer to as the
>
> phatic. (Miller, 2008, p. 393)

Miller is touching briefly on the social capital notion I introduced here previously, which has to do with the significance social connections have as currency for social capital. This idea is not new, people typically aim at having connections, contacts, friends, someone they know here and there; some because such connections can be useful, others because they cherish those relationships for what they are, and others simply because they believe they can enhance their own social status that way. In any case, what is interesting is to see this is still the case in online relationships; if anything, this paradigm has been further promoted by social media because relationships online can be very visible, they leave evidence of their existence in a very visible way.

Wang et al. (2011), use the term phatic technologies to denote those that "establish, develop and maintain human relationships" (p. 46) and are known for their sociability (p. 45), and hence depend on user participation. Not only do these authors see some technologies as phatic, but they also see phatic communion itself as a technology, because it is a tool that enables the emergence of culture amongst user groups (p. 48), serving the purpose of facilitating sociability by lubricating social exchanges. The central argument these authors maintain has to do with technologies we find online, as the Internet is a great source of phatic technologies. They mention types of communication, such as Voice-over IP, and specific software, like Skype, all of which have come to play a

predominant role in our culture, and they even go as far as saying the way in which the

Internet has become so deeply integrated in our culture is precisely due to its phatic

nature, which arises from one of the Internet's fundamental characteristics - the

minimized time span between producers and users (Wang et al., 2011), a conclusion we

find as well in Miller's (2008, 2011) work. For example, blogs are more content-driven,

but a social media platform like Facebook is evidently about contact to preserve one's

presence and have it acknowledged by one's network, which makes it a phatic technology;

or in Miller's (2008) terms, a phatic media. Of course, that is not to say blogs to a point

do not help us connect, especially some type of blogs that have managed to have a faithful

list of readers and they interact with each other, but it is a medium originally conceived

and used to display information rather than as a means for connectivity.

Given that individualization, as opposed to tradition, is commonly the norm in

people's behavior nowadays, it has led us to feel the ability of making our own bonds

freely, without time or space constraints, and not determined by anything else other than

our will. Miller (2011) points to the work of Van Dijk, Barney and Wellman, who

concluded that indeed networking is related to a rise in individualism. In fact, Wellman

coined the term "networked individualism", in order to explain and describe how people

connect individually with each other, via mobile technologies like phones and Internet (in

Miller, 2011, p. 199). This shift justifies the tendency to re-create ourselves online and

use the available platforms as a way to present ourselves to the world (Miller, 2008), with

much more control than in offline circumstances, and by — among other things —

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managing our network and network-to-be through the management of connections, very

much so in the way we manage bonds; after all, network connections are a kind of phatic

bond. We strive to stay connected, while being comfortably disconnected, which is an

undeniable sign of phatic culture.

Chapter 4: Theoretical Model of Phatic Communication

Rethinking Phatic Communication

I have previously explained how the present work offers a theoretical model of phatic communication, which is absent in the existing literature to this date. I believe an organizational scheme is needed in order to provide structure and categorize the different features of a phenomenon, so as to better understand it, especially if there is an analytical aim along the way. Offering a different framing paradigm, the sole re-framing of a phenomenon, brings the possibility of re-thinking a phenomenon. This could lead to different improvements; in this case, the present work offers a new organization for conceiving a phatic communication, which required a paradigm shift from the existing ways of thinking about it.

There are five key aspects in rethinking phatic communication:

A) Providing a new definition that contemplates the extension of the scope that phatic communication reaches today.

B) Using Scheff's (1990) Bond Theory to frame phatic communication.

C) Using Miller's (2008, 2011) work to approach phatic communication in a contemporary manner.

D) Coming to a new organization of knowledge in a theoretical model of phatic communication.

E) The notion of antiphaticity.

Introduction of the Model

After gathering sufficient information on phatic communication, I observed that it is approached in two ways: first, older work is focused on studying the phenomenon in itself from various academic perspectives; and second, more recent work looks into how the phenomenon relates to other phenomena, or acts in certain contexts, or is used for a determinate purpose, particularly in certain professional fields. In general terms, however, no author offers a theoretical model of phatic communication or any sort of comprehensive organizational scheme that allows for better understanding of this discursive mechanism.

It is true that some authors do offer some sort of organizational structure, but they are typically very focused in one discipline, lacking the wholesomeness the model I propose here has. The only exception is perhaps the work of Ventola (1979), who is possibly the only author who attempted to come up with a more holistic model. However, it is radically different to the one proposed here. In her analysis, Ventola (1979) details five variables that are characteristic of casual conversation:

- First, *subject-matter*, which is to maintain social bonds by addressing rather superficial topics, like "the weather, the interactants' health, holiday plans, or current news" (p. 268).

- Second, *situation-type*, which she limits to face-to-face interaction.

- Third, *participant roles*, which she takes from Hasan. These can be social (according to norms), textual (according to the turn-taking dynamic), or participatory (according to the nature of the interaction).

- Fourth, the *mode* of discourse, which she calls "sociability" given that it serves a social function.

- And fifth, *medium*, which is spoken (p. 268-270).

Ventola also mentions three functions casual conversation serves, which speak to the participants' skill: first, casual conversation conveys indexical information about the speakers; second, it must have a certain functionality to the situation, thus it needs to be coherent and relevant; and third, which she phrases quite elegantly: "… casual conversation also provides cognitive and factual information: that is to say, it expresses the ideational macro function of language as well" (p. 270).

Ventola's work is one of the oldest included here, and yet her observations remain to be quite complete and helpful, even though she is not a widely referenced author. Nevertheless, the organizational scheme I propose here is more exhaustive and it is especially more holistic in its approach, aiming at facilitating the understanding of phatic communication as a discourse mechanism, but also as a relevant tool for socialization.

Explanation of the Model

The model I propose here came from a lack of organization, typification and specification in the existing literature. I felt that, as I read all the wonderful and insightful contributions many brilliant authors have made to phatic communication, it was hard to

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comprehend the bigger picture. At the same time, this model conveys with just a glance

what phatic communication is about, as well as facilitating a better grasp of its different

features.

Figure 4. Theoretical Model of Phatic Communication
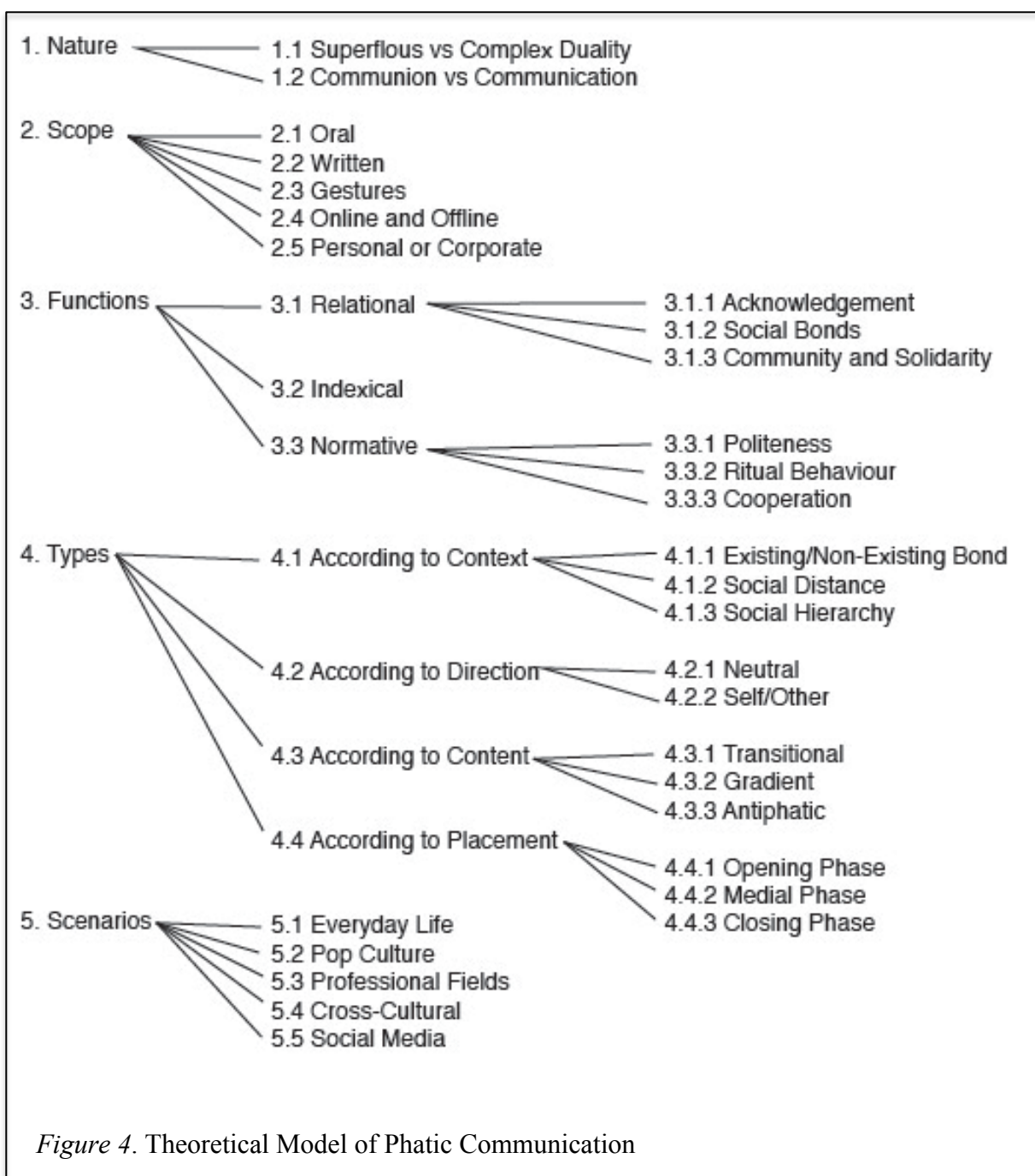
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Each of the categories of the model will be now explained in detail, using the existing literature and all the valuable knowledge that led to the present organization of phatic communication, as well as my personal insights on each feature.

1. Nature of Phatic Communication

The first question a researcher should ask in scientific inquiry is "what is the origin of a phenomenon?" Of course, we must start with Malinowski's work, since it has been unanimously attributed to him the coining of the term phatic communion. Malinowski gave phatic communion a rather superficial approach, which in this section will be contrasted with other approaches as a reflection of the nature of this discourse mechanism. The difference between phatic communion and phatic communication will also be addressed.

1.1 Superfluous versus complex duality.

In Malinowski's (1946) work, it becomes increasingly more apparent throughout his essay that language is an ambiguous system, which is also a prevailing theme throughout the book his essay is a part of. Culture, norms, and tradition play a big part in our ability to determine meaning, and hence Malinowski's ethnographic work. He places speech as a unifying force within society: "Speech is the necessary means of communion; it is the one indispensable instrument for creating the ties of the moment without which unified action is impossible" (p. 310). This statement connects communication and bonding and it is why I claim communication is bonding in action.

Malinowski obtained this insight when observing fisherman groups and the way they interacted with each other when fishing. A lot of the exchanges were very specific to the activities being conducted and the vicissitudes of the moment; he described it as "a mode of action that is not an instrument of reflection... When the object of talk is not to achieve some aim but the object of words almost as an end in itself?" (Malinowski, 1946, p. 312). Consequentially, he goes on to describe these kind of encounters as "a mode of social action", "free, aimless social intercourse", "gossip quite unconnected to what they [the fisherman] are doing", "[the meaning of its words is] almost completely irrelevant", "[it includes] inquiries about health, comments in weather, affirmations of some supremely obvious state of things"; regardless, he does point out all these activities do serve an important purpose, "to connect people in action" (Malinowski, 1946, p. 313-314). Malinowski even provides specific examples like "How do you do", "Ah, there you are", "Where do you come from?" "Nice day-to-day" (p. 314), as the phrases used for this purpose.

Malinowski continues to build on these notions related to our gregarious human nature to define a type of speech function that will later be identified under the term *phatic communion*: "a type of speech in which ties of union are created by a mere exchange of words" which consists of "verbal exchanges that primarily serve a social purpose" (Malinowski, 1946, p. 315). He also defined it in the summary of his article as "speech in social intercourse" (p. 296), meaning speech as a means to relate to others, to bond. This is, of course, a phrase from Malinowski that is often cited because it implies

that the symbolic meaning of the action of coming together to establish and maintain this bond is much more important and representative of the participant's intentions than whatever they are actually uttering.

However, it is precisely Malinowski's choice of words, here and in other moments of his text, that led to an initial perception of phatic communion as a simplistic form of interaction, as can be evidenced by the examples quoted above that he provided. Some authors reacted to this, attributing a more complex nature to phatic communication.

Certainly a duality exists in the literature where some authors see it as being superficial or *empty*, some of that group of authors barely acknowledging it does serve — at least — the important function of maintaining social bonds. On the other side, some other authors (Coupland, 2000/2014; Coupland et al., 1992; Laver, 1974/1975; Ritchie, 2011; Schneider, 1988; Senft, 2005; Wang et al., 2011), contemplate that there is information about the participants that can be inferred from phatic interactions, which serves a purpose in itself, leading some authors to even say it requires sociopragmatic ability and cognitive skill (Drazdauskiene, 2010; Holmes & Fillary, 2000; Hunter, 2011; Padilla, 2001, 2005, 2013; Ventola, 1979; Vigara, 1990; Žegarac & Clark, 1999). Some of these authors were as well interested in the importance of context and making the appropriate choices in the interaction (Berendt, 1997; Coupland, 2000/2014; Drazdauskiene, 2010; Endrass et al., 2010; Laver, 1974/1975; Padilla, 2001, 2005; 2013; Senft, 2005; Ventola, 1979; Vigara, 1990).

Laver's (1974/1975) work is perhaps the oldest critical reference to Malinowski's work. He clearly vowed against the dismissive approach to phatic communion as a simple phenomenon and he aimed at studying it in more depth, asking for pertinent research questions about the subject, even though — due to the lack of previous research — his work was mainly exploratory. This complexity counter-argument was also stated explicitly by Senft (2005), who was surprised Malinowski did not comprehend the depth of his own concept. He notes an expression from the primitive tribe Malinowski researched that would be the equivalent to "How is it going", for a casual salutation, and explains how the typical answer to this question in this tribe contains enough information for the inquirer to know about the other's actions, allowing a true sense of caring and community to manifest, despite the fact that it is indeed a form of ritual communication (Senft, 2005, p. 230). Here Senft argues with Malinowski's claim that phatic communions are only functional, and shares Laver's perspective instead which explains it is also informative.

Drazdauskiene (2010) maintains that even though the initial meaning for phatic utterances might seem trivial and at most *only* related to maintenance of bonds, there is a deeper meaning inferable from the interaction (p. 5), and this is what Laver (1974/1975) called the indexical function of phatic communion, which provides information on the participants. Schneider (1988), for example, uses Jakobson's (1960) terminology to refer to this function as the "referential" function of communication (p. 27).

When examining the poetic function of language, Jakobson briefly goes over the traditional features of communication known from classic models, which include the instances of sender and receiver, channel, code, and context. The way he sees it, each of these six factors (the sixth one is the message itself) determines a function of language, but typically a message has many functions at the same time (Jakobson, 1960, p. 353). In this way, he pairs context with the referential function, receiver with the conative function, the message with the poetic function, the code with the metalingual function, the sender with the emotive or expressive function, and most importantly here, the *contact factor* with a *phatic function* (p. 353-357). Of this contact factor, which refers to the relational aspect of phatic communication, Jakobson says "[it] may be displayed by a profuse exchange of ritualized formulas, by entire dialogues with the mere purport of prolonging communication" (p. 355). For him "phatic" is that which keeps the communicative channel open for sender and receiver to continue to communicate (Jakobson, 1960; Rodríguez-Ponce, 2011), it refers to a "contact" function of communication (Schneider, 1988).

The superfluous-complex dichotomy exists not only in general, but also in more recent work of authors that try to look at phatic communication within their academic or professional field. For example, in linguistics, authors typically look at words for their content in a phatic exchange, focusing on the symbolic meaning and the functionality they serve in language (Boyle, 2000; Senft, 2005; Ward, Horn & Žegarac, 1999; Žegarac & Clark, 1999). And yet within the field of linguistics, McCarthy (2003), for example,

claims phatic communication is superficial. In social media, Jensen and Scott (2013) agree on phatic communication's triviality, but Wang et al. (2011) see it as complex and deeply interwoven in online dynamics. In cross-cultural studies, part of pragmatics, we also find for example Estlein and Mashler (2008) holding antagonist views in relation to Alquinai (2010).

However, unanimity also exists. In organizational communication, Holmes and Fillary (2000) notice that engaging in small talk at work indeed requires cognitive ability, thus negating an initial assumption of small talk being empty, not substantial or trivial. In their research, Tracy and Naughton (2000/2014) found that 73 per cent of the press articles they researched included "positive treatments of the concept" of phatic communication as a "good skill" to have, and only 27 per cent were "negative" (p. 144). For example, they found that small talk was a social skill, given that it signified "joining others" through it, and was part of the attempts of "fitting in" (p. 145), especially in the workplace. And Coupland (2003), as another example, specifically mentions in her research how small talk is not considered by many as a skill, and highlights how it indeed enhances conversations and relationships at work.

Padilla (2005), on his part, works from pragmatics to transcend the understood notion of phatic communion as merely empty exchange of words that allow social bonding, as many linguists have taken it since Malinowski (p. 2). In an earlier work, Padilla (2001) indirectly deems phatic communication as complex, when he describes the processes that interactants go through to achieve meaning in communicative exchange,

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since coming to meaning regarding an interaction is a challenging process - not only must we consider the literal information according to complex linguistic and semantic codes, but we must also interpret the interaction within a context that has many facets: who is saying what, when, why, and how, to paraphrase our *field cousins* the journalists.

Drazdauskiene (2010) emphasizes the role of context that can be provided in the phatic use of language as being quite substantial, and it can be a challenging intellectual exercise for non-natives when learning a second language (p. 4). Given the constant change and evolution of language, this author does not conceive such things as explicit meaning in communication; so even though the initial meaning for phatic utterances might seem trivial and only related to maintenance of bonds, the deeper meaning can be inferable from each interaction (p. 5).

In this same field similar observations are reported by other authors (Alquinai, 2010; Amador-Moreno, 2013; Boyle, 2000; Hunter, 2011; Lin, 2013; Padilla, 2001, 2013; Vigara, 1990), as well as for learning any other second language (Banda, 2005), or pragmatics in general (Aijmer & Simon-Vandenbergen, 2004; Berendt, 1997; Desalles, 2007; Haugh & Schneider, 2012; Placencia, 2005, 2007; Rodríguez-Ponce, 2012; Schneider, 2011; Ventola, 1990); also by those who embark in fascinating cross-cultural research (Aijmer & Simon-Vandenbergen, 2004; Alquinai, 2010; Banda, 2005; Berendt, 1997; Firth, 1972; Mak & Chui, 2013; Padilla, 2001, 2005, 2013; Placencia & Lower, 2013; Schneider, 1988, 2011; Vigara,1990; Wang et al., 2011). And yet, some authors, on the other side, do stand their ground seeing phatic communication as superficial or

trivial (Beck, 2010; Holba, 2008; Jensen & Scott, 2013; Jones, 2011; Malinowski, 1946; McCarthy, 2003; Mehl et al., 2010; Miller, 2008, 2011; Stenström & Jögensen, 2008), and some even limit it to being simple chatter or ramble (Estlein & Maschler, 2008; Stenström & Jögensen, 2008; Sturtzsreetharan, 2006).

Holba (2008), for example, writes phatic communication is "superficial, inauthentic or empty", quite the opposite of the ideal communication that is found in "genuine dialogic communicative encounters" (p. 35). She takes on the work of philosopher Martin Buber to highlight the dialogic nature to human communication. The sort of communication that engages in content corresponds to I-Thou moments, and that which we can match with our notion of phatic communication would be I-It moments in Buber's philosophy (p. 35). Holba specifically states it is the content in the I-Thou communicative moments that brings people together (Holba, 2008, p. 35), dismissing the potential phatic communication has for doing so. However, she does contemplate phatic communication as a way to further engage in meaningful communication, which in a way is an admission that it is not purposeless (she will even later call it a *need*), but it does still remain as something that is "flat" (p. 36). If people come together for "social or biological needs" the encounter will likely be phatic, Holba says, but if they gather because of an idea, the encounter can be meaningful (p. 38). Oddly, this author does allude to the relational nature of phaticity, taken from Coupland et al, (1992), but at the same time she considers it as superficial and often limited to mere small talk (Holba, 2008, p. 36). Furthermore, she says it can eventually even be detrimental for human connection (p. 38).

Holba's main argument, however, does reside in her critics on the shortcomings of phatic communication; it is centered in the importance of true human engagement by sharing ideas, and this is indeed a very important function of communication in general. Quoting Coupland et al. (1992), Holba says phaticity in conversations "shows degrees of reticence or withheld commitment to openness, seriousness and truth. Prototypically, phatic discourse may involve a suspension of commitment to a speaker's own factuality" (Holba, 2008, p.39), a sort of dismissive attitude toward others. In her own words: "phatic communication becomes problematic when it becomes the normal mode of communication (p. 39); a statement that related to Schneider (1988) when he says, "genuine social bonding cannot do without 'big talk'." (p. 29). This is something I will discuss ahead under the function of politeness, also under *gradients* of phaticity, and lastly in the debate about online communities. Nevertheless, I do believe Holba's arguments are genuinely valid: we cannot truly engage in a meaningful way without non-phatic big talk; however, that does not mean small talk is not a valuable bonding tool.

There is a further distinction to be made in regards to the nature of phatic communication, and it is found in Edmondson and House. Their classification is quite different, conceiving phatic interactions outside ritual illocutions, and proposing "the central types of illocutions which characterize small talk are informative in nature, i.e. Remarks, Tells and Discloses (possibly Opines), and, necessarily matching Requests for Illocutionary Acts, which these informative illocutions may Satisfy" (in Schneider, 1988, p. 33- 34). These authors seem to see the standardized nature of small talk in a literal way,

conceiving the ritualized questions as genuine demands for information. Similarly,

Schneider assumes as a given there must be an "unmarked" nature in phatic

conversations: any type of conversation that has a predetermined structure, cannot be

phatic to him (interviews, lectures, etc.). Taking into consideration Ventola's work as

well as that of Edmondson and House, Schneider (1988) locates small talk in the

following classificatory structure:

Figure 5. Small Talk Classification. From *Small Talk: Analyzing Phatic Discourse* (p. 39) by K. Schneider, 1988, Marburg: Hitzeroth. Copyright 1988 by Klaus Schneider. Reproduced with permission.
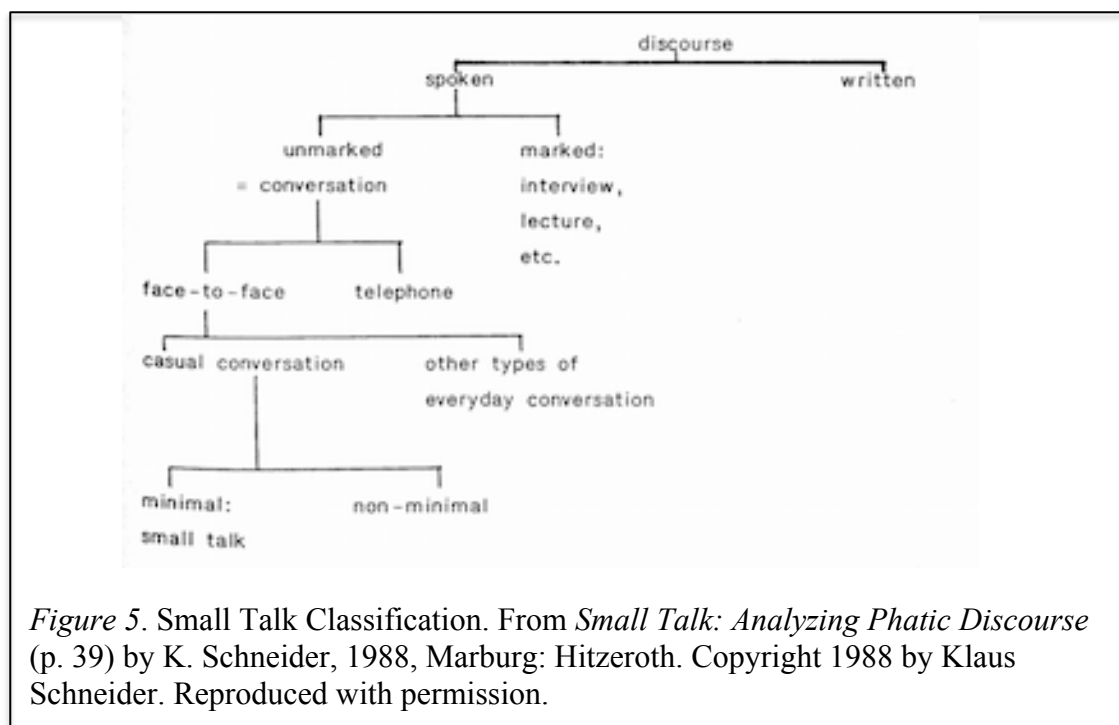
This point of view, although seemingly coherent given the examples these authors

provide, almost seems to challenge the ritual aspect that guides certain social

circumstances in which phatic communication aids in the establishment or maintenance of

bonds, as well as discursive tokens that are used when engaging in phatic communication

that are indeed conventionalized: words, phrases, idioms and even non-verbal

communication and gestures that have become standardized in function and meaning and thus incorporated into the complex normative system of our society. I must now bring about something Coupland (2000/2014) articulated very well:

> Can a sociolinguistic focus support a conception of everyday language as banal?... Should the argument be that even talk which is banal for participants, or at least wholly unexceptional for them at the moment of its production and reception, is nevertheless socio-culturally significant as a performed routine? (Coupland, 2000/2014, p. 41)

The reasons for considering phatic communication as a relevant discourse mechanism are diverse: the importance of the main relational function it serves, the competency that its successful use implies, the information that can be inferred from it, and the ability to reflect in one conversational tool the whole society. The commonness of everyday discourse is often mistaken as marginality, Coupland (2000/2014) believes, but it is there where the heart of sociolinguistics precisely lies.

1.2 Communion versus communication.

It was briefly explained before that most authors do not address the difference between these two terms, and instead use it interchangeably (for example, Coupland et al., 1992; Holba, 2008; Laver, 1974/1975; Schneider, 1988). Laver (1974/1975, 1981) generally uses the terms as synonyms, but in order to analyze Malinowski's work he does use them mainly as an aspect of communication. He refers to *strands* to denote each variable that influences an interaction, like speech, gesture, posture, body movements,

orientation, proximity, eye contact and facial expressions; all aspects he considers in his analysis, which he performs taking a multidimensional perspective: from linguistics, phonetics, psychology, anthropology and sociology.

Coupland et al. (1992) explain Malinowski's *famous dictums* "phatic communion is a type of speech in which social bonds are created by a mere exchange of words" (Malinowski, 1946, p. 315) in a rephrased fashion: "communion among humans will often be marked in speech - 'phatically'" (Coupland et al., 1992, p. 208). They also quote Malinowski's examples of how this comes to be: "purposeless expressions of preference or aversions, accounts of irrelevant happenings, comments on what is perfectly obvious" (Malinowski, 1946, p. 315) as the main manifestation of phatic tokens that are commonly referred to as small talk. Another of Malinowski's examples mentioned by these authors is when participants inquire about heath, which is precisely in the context of what they were looking to research. Their analysis of the linguistic tokens used to initiate conversations amongst elderly people regarding their health lead them to conclude that "phatic communion cannot be defined as a type of talk, although the term can still locate an intriguing cluster of sociopsychological orientations to talk" (Coupland et al., 1992, p. 214).

Schneider (1988) frequently equals phatic communion to small talk, however he later quotes Wardhaugh to highlight the important distinction between the two: phatic communication can be seen as the mean for phatic communion (p. 25), or, in other words, small talk as the means for bonding, which is precisely the central argument here, a point

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also shared by Laver (1974/1975) and Senft (2005), who think perhaps the term

"communication" primes over "communion" because its manifestations are more visible.

Indeed, I have established here that communication is bonding in action. Ultimately,

Schneider focuses on the relevant aspect of phaticity: "Yet this distinction would overlook

the fact that, after all, it is still phatic communion utterances whose meaning is secondary

to their function, i.e. the indication of so called solidarity, however vague." (Schneider,

1988, p. 29).

In a later work Coupland (2003) seems to make a distinction by calling phatic

communion "the prototypical instance of small talk" (p. 5). However, what really matters

is that both "phatic communion" and "phatic communication" have a strong relational

purpose, they serve to — inter alia — maintain and establish social bonds, to help us

interact reducing potential bond anxiety that can arise when the bond is jeopardized, and

to ease the way in which the initial phases of an interaction unfold.

2. Scope of Phatic Communication

One of the purposes of the present work is to formally broaden the perceived

scope of phatic communication. I briefly suggested previously that most authors conceive

phatic communication exclusively as a speech function, which implies it is limited to oral

communication. The exception is in those authors who researched phatic communication

in social media and saw the many other ways in which phaticity can arise besides speech.

Therefore the following classification offers a holistic view of the total scope of phatic

communication, in every possible way of manifestation: certainly oral, but also written,

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and even non-verbal, which includes gestures; all possible in both offline and online

settings, and by personal or corporate agents.

2.1 Oral communication.

Oral communication refers, of course, to the spoken word, a very expressive form

to convey in an audible way one's thoughts to someone else. The speaker requires at least

a certain level of skill in language and vocabulary, as well as other desirable abilities in

intonation, pronunciation and narration.

When it comes to phatic communication, most authors have considered it to be

within the realm of oral communication; but what makes a communicative interaction

phatic is the tokens used, topics addressed, protocols followed and the objective with

which interactants engage in it: to establish or maintain social bonds. For example, when

passing an acquaintance in the hall, we can say, "How is it going?" and likely the other

person will provide a brief reply without either of you stopping or getting into details of

precisely *how* it is going.

2.2 Written communication.

Written communication is, in general, the conveyance of words in a medium that

allows for the inscription of text in order to carry a message. It requires an extra set of

skills since, besides mastering language and vocabulary, writers must have knowledge of

the signs for each letter, as well as the ability to apply grammar and semantics in order to

come up with a text that in itself can express one's thoughts without the help of any other

type of extra linguistic resources like body language, intonation, or gestures. Informal written communication also allows for signs and other added graphic elements to make up for the loss of expressivity from adapting oral communication.

In phatic communication, written language can not only express the same as we would orally, but it can also further create cultural codes, abbreviations and standardized expressions to help convey our desire to establish and maintain the bond. The paramount of written phatic communication is found in online communication, however examples can also be found offline, such as a coworker could leaving a note on your desk that says "Have a good day :)".

2.3 Gestures.

Any action we perform towards someone else without the use of words is considered a gesture. Typically gestures are a sign for something else, which becomes more apparent when we think of sign language or the way in which animals communicate. Cats, for example, bump their heads as a sign of love, and *phatically* lift their tails as a greeting gesture.

Gestures are culturally determined, which means there are widespread differences of which ones are used within a culture, and even differences on the choice of signs to signify certain notions. Thus, in the same way that oral and written communication requires a certain level of skill in language and grammar, the use of gestures requires as well a level of cognitive competency to select and mimic the appropriate gesture. For example, in Latin countries a hand closed with the fingers extended means a place is

really crowded, but the same gesture in Italy — as it is popularly known — manifests the displeasure for someone, put euphemistically. The meaning of gestures can also depend on the context of the relationship or the specific situation; hugging, for example, can be out of true love, but it can also be a mere gesture of consolation.

Phatic gestures are conceived here as any action that helps maintain or establish bonds. For example, gestures for greeting and parting, like waving of hands, deference gestures, bringing one hand closed and extended to the forehead and taking it off; amicus physical gestures, like hugs, pats, rubbing the other's back; as well as different gestures characteristic of turn-taking in conversational interactions, to name a few. In the online world we certainly can find phatic gestures that are a typified action with an established meaning that allows users to connect or remain connected. Here I will refer to the most common ones, such as *pokes*, *retweets*, *follows*, *Likes*, *favourites*, but they are also any other social media token that are used as part of the rituals of social interaction already typified in online communities.

Although not a gesture per se, a brief analysis of the use of hashtags as phatic tokens in social media will be introduced at the end of the present work. Hashtags are considered here as a tagging convention that enables connectivity between users, allowing them to establish contact and bond.

2.4 Online and offline.

The notion of online and offline settings were briefly introduced in the conceptualization chapter, with the intention of offering a wider scope for the study of

phatic communication than the one it typically has in academic writing, with, again, the exception of those authors dealing with social media and Miller's phatic culture.

Both online and offline settings are spheres of social action, where individuals interact and thus have the possibility to establish and maintain social bonds. Rarely authors dealing with online issues feel the need to address these definitions of what is online and what is offline in an epistemological way, because it is understood as *common knowledge*, specially for a reader who is engaging with that subject. Hence, the conceptualization I offer here is a product of personal experience, and perhaps even falls into dated terminology for these two settings, but most certainly a differentiation had to be made.

It has been noted before that in the present work "offline" is conceived as all that happens without the intervention of technology. On the other hand, "online" is an abstract noun that denotes the *virtual world*, a space that exists only through computer technology and where the most diverse kinds of information are hosted, and accessed by individuals, or *users*. Literally, the term means to be on-line, denoting the finalization of a process through which users get *on a line* to access the interconnected web of computer networks that is the Internet. The popular use of the term comes from the unavoidable requisite of *logging in* through technology to access the Internet; by doing this, we are logged in, connected, online.

Some of the communication we engage in online aims at reproducing the same type of communication that we can engage in offline, but with the added plus of remote

physical location, and the possibility of interacting with an extended network. On the downside, online communication lacks the added expressivity of in-person encounters where interactants can add meaning to the conversation with the decoding of cues like body language, position, gesticulations, and the like. Nonetheless, for the most part, as will be discussed later, the online world is constructed as a representation of the offline world, and thus the interactions are often mirrored as well. Social networks particularly have come to offer a space for interaction, bonding, and networking that have become an important tool in relationship management, or bond management, and not only for individuals, but also for corporations or brands that found in this medium an opportunity to become embodied in profiles that allow them to connect with their audiences.

4.1.4 Personal or corporate sender.

The popularity of social media platforms became apparent around 2003 with a blooming of sites dedicated to sharing interests online and connecting with others. Until then, other mediums were available, like blogs, chat rooms, or various communication software, but they were not as popular as social media came to be. Later on, Facebook became a giant in the industry, benchmarking the dynamics of social media; and a little after that, the video platform YouTube became a huge sensation with their slogan "Broadcast Yourself". Twitter was the next big thing, and it is also currently used by millions of users. And perhaps the latest *boom* in social media has been Instagram, a photo-sharing platform that has become widely popular in the last few years. As this

thesis is being written, maybe other apps to socialize are on the rise, like Snapchat and Vine.

What used to be limited to chats and email, blogs and personal sites, was suddenly transformed with the widespread use of these social media platforms. The way in which people interacted online was radically changed and a new universe of possibilities opened up for anyone with access to technology, and with the only prerequisite of setting up a profile, which sometimes can even be left blank. In the midst of this, companies and institutions saw the opportunity to use this new *space* to connect with their audiences: now a corporate website was an archaic model of unidirectional communication, and brands had discovered the possibility to *engage* with their audience in a more *personal* level, that is from brand to consumer and from consumer to brand. The relationships these corporate users form with their audiences online can be called *brand bonds*, and they are a type of pseudo-bond in which the level of intimacy is low, but nevertheless infinitely valuable, especially from a marketing perspective when it is done right.

Social media has been an immense source for companies and brands to find what their users and consumers are thinking, not only about their product, but in general, which has taken profiling to the next level. As Miller notes:

> Strategies such as data mining, consumer profiling, 'buzz' monitoring, and reading brand relationships are much more compatible with the small bits of 'data' exchanged in brief phatic exchanged than the narratives and dialogue associated with, for example, blogging. Phatic communication is much easier

to put in a database, and much easier to package and sell to those looking to

market products or gain consumer insights. (Miller, 2008, p. 398)

Twitter, for example, has evolved significantly in these five years, and it has taken

an interesting turn from mainly individual profiles to a proliferation of corporate,

institutional, branded and even celebrity profiles, becoming in many ways a place for

these *newer* kind of users to interact with their audiences; some with the intention of

conveying genuine content information, and some consisting mainly of interactions that

are phatic.

Nevertheless, today companies and brands can interact directly with their

stakeholders, allowing for brand bonds to be formed. Goffman's (1955/1972) concept of

face can also be used to represent a corporate brand: one thing is what we construct,

another the image our audience has in their minds; if we want the latter to match the

former, we must act accordingly, because the audience's perceptions will not only rely on

our fancy logo or expensive advertising, not even sometimes on our effortful direct

marketing actions (which, in a way would be the marketing equivalent to Goffman's

facework), but brand image is also based in overall behavior. Since being in face is

signaled by pride and thus strengthens bonds, companies and brands online put significant

effort in making their presence be worth something for their business.

A distinction needs to be made, nevertheless. Individuals online interact amongst

themselves in a way that largely resembles their communication offline, but simply

migrated to the online setting and with the added *noise* of technological mediation. This

happens when, for example, two friends share messages, voice notes, videos, Likes, pokes, favourites, retweets, or engage in any type of direct communication through platforms of communication online. On the other side, there is corporate communication, which is strategic and designed professionally with certain brand goals in mind. This happens when one of the interactants online is represented by a profile for a brand, a company, or an institution as a way to engage with its publics. This specific type of communication does not take place offline in the same way as interpersonal communication between individuals does. For example, a brand can interact with a personal user in Twitter or Facebook, but they cannot interact with a person in an offline setting, unless they are represented at events or other kinds of acts in their name. Regardless, we can still identify ways in which companies do try to connect with us offline that can be identified as phatic.

Please refer to the Appendix for a detailed list of examples of every aspect of the scope of phatic communication explained here, which I have divided according to setting and sender.

3. Functions of Phatic Communication

Although the main function remains to be the establishment and maintenance of social bonds, and hence the chosen theoretical frame, there are other functions of phatic communication found in the literature; some are found explicitly, some others can be inferred. As Holmes (2000/2014) indicated, phatic communication serves more functions than the primordial relational function, "It is not generally possible to parcel out meaning

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into neat packages of referential on the one hand and social or affective on the other. Talk is inherently multifunctional" (p. 88-89).

Three main functions, with various sub-functions, are presented here: relational, indexical, and normative. The following is a suggested organizational structure with a comprehensive intention to include all the functions of phatic communication; however, it could certainly be seen under different perspectives. For example, politeness is presented here as a normative function of phatic communication given that when we engage in greeting and parting rituals we are being polite according to a normative structure internalized as a consequence of a specific socialization process. However, politeness can also be seen as a framework for phatic communication, since it is a wider sociological phenomenon that encompasses phatic communication as just one of the ways in which politeness can be manifested.

3.1 Relational function.

This central function of phatic communication is explained in the theoretical frame of this work thanks mainly to Scheff's (1990) Bond Theory. Nonetheless, this function is also commonly alluded to by most authors who deal with phatic communication in many different ways, which I have grouped here as *relational*, a category that encompasses a few different functions in itself, and all the different terms that come to signify the same. Some authors indeed use the term "relational" to denote the function phatic communication serves (Coupland et al., 1992; Felice, 2013; Holba, 2008; Jakobson, 1960; Jensen & Scott, 2013; Laver, 1974/1975; Malinowski, 1946; Miller,

2008, 2011; Padilla, 2001, 2005, 2013; Senft, 2005; Ventola, 1979), but some use the

term "social" (Coupland, 2003 Graham, 2013; Holmes & Fillary, 2000; McCarthy, 2003;

Penn & Watermeyer, 2009; Posmer & Hamstra, 2013), and some use the preferred term

here, "bonds" (Berendt, 1997; Boyle, 2000; Burnard, 2003; Desalles, 2007; Endrass et al.,

2010; Pullin, 2010; Ritchie, 2011; Schneider, 1988; Wang et. al, 2011), and also many

authors combine them or use other similar terms.

It has been mentioned here before that Malinowski (1946) conceived language as

a form of action; this helps to represent communication as a performance and as relational

tool. According to Malinowski, the opposite of this would be a kind of more ideational

talk, what he called "means of thinking", which is an "instrument of reflection" (p. 315).

Action and reflection are thus separated not only as different functions of language, but as

processes offering significantly different outcomes: literature and poetry, for example, on

the first part, versus gossip and chit chat on the later. Tracy and Naughton (2000/2014)

presumed that "in an academic work where the purpose of language was assumed to be

representation, Malinowski's position was truly radical, a precursor of the speech as

action that appeared several decades later in Austin's work (1962)" (p. 157)

Alqinai (2010) offers a point of view that focuses on action as well, as the

performance aspect of communicative acts: "the notion that language is not merely

referential but serves a communicative purpose with a definitive goal has led to the

development of the study of 'language in use' or 'discourse'" (p. 1). This constitutes a

performative function of language, which, according to Alqinai, is of primordial

importance when taking a sociopragmatic approach. For example, she explains, ideas

such as Goffman's (1955/1972) concept of face, and the notion of politeness have shifted

the focus from what is *meant* with discourse to what is *done* with it instead (Alquinai,

2010). And what we *do* with phatic communication is establish and maintain social

bonds.

To illustrate this, Coupland (2000/2014) uses an example from a British Telecom

brochure she collected in 1997 about the value of conversations:

> It may be just Gail's way of saying 'I like you. I value your company.'
> To dismiss this kind of conversation - small talk, as we call it - as
> unimportant is to deny Gail the opportunity to demonstrate her
> friendship.
>
> (British Telecom 1997: 15-16)

Figure 6. British Telecom Brochure on Small Talk. From *Small Talk* (p. 57) by
J. Coupland, 2014, Hoboken: Taylor and Francis. Copyright 2014 by Taylor and
Francis. Reproduced with permission.

Of course, as Coupland herself suspected, these tips were likely introduced in order to

keep people on the phone and bring more business to the company. Nevertheless, the

validity of their observation stands.

3.1.1 Acknowledgment.

Before bonds can be established or maintained thanks to a successful

communicative interaction with the help of phatic communication, there has to be a

moment of recognition between the interactants. Firth (1972) studies formalized ritualistic

behaviour in greeting and parting, and interestingly enough he starts with a sort of

operative definition for these marginal phases of interaction, which no other author (of the

ones reviewed here, at least) has done: "greeting is the recognition of an encounter with another person as socially acceptable. Parting, in a social sense, is the recognition that the encounter has been acceptable." (p.1). These marginal phases of interaction are central to bond management and in how we evaluate the interaction itself and the bond we share with the interactant, which is why they are paramount in phatic communication.

Firth's definition is of course very general, but at least offers a frame to work with. By "socially acceptable" Firth refers to that which is incorporated to the interactants' *social universe* (Firth, 1972, p.1), implying that a lot of the people we share the physicality of our world with could very well be invisible because we never interact with them, we do not acknowledge them. A greeting, then, becomes an acknowledgement of presence, an incorporation into one's social universe, and as it is conceived here, a desire to establish or maintain social bonds. With phatic communication, and Malinowski would strongly agree, Firth (1972) explains greeting and parting tokens have a literal meaning that is irrelevant because what counts is the acknowledgement of the participants and the bonds they are establishing or maintaining.

An example offered in a previous chapter of two coworkers running into each other briefly in the workplace and one asking the other "How was your vacation?" without in fact stopping to hear the reply, was meant to explain this function of phatic communication. Again, the coworker did not intend to stop and talk extendedly, perhaps she has no real interest in knowing the details of her coworker's vacation, but the phrase works as a way to acknowledge that she is back at work, and because they share a bond,

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she noticed she was gone, and notices now she has returned. Graham (2013) offered

another example:

> When I greet the woman at the grocery store check-out line with "How's it
>
> going?" I don't really want to know how she is doing; I am simply
>
> acknowledging her as a fellow human being and eliminating the awkward
>
> silence. (Graham, 2013, p.2)

As a marker of sociolinguistic skill necessary for small talk, Holmes and Fillary (2000)

comment on how these sort of greeting tokens while passing are situations in which often

workers with intellectual disabilities err, trying instead to further engage in the

conversation, "sometimes launched into a detailed account of their current medical

worries" (p. 279), taking literally polite inquiries as the one mentioned above.

As will be discussed in a subsection below, the ritualistic nature of

communication, and here presented as a ritualistic function of phatic communication as

well, offers a sociocultural framework of action, where participants have established

codes to be able to acknowledge others with ease. According to Scheff's (1990)

Deference-Emotion system, conformity to exterior norms is something rewarded and

signaled by deference, which triggers a feeling of pride; and nonconformity is something

punished by lack of deference and the feeling of shame. This rationale signifies the very

foundation of politeness routines.

A *state of talk* is necessary for this function, because participants acknowledge

each other's faces in order to engage in greeting routines. Scheff (1990) references

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Goffman's (1955/1972) state of talk to describe the ritual conditions for face-to-face

interaction. He proposed two requirements for it: a communication system in place that

allows for the interaction to take place, and a Deference-Emotion system that allows for

evaluations: "the first system enables the speakers to make known to each other their

thoughts; the second, their evaluation of each other's status" (p. 6). While, according to

Scheff, Goffman focuses on legitimacy and ratification of each other's face while

interacting, to Scheff himself it's about the emotions that arise when an encounter does

not go as smooth as it should go because this causes the bond to feel threatened (Scheff,

1990, p. 7).

In a state of talk, interactants are open to having an interaction; they tacitly accept

the *lines and faces* others offer. This kind of mutual acceptance seems to be a basic

structural feature of interaction, especially in the interaction of face-to-face talk

(Goffman, 1955/1972). This social dynamic implies a state of cooperation, which I will

address in the next section as well. In this state, Goffman suggests, social relationships are

governed by a tacit social sensibility that acknowledges face and facilitates optimal

encounters:

> This perspective nicely accounts, for example, for the little ceremonies of
>
> greeting and farewell which occur when people begin a conversational
>
> encounter or depart one. Greetings provide a way of showing that a
>
> relationship is still what it was at the termination of the previous
>
> coparticipation, and, typically, that this relationship involves sufficient

> suppression of hostility for the participants temporarily to drop their guards
>
> and talk. (Goffman, 1955/1972, p. 343)

Earlier, Goffman explained:

> One's own face and the face of others are constructs of the same order; it is
>
> the rules of the group and the definition of the situation which determine how
>
> much feeling is to have for face and how this feeling is to be distributed
>
> among the faces involved. (Goffman, 1955/1972, p. 320)

Although by this Goffman is stressing the importance of context, which I will address in the next section as well, we can determine from this quote a relationship between Scheff's (1990) and Goffman's (1955/1972) theory without investing in a discussion about construction of identity, because it is not the object of the present study. Being in face is signaled by pride and consequentially strengthens bonds, and being out of face or in the wrong face, is signaled by shame and causes weakening of bonds. The fear of losing face can also be paired with bond anxiety. Face can also be given, as Goffman points out, which implies a situation would have to be arranged in which someone will perceive you a certain way, a way which benefits you (Goffman, 1955/1972, p. 321). This could also be seen as *face gain*, although this is a term Goffman does not use, but is certainly an important notion to keep in mind for corporate communication, public relations, and the many direct marketing strategies through which companies and brands try to engage with us in order to enhance their image.

Another parallelism is that in interpersonal communication, both phatic

communication and face are framed within a politeness system, as Laver (1981) also

notes, further indicating that linguistic routines are a tool for polite behaviour, and serve

the purpose of avoiding face threats (p. 289). For him when we engage in linguistic

routines of politeness, "it is not unreasonable to suspect that face is potentially at risk, and

that the negotiations that are being tacitly conducted are possibly negotiations of social

fellowship between the participants" (Laver, 1981, p. 292). This means face management

can also be equaled to bond management; and even more so, we can assume that they are

both performed at the same time. Bond management and constant monitoring bonds is of

primordial importance, since according to Scheff (1990), "in all human contact, if bonds

are not being built, maintained or repaired, they are being damaged" (p. 76).

3.1.2 Social bonds.

Besides Scheff's Bond Theory, which serves as the theoretical framework for the

present work, some authors use specifically the terminology "maintenance of bonds" to

reference the main function of phatic communication. Other similar terms are used as

well to convey the same idea, such as "relational", "social" or even "friendship".

In the opening phrases of her essay, Ventola (1979) observes that this relational

function of phatic communication is also a purpose of language in general: "Language is a

means of communication. But the transmission of informative messages is not its only

function. It is also used for extra bonding and maintaining contact between people." (p.

267). She then proceeds to analyze the work of Malinowski, and debates about human

gregarious nature. A similar argument is found in Dessalles (2007). He believes as well

that language in general plays a central role in establishing social bonds (p. 315). Their

main argument to justify this, since throughout they maintain a fairly scientific

perspective, especially from a biological and evolutionary point of view, is to first explain

a known fact about primates that has been extrapolated into a theory. The way in which

chimpanzees establish hierarchies and bonds is by grooming each other, these authors

say, referencing the work of Dunbar. Nonetheless, this is a laborious one-on-one task, so

with our societal groups getting bigger as we evolved into Homo Sapiens, we had to

figure out another way to bond with more members of our group with less effort

(Dessalles, 2007, p. 316-317). This became possible with language.

Although Dessalles is not entirely convinced of the veracity this hypothesis may

hold because he feels it undermines the outstanding importance of language, it is quite

pertinent to my argument here. However, evidently certain specifications should be made:

not all language contributes to bonding, not all bonding is the same, and only some forms

of bonding can indeed be achieved through certain communicative mechanisms. Phatic

communication is discourse mechanism that is oriented towards bonding, but

furthermore, this form of communication is not limited to verbal exchanges, and not even

to language; it encompasses the many ways in which we communicate with others as a

means of transmitting our desire to bond.

Coupland (2003) does attribute to small talk specifically a prosocial function,

since it "enacts social cohesiveness, reduces inherent values of social contact, and helps to

structure social interaction" (p. 1). Padilla (2013), on his part, quotes Malinowski to define phatic communion, and explains it in his own words as "conversation devoid[ed] of relevant factual content but with a great latent significance because it created, maintains and/or enhances friendly relationships" (p.132). The bottom line of all these arguments, which sums up the relational function of phatic communication, is that we use communication not only in a transactional or ideational, or reflective, or informative way, but also as a means to *relate* to others.

Coupland et al. (1992) also address this, quoting Fawcett as follows: "it is not that we are not sharing information when we say *nice day but it looks as if it may rain soon*, but that the informational purpose is rather weak" (p. 215). In fact, these authors use the word "phaticity" to refer to the quality of an interaction when a "speaker's relational goals supersede their commitment to factuality and instrumentality" (p. 207). Schneider compares this to similar differentiations made by Watzlawick et al. and Grice, where one type of communication can be seen as "instrumental", and the other as "phatic" (p. 1). I have maintained here throughout a difference between the informational, or reflective, or ideational aspect of communication as opposed to the relational aspect, which has also been called communication in action as per Malinowski (1946), which is the side of communication that is seen as phatic. Personally I find the word "instrumental" to be, perhaps, not the most suitable to describe the non-phatic, given that serving a phatic function denotes instrumentality nonetheless. For example, Tracy and Naughton (2000/2014) researched conceptions about small talk in popular press and academia. They

found instrumentality to be the main aspect of focus, given that small talk is useful in "helping individuals accomplish social goals such as managing impressions, putting people at ease, building connection, winning approval and predisposing a listener to one's perspective" (p. 143). So when the word "instrumental" is used to describe the non-phatic in the literature, I see it more as "transactional" which can be considered as when it serves a purpose with more specific goals, like when we convey information. As Brown and Levinson (1987) put it, phatic talk is that which is "more closely related to types of social relationship than to activities" (p. 92).

Having said this, phatic communication can as well be used in a transactional matter, as a politeness protocol to start the interaction and ease things along when a transaction needs to be made. For example when we buy something, we frequently greet the clerk first with a variety of formulaic greetings; or when we need to get something done, for instance at work, we are likely to start with a little small talk, which can also be placed at the end to dissipate potential hostility from what could seem like an order or a command. But generally the *issue* with phatic communication — for those who have an issue with it — is that it seems to be voided of relevant content, considering often relevancy is measured in terms of information, ideas, or reflection. As Laver (1974/1975) noted, quoting Hayakawa: "it is completely impossible for us in society to talk only when we 'have something to say'" (p. 220). Relatedly, Brown and Levinson (1987) explain, according to the work of Scollon, that communication is seen as a generative mechanism that needs to be constantly humming simply in order to know it has not broken down.

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This is what phatic communication does, it hums; a reference also noted by Coupland alone in a later work (2003), and Rodríguez-Ponce, (2011).

In his work, Malinowski (1946) uses the term "purposive activities" to denote those which oppose to the ones that lead to phatic communion, which he deems as "purposeless", as Coupland et al. (1992) also noted, which include "hunting, tilling soil, and war in 'primitive' societies" (p. 208). These authors take on Malinowski's work to highlight communication as a form of action:

> Malinowski nevertheless recognized phatic talk to be a form of action, serving
>
> 'to establish bonds of personal union between people brought together by the
>
> mere need of companionship'. Even though it may 'not serve any purpose of
>
> communicating ideas', phatic communion is functional in defusing the threat
>
> of taciturnity. (Coupland et al.,1992, p. 208)

This quote from these authors calls attention to the function of social lubricant, which is an important means to achieve the main function of bonding. Malinowski (1946) defined taciturnity as "not only unfriendliness but directly a bad character" (p. 314), a feel that could be inferred by the participants in a situation of silence, which he recognizes as dangerous and something that must be avoided.

Schneider's work (1988) starts precisely by saying there is a phatic function of language, "whose main aim is to establish and maintain social contact" (p. 1). He tackles the issue of meaning, since this was, after all, what started it all when Malinowski was doing his ethnographical work and asked "Are words in Phatic Communion used

primarily to convey meaning, the meaning which is symbolically theirs? Certainly not!" (Malinowski, 1946, p. 313). In this case, Malinowski uses symbolic meaning to refer to that which words are referents of, the distinctive abstraction and codification processes of language as a system of symbols. Thusly, what Malinowski is conveying is that in phatic communion the meaning of words is not, as Schneider (1988) noted himself, transactional - it is, however, relational and inferential, which I maintain here.

Another of Malinowski's phrases, which has been quoted as well by Senft (2005) and Coupland et al. (1992) works to reinforce this notion: "phatic communion serves to establish bonds of personal union between people brought together by the mere need of companionship and does not serve any purpose of communicating ideas" (Malinowski, 1946, p. 315), and he even uses the term "the bonding function of language" (p. 227).

3.1.3 Community and solidarity.

It was mentioned previously that a critical take on what a community means is present in Miller's (2011) work on digital culture. He highlights that despite being paramount in sociology, the term "community" remains to be ambiguous because it is rather used too generally without specification, or too specifically without situating it in the bigger societal picture (Miller, 2011 p. 184). Initially, the term was used to describe "group-ness", as opposed to the characteristic individualism, and often isolation, that came with industrialization and deepened with the consolidation of capitalism in every aspect of society (Miller, 2011, p. 186). For Gruzd et al. (2011), "community" is about an imagined set of people perceived as being similar. Perhaps especially when we think

about discriminating between similar people that have certain characteristics in common,

we find there is a *groupness* that does somehow correspond with similar individuals that

share, for instance, origin, race, or sexual preference. The notion of community discussed

here goes beyond that, and debates the level of moral and emotional commitment

members have for each other, beyond whatever it is that makes them similar; it alludes to

the notion of "caring for others" and realizing one's own actions have an impact in others.

Ultimately, Miller's (2011) concern had to do with the fact that in an

industrialized era what tore people apart was literally the distance; a geographical

distance that resulted in a consequence of other distances, such as distant relationships,

distant emotions, distant type of interactions. Fast-forwarding a few years ahead,

technology and electronic communication, and now digital social spheres, continued this

shift from societal life in traditional societies with increased notoriety. Consequently, we

can understand what Giddens conceived as the three observable aspects that characterize

late-modern society:

-The separation of time and space

-The disembedding of social relationships and organizations

-The reflexive ordering of social relations. (in Miller, 2011, p. 188)

Evidently, Miller alludes to the concepts of Gemeinschaft (commonly translated as

"community") and Gesellschaft (usually translated as "association") from Tönnies. The

two concepts are antagonistic, since the first means a true sense of togetherness, which

implies emotional (some might say moral) and practical commitment, and the latter is

related to the notion of cooperation characteristic of the Social Contract Theory.

According to Social Contract Theory, there is a tacit *social contract* that gives the

authority (or the sovereign) the authorization (or power) to govern on behalf of a

community (Waluchow, 2004). The reason why people would surrender their endless

freedoms is because it is a means to achieve peace through cooperation for the sake of

everyone instead of a few, allowing them to live in certainty and safety.

Solidarity is another concept related to these notions and to the concept of

community itself. Solidarity can be seen as a requirement for community. Scheff's (1990)

theory uses both concepts, although his theory parts from Durkheim's in the way they see

solidarity: for Durkheim, Scheff explains, bonding involved in organic solidarity is

"stronger than that in traditional societies, that is, mechanical society"; but for Scheff,

"communal solidarity is the strongest force in human affairs and... the absence of such

force plays a central role in social conflict and turmoil" (p. 73). Solidarity arises in groups

of people precisely when there's an understanding of these factors, just like attunement is

the product of intact bonds.

In fact, Scheff sees solidarity as the groupal equivalent to bonding: "bonding

between individuals and solidarity between groups both depend upon mutual trust, which

in turn is usually connected to emotional as well as intellectual ties" (Scheff, 1990, p. 11),

as his Deference-Emotion system suggests. Trust needs stability, thus the constant change

that is characteristic of modern societies makes bonds, and solidarity, and furthermore

community, more fragile. As he points out, "sociology as a discipline arose out of the

realization that modernization — the rise of urban, industrial societies — was destructive of community" (Scheff, 1990, p. 12). In fact, Scheff believes in modern times we have shifted our focus into individualism and not given human nature, with emotions and all, the attention needed in our busy schedules where productivity is the main goal. Individualism can be considered a distraction that forms some sort of curtain that blinds our view of the importance of the bonds that are keeping us together:

> I propose that modern societies have institutionalized two defenses against the
> loss of secure bonds. The first myth is individualism, and the denial and
> repression of emotions that are associated with social bonds - pride and
> shame. The second myth follows from the denial of complexity in human
> affairs: human nature and social order are simple matter, easily understood.
> (Scheff, 1990, p.12)

Later on, Scheff (1990) uses the word "ideology" instead of myths, to connect this postulate in a more modern way as well. What concerns us here is the relational aspect of community he expresses so well in his work. Taking his statement about bonds being *the force that holds society together* (p. 4), the next logic assumption would be to say that the establishment and maintenance of bonds could also work as the foundation for community — but not just any kind of bonds.

Based on this, it could be said that what Scheff (1990) is constructing though his work and specifically through his Deference-Emotion system is a theory of social solidarity, very much in line with the Social Contract theory, although using emotions

instead of rationality. The bottom-line goal, in any case, is cooperation and co-existence achieving optimum results: benefits in one case, emotionally reinforced bonds in the other.

As it was explained before, Scheff's Deference-Emotion system deals with two polar emotions: pride and shame to both manage and monitor bond status (Scheff, 1990). According to him, and we shall easily agree, Goffman's notion of embarrassment and anticipation of embarrassment is inherent to all social interactions as well. Scheff (1990) uses shame to frame all negative emotions (including embarrassment or humiliation), and pride for the positive ones (including fellow feeling). Shame is manifested internally and externally as demotion; and pride is manifested internally as well, and externally as deference. (p. 74-75). Phatic communication is framed here as a deference mechanism to signal pride, and following Scheff (1990): "pride signals and generates solidarity. Shame signals and generates alienation" (p. 74), so indeed, we can conclude phatic communication signals and promotes solidarity and, furthermore, ignoring the relevance of this discourse mechanism can lead to alienation.

Here I consider phatic communication is not only a relevant social tool for the establishment and maintenance of bonds, but consequently, it is as well a mechanism that helps in the foundation of society and even the establishment of community and solidarity. Nevertheless, as I just hinted, it is not any kind of bonds that will hold societies together and instill a sense of community, but most certainly as a discourse mechanism

with a strong relational function, phatic communication is there to assist in taking the first step, it helps us start something.

3.2 Indexical function.

This second main function of phatic communication comes irrefutably from the work of Laver (1974/1975). In his analysis of phatic communion, Laver notes one of the three key terms in semiotics that prevails is not symbol or icon, but index, because it reveals information about the speaker. For him, "phatic communion is the communication of indexical facts about the speakers' identities, attributes, and attitudes" (Laver, 1974/1975, p. 217). Similarly, Schneider (1988) indicates that there is a dichotomy in both action oriented and identity oriented communicative acts, a distinction he takes from Schlieben-Lange.

An important observation Laver (1974/1975) makes is in regards to linguistic tokens, and he establishes they are deictic (p. 222); hence they are indicative of the context. What can they indicate? They can give information about persons, place, time, or social information of the interactants. Laver defines the indexical function as that which gives information about: "identity and attributes of the interactants, and their psychosocial relationship" (Laver, 1974/1975, p. 232). Since this information can primarily be inferred from the selection of linguistic tokens the participants use, he indicates that even though indeed interactants chose from a limited repertoire or tokens to engage in phatic communion which accounts for its ritualistic nature, that does not mean the selection is irrelevant; in fact, the choice is precisely what contributes to conveying indexical

information about the interactants, and furthermore that choice limits the entire semantic

scheme of the interaction (Laver, 1974/1975, p. 222).

In the previous function of phatic communication, I considered communication

does not only serve an informational function, but also a relational one. Here, we go back

to the informational function, but we make a distinction between *operational information*

and *indexical information* (Laver, 1974/1975). The first kind corresponds to what I called

the transactional aspect of communication, when we talk to get stuff done, so it is

communicated for a specific purpose; the second is that which can be inferred about the

situation and the interlocutor. Phatic communication offers the second one, and thus it can

be said, as I have before, that it contributes to the construction and maintenance of face.

According to Goffman:

> When an individual enters the presence of others, they commonly seek to
>
> acquire information about him or to bring into play information about him
>
> already possessed. They will be interested in general socio-economic status,
>
> his conception of self, his attitude towards them, his competence, his
>
> trustworthiness, etc. (Goffman, 1959, p. 13)

He came to this conclusion after analyzing all aspects of non-verbal communication, but

it applies to phatic communication as well: the visibility that the actual phrases being

communicated were not as relevant as the other aspects inferable from the interaction.

A brief mention to Relevance Theory is pertinent here. Žgarac and Clark (1999)

worked, as did Padilla (2001, 2005), within the frame of Relevance Theory to survey the

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field of communication and determine what can really be considered as phatic. In their

work they say the term *phatic* should be used instead for interpretations, given the

cognitive process that is required to interpret phatic utterances. "Phatic interpretations",

they say, take place "only when non-phatic interpretations are not consistent with the

Principle of Relevance" (Žgarac and Clark, 1999, p. 321) which is related to the choices

we make in communication to convey what we want to in a specific case, as opposed to

other choices in other situations. Something can be considered phatic in certain context

because it is not relevant. These authors offer a list of things that can be intensively

communicated — with manifested intentionality — and they analyze a few dialogues to

determine their implications to see if they are indeed phatic in nature or not, depending on

their relevance.

Padilla's (2001) work also takes on the work of Žegarac and Clark (1999) in

Relevance Theory to state that phatic communication is "a social institution, and can also

be institutionalized in two different ways, either by standardization or by

conventionalization" (p. 204). Standardized phatic expressions keep their linguistic

meaning, and conventionalized phatic utterances do not keep their linguistic meaning and

convey contextual meaning (Padilla, 2011, p. 204). This notion of standardization and

conventionalization will be further explored in the next subsection in regards to social

norms and politeness. In any case, both types of phatic expressions allow for a process of

phatic interpretation that the receiver can perform to infer the sender's intentions and

additional information that is actually non-phatic but quite substantial information about

the interaction, the context and the interlocutors. This information is useful for bond

management. Nicolle and Clark also noticed this process when they observed that phatic

expressions "encode procedural information that constrains the inferential process by

which phatic implications are derived" (in Padilla, 2001, p. 204).

Relevancy can also be understood as that which is pertinent for the interaction and

the participants. Coupland (2000/2014) touches on this when she uses the following

dialogue from Cheepen and Monaghan:

A: Have a good weekend?

B: Yes, quite nice. Spent Saturday evening with Sue.

A: What did she have to say?

B: Nothing really. (Coupland, 2000, p. 50)

These authors note, according to Coupland, that these kinds of conversations have private

value for the interactants, but are irrelevant to a third party, hence subject B's reply. There

could be two reasons for this; one, whatever they talked about was not relevant for subject

A, perhaps none of his or her concern. But a second reason could be that they talked about

nothing indeed, meaning their interaction remained phatic but the relational value of

spending time together is precisely what made it, in subject B's words, "quite nice". This

nothingness, is what Eggins and Slade called "the central paradox of casual conversation"

(in Coupland, 2000/2014, p. 51).

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3.3 Normative function.

The third and last main function of phatic communication encompasses many different functions within it. If we start from a social-constructivist paradigm, reality is something unanimously known to the participants and it is constantly being constructed and re-constructed by them. In Berger and Luckman's recognized work *The Social Construction of Reality* (1967), they define the world of everyday life as " a world that originates in [the participants'] thoughts and actions, and is maintained as real by these"; it constructs an "intersubjective commonsense world" (p. 20). Of course, as they will later explain, this requires coexisting with others and engaging at some level in many different interactions with them, because, as they put it:

> Indeed, I cannot exist in everyday life without continually interacting and
> communicating with others. I know my natural attitude to this world
> corresponds to the natural attitude of others, that they also comprehend the
> objectifications by which this world is ordered, that they also organize this
> world around the 'here and now' of their being in it and have projects for
> working in it. (Berger & Luckman, 1967, p. 23)

These two phrases describe a social process that involves everything from the implications imposed through socialization practices, to the individual's agency; to the notion of attunement, and the notion of face and all other concepts Scheff (1990, 1997) and Goffman (1975, 1959) proclaim as paramount in social interaction, some of which I have dealt with here. Very succinctly, what this means is that in fact agents and

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interactants construct social reality through their everyday interactions, which ultimately can become typified, standardized, and recognized within a culture. Certainly, one of the most visible process through which this occurs is communication; we can look at communicative exchanges and decode the particularities of each interaction. Specifically, when it comes to face-to-face interaction, there are many communicative routines of everyday life that become ritualistic, and phatic communication is surely one of them.

Berger and Luckman (1967) conceive there are cognitive typifications that take place when interacting with others (p. 28-34) and this way of processing of information can be evidenced in conversations: we catalogue the nature of the conversation and commit to a level of engagement corresponding to the content being shared: if we are merely talking about the weather, we engage little, if someone is telling a heart-felt story, we will engage more; and accordingly, we use specific linguistic tokens or phrases to participate and shape the interaction.

This process is seamlessly performed in our everyday interactions, without even taking the time to run a quick conscious assessment of the situation, because we have gathered already through our life and social experiences the skill set necessary to know which approach to take for each communicative exchange we engage in. Standardization and conventionalization give us certainty and reduces the anxiety that can come with some interactions. In Scheff's (1990) terms, ritualized communication mitigates bond anxiety because of the fear of bond loss, and provides a framework for more confortable bond management and monitoring.

For Berger and Luckmann (1967), certain meanings become *objective* because they go through a process of signification: we produce signs and we attribute specific meanings to them: "a sign may be distinguished from other objective signs by its explicit intention to serve as an index of subjective meanings" (p. 35); and in this way phatic communication offers signs that let the interactants know the nature of the communication. For example, specific opening and closing expressions are used (greetings and goodbyes) that clearly signal when an interaction has begun and has ended; these are specific linguistic tokens, and even phrases or entire idioms that clearly indicate the presence of phaticity, such as "How's life?" after a greeting, or "To live and to learn". There are, as well, other linguistic tokens to signal the interaction will begin to end, such as "Well…" or "Alright…". A closer look at the gradients of phatic communication will explore further how by detecting these signs each interactant decodes the nature of the conversation and thus can adjust accordingly to the depth of the interaction and its content.

Holmes (2000/2014) also highlighted social constructivism in his work, given that small talk works as a relationship-building mechanism, a tool that constructs relationships between the interactants within a social frame. Surely cultural determinism plays a significant role in the coding process, and offers as an outcome a regulatory system of social meaning from which we can deduct basically anything in the social behavior spectrum, from what to wear to different places to what to say in certain situations. Politeness is a maxim that can be framed in this context.

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3.3.1 Maxim of politeness.

Many authors use politeness as a frame for phatic communication (Boyle, 2000; Brown & Levinson, 1987; Coupland, 2000/2014; Haugh & Schneider, 2012; Mak & Chui, 2013; Mullany, 2006, Padilla, 2005, 2013; Placencia & Lower, 2013; Schneider, 1988, 2011; Stenstörm & Jögensen, 2008; Sturtzsreetharan, 2006). For Schneider (2011), for example, different principles of the maxim of politeness can be justified by pragmatic differences in language and cultural determinism. Evidently, and as explained above, all social interactions take place within a social context that is guided by social norms; it would be quite a shock to be asked about our sex life by the cashier at the supermarket when buying lettuce.

In an earlier work, Schneider (1988) talks about a unified theory of spoken discourse and the "maxims and strategies" that take part when engaging in small talk (p. 41-80). He first deals with conversational and social maxims, following the work of Grice (1974/1975), finding there are expected behaviours in communicative acts, some inherent to the communication itself, and some to the manner in which it is performed. According to Schneider, the latter one is related to the notion of politeness (p. 73); in fact, he will later state clearly that "phatic discourse is governed by social maxims" (p. 157), politeness being one of them.

Following Leech, Schneider details four maxims of politeness:

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1. TACT/GENEROSITY

Minimize cost to other/Minimize benefit to self

2. APPROBATION/MODESTY

Minimize dispraise of other/Minimize praise to self

3. AGREEMENT

Minimize disagreement between self and other

4. SYMPATHY

Minimize antipathy between self and other. (Schneider, 1988, p. 74)

And, as Schneider adds, Leech later establishes a fifth maxim, a *phatic maxim* that aims to avoid silence (Schneider, 1988, p. 74). Schneider himself develops in his work five maxims for phatic discourse as part of his analysis of naturally occurring phatic discourse. The first one is politeness, which he divides in politesse (formal politeness) and friendliness (social politeness). Politesse is framed, of course, within a social normative system, and it works by *avoidance maxims* (p. 158), corresponding with Laver's (1974/1975) "neutral utterances", those that refer to something both interactant's know about, the safest of topics, avoiding anything can threaten face. Friendliness, on the other hand, is associated with participant-oriented utterances (Schneider, 1988, p. 158), and can be paired with what Laver (1974/1975) calls self-oriented and other-oriented linguistic tokens, which will be explained here later on.

Below is my own incorporation of Schneider's two sub-maxims of politeness in a single list as Schneider offers them in separate lists. Each sub-maxim works by four

maxims of their own, and they are the same, although by integrating both in this graph we can appreciate how each is expected to manifest itself differently for politesse and friendliness, which are the two sub-maxims:

1- Speech

Politesse: Avoid silence!

Friendliness: Say something nice!

2- Person

Politesse: Avoid curiosity!

Friendliness: Show interest!

3- Union

Politesse: Avoid conflict!

Friendliness: Create a common ground!

4- Emotion

Politesse: Avoid pessimism!

Friendliness: Be optimistic! (adapted from Schneider, 1988, p. 158[1])

Although friendliness seems to be the complement of politesse, Schneider (1988) stresses that there is more to it: "'Avoid the silence' means by implication 'Say anything'" (p. 159), but the friendliness maxim channels this into a specific action, "Say something nice!", as opposed to just saying anything. In any case, displaying friendly behavior is part of the maxim of politeness, and can certainly use phatic communication to help in such purpose.

---

[1] From *Small Talk: Analyzing Phatic Discourse* (p. 158), by K. Schneider, 1988,

Nevertheless, friendliness — even when it is mutual — does not mean the participants are becoming friends per se.

To pursue the maxim of politeness, this author offers four strategies:

- The first one is *Agreement*, which is also proposed here as a sub-function of phatic communication, and self-explanatory in meaning: react by agreeing to the other's statements.

- The second strategy is *Evaluation*, which is another reactive strategy where the participants react to each other's utterances, but this one Schneider believes occurs much less frequently than the first one because according to him participants share the same hierarchy in phatic interactions (Schneider, 1988, p. 176).

- The third strategy is *Revaluation*, which contemplates that by trying to keep things positive, one interactant can disagree very cordially with the statements made by the other interactants only if they are self-critical (Schneider, 1988, p. 185). In other words, being nice, primes over being agreeable for Schneider.

- And finally, the last strategy is *Linking*, which consists on emphasizing certain contents of the information participants exchange in small talk to further continue the conversation, by linking themes or subjects (p. 186-187).

As is has been stated before, there is a gradient to phatic conversation, which in current terms means a deeper degree of small talk can be achieved by the strategy of linking. Although not exclusively, linking is a strategy often performed through question, which is something Schneider considers part of the nature of phatic interactions: "more often than

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not small talk exchanges are question-answer pairs" (Schneider, 1988, p. 192). He even

offers a brief schematization of the dynamic of interactions:

  Move   Function

  1. Requesting info

  2. Providing info

       -in response to 1

       -voluntarily

  3. Reacting to info

  4. Reacting to reaction. (Schneider, 1988, p. 192)

Schneider here develops a typology of first moves, second moves, third moves, and

"further moves" he observed in the analyzed interactions (p. 193-212), in order to

achieve, as Malinowski (1946) put it, "polite, social intercourse" (p. 316). Turn-taking is,

of course, a primordial notion in polite interactions, which can be evidenced even more

clearly in its absence when interactions turn, well, impolite, or rude. In this sense, the

ritualized nature of most small talk interactions provides guidelines for how the

interaction will most likely unfold. As Holmes (2000/2014) says, "small talk might be

considered a core example of positively polite talk" (p. 115)

     In his work, Laver (1981) includes as a *repertoire of politeness*, which includes

pleas, thanks, excuses and apologies - besides greeting and parting tokens, and small talk

itself (p. 290). He says, "the basic position is that a certain pattern of phatic communion

constitutes the polite norm, and that the use of this pattern serves as an acknowledgement

of the social relationship that exists between the participants" (p. 301), very similarly to

what was described here previously under the sub-function of acknowledgement. Laver

also observes there is a tension between the need to communicate effectively and the need

to be polite (Laver, 1981, p. 295), a tension we can pair with the two dimensions of

communication offered here before: informative and phatic. Indeed, in many

circumstances, we use phatic protocols with the intention to merge into an informational,

transactional topic (more on this on the next section, under the *transitional* type of phatic

communication). We can say within Scheff's (1990) Deference-Emotion system, that

politeness is a sign of deference and also a tool to avoid shame; it is not used only as a

social protocol, but also as a way to deal with tense situations, or situations which are

better eased in with the use of phatic tokens that can act as *social lubricants*.

3.3.1.1 Social lubricant and management of silence.

This sub-function of phatic communication is surprisingly present in many authors

in an explicit way, especially when trying to define phatic communication (Coupland et

al., 1992; Laver, 1974/1975; Padilla, 2013; Penn & Watermeyer, 2009; Posner &

Hamstra, 2013; Schneider, 1988) as was hinted in the chapter of conceptualizations.

Perhaps this common terminology comes from authors following Laver's work

(1974/1975, 1981). When he talks about phatic communion, he calls the social lubricant

function "breaking the ice" (Laver, 1974/1975, p. 218) and pairs it with his own

propitiatory function, in the opening phase of phatic communion. This function is meant

"to defuse the potential hostility of silence in situations where speech is conventionally

anticipated" (p. 220). Another common expression is "lighting up the mood" or even "lay the first stone".

Laver takes on Malinowski's (1946) work to explain this function, because Malinowski described silence as alarming, dangerous, strange and unpleasant (Malinowski, 1946, p. 314) and so Laver determines "the breaking of silence, the communion of words is the first act to establish links of fellowship" (Laver, 1974/1975, p. 313). Laver later explains that while doing this, the participant who speaks first does so as a sign of submission and is left at the other's mercy (Laver, 1974/1975, p. 221). Although this could potentially be true for a number of situations, he fails to frame phatic communion within a cultural paradigm where politeness guides this type of social interactions, as it is proposed here, and given that polite tokens for communicative exchanges have been socially constructed, they undermine anxiety and provide certainty. Hence, instead of submission we can see it as deference, in Scheff's (1990) terms, because we can say silence represents a threat to the bond.

Schneider (1988), on his part, calls the social lubricant function "to ease things along" (p. 9), because, as he will later quote in Friedlander, the alternative of silence feels like it is "fatal" (p. 10); but an even worse alternative, Friedlander says, would be saying what we really think (in Schneider, 1988, p. 11). Senft (2005) also notes the tension participants can feel prior to an interaction, when in silence, however other authors note this is not a universal reaction. In other cultures it is seen as a moment that shouldn't be

interrupted with small talk (e.g.: in the work of Firth, 1972 and Schneider, 1988). This

illustrates how one action can be seen as polite in one culture and rude in another.

3.3.1.1.1 Jokes.

Another way to phatically break the ice is with jokes. Coupland et al. (1992) use

Berger and Bradac's work to offer the basis of an old joke from literalist interpretations of

the opening phrase "How are you" (*HAY*):

A: How are you?

B: I have bursitis; my nose is itching; I worry about my future; and my uncle

is wearing a dress these days. (Coupland et al., 1992, p. 217)

Clearly, this is a dialogue not likely to happen in reality. However, Coupland et al. argue

the use of HAY can actually be meant in a literal sense when we ask the same question to

those close to us with whom we share deep and consolidated bonds, manifesting our true

desire to inquire about their status. What is true here is that humor can also be phatic way

to ease things along at any point of the interaction, not only the beginning.

Jokes are also found in other authors as a phatic strategy. Brown and Levinson

(1987) consider them *strategies of politeness*, and Scheff himself (1990) suggests laughter

can be used to fight shame. Although this hypothesis is intuitive, as many of his other

ideas, Scheff uses a story about German composer Richard Wagner. Wagner's wife was

keeping a diary and looking to establish a correlation between genius and laughter. Scheff

observed there were more laughter-related entries in the diary while Wagner was still

creating music than in the second half when he was simply editing (Scheff, 1990, p. 174).

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If we take this correlation as meaningful, we can assume that in social circumstances

prone to shame, a good joke might alleviate potential tensions.

Jokes, then, serve a phatic purpose, working as phatic devices to make sure that

when the bond is threatened, it can be somehow preserved. On one hand, a joke could be

used as an introductory token, simply to open the conversation and end uncomfortable

silence, in which case, the shame avoided was the shame both interactants could

potentially have felt for not being able to engage in conversation. And on the other hand,

a joke could be used to explicitly lighten up the mood after a comment that had brought

shame, or threatened participants' face.

Joking as a phatic device can, nevertheless, act as a substantial communicative

move. Tracy and Naughton (2000/2014) realized that "embedded in the joking... is a

reference to a consequential problem the group must think about and solve... [it] appears

to encourage problem reflection, something phatic communion is not routinely expected

to do" (p. 157). Here is an extract of the conversation transcript they analyzed:

```
12  FM Chair: Her ( . ) her tape recorder's here.
13  Group:     ((simultaneous talk and laughter))
14  FM Chair: So this goes into your permane- this goes
15              into your permanent record Ted. I bet you
16              didn't know I was taking attendance every
17              day.
18  Group:     ((light laughter))
19  FM3:        Does this go- Is it the heading ( . ) called
20              ( . ) foolish enough to go indiscriminately to
21              colloquia?
22              ((light laughter))
23  FM Chair: I think it's uh, I think it's uh, wuh we need
24              fran-, you know this might not be the forum
25              for it but uh somehow we need to get ( . )
26              better about it ( . ) graduate student
27              attendance
28  ?:          Yeah
```

Figure 7. Small Talk Dialogue Number 1. From *Small Talk* (p. 154) by J.
Coupland, 2014, Hoboken: Taylor and Francis. Copyright 2014 by Taylor and
Francis. Reproduced with permission.

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The context is a meeting between students and professors to discuss their projects and other matters. The meeting started with what Tracy and Naughton *thought* was small talk, but they were seemingly confused by the form small talk took. In the end these authors concluded that those joking instances, were, then, not phatic. I, however, maintain that they are. These are examples of phatic communication that are perhaps less ritualized and out-of-script than the majority of the examples, but they are nevertheless phatic in nature. In this case, the joke is introduced as a way to address a problem in the group, and thus the solution of such problem will grant the achievement of the group's goals and furthermore, the maintenance of the group itself.

Take another similar example from Coupland (2000/2014):

```
 1 C: oh I got some really nice you must see these I got for my Christmas these people I
 2    stayed with the other day some really amazing shot glasses (describing the shape
 3    with his hands) really thick short shot glasses=
 4 J: = (ironically) oh yeah?=
 5 C: =and I said (.) hey I was just talking about these the other day (turning to
 6    Gary) that's cos=
 7 J: =we got=
 8 C: =James bought some nice
 9 J: we got a bulk buy of uh twenty shot glasses
10 C: twenty shot glasses
11 J: we can line them up they were fifty pence each
12 G: where's that from?


13 J: from (silly voice) yurgh Habitat
14 C: in Bristol
15 J: (imitating a Bristolian accent) in Brissol
                          [
16 C:      (imitating a French accent) dans Bristol=
17 J: =dans=
18 G: =I erm (.) borrowed one once from this hotel in (.) Rhodes
                                         [
19 C:                                   (smiling) borrowed
```

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20 G: (laughing slightly) yeah I borrowed <u>two</u> actually they're really nice=
21 J: (ironically) =oh yeah?=
22 G: =slightly= (describes their shape with his hands)
23 C: (2.0) these are amazing these came in a little tin (.) a little silver tin=
24 J: (ironically) very posh=
25 C: with like red stuffing inside and shot glasses four shot glasses they're <u>really</u> <u>nice</u> you'd=
26 J: =you'll have to get some friends now=
27 C: =you'd really like them (.) (noise in amusement at J's comment) yerrh!

                                                                          [
28 G: ((3 sylls))
29   ((he's got four on his own)) (tapping the table as if downing four shots in
30   succession)
31 C: exactly who needs friends when you've got four shot glasses?
32 G: (in mock drunkenness) uuuurgh!
33   (joint laughter)
34 C: (mock drunkenness again) I don't need fucking friends urgh!
35   (J and G laugh)
36 J: what are you going to do? put your Babycham in them?
37 G: (very quietly) I might do (.) I got given (.) about two three years ago this
38   incredible bottle of super duper tequila from Mexico . . .

Figure 8. Small Talk Dialogue Number 2. From *Small Talk* (p. 41) by J. Coupland, 2014, Hoboken: Taylor and Francis. Copyright 2014 by Taylor and Francis. Reproduced with permission.

In this dialogue, two of the participants - C and J - know each other better than either of them know G. Regardless, the performance of the three participants denote their investment and enjoyment in the interaction. Particularly, the playful teasing and banter in which C and J engage in can be justified as part of their relationship dynamic, and thus cannot be taken as anything that would jeopardize the bond; if anything, it is a sign that their bond is strong.

I had thought about similar issues before reading Malinowski or Coupland; particularly, I thought about bullying or other intragroup practices. For example, in a

situation where members of a group are being "rude" in the way the approach each other,

but that seems to be the predominant vocabulary their group uses, politeness ceases to be

the most important social maxim guiding phatic communication, and instead, it is mainly

guided by specific group norms. As long as the bond is not threatened, the interaction can

be deemed as phatic.

When talking about listeners' tokens exchanged in an interaction in order to

provide feedback to the speaker, Coupland (2003) takes on the research of McCarthy

(2003) to point out these tokens are furthermore:

> ... microlevel resources for overlaying creativity onto formulaic speech (see
>
> also Kuiper, 2000/2014) to provide more positive, and more discriminating,
>
> social orientations and perhaps above all to signal various forms of
>
> engagement (which we might take, at a macrolevel, as the primary social
>
> function of small talk in all its manifestations). (Coupland, 2003, p. 4)

Coupland here is talking about what Laver (1974/1975) established as the indexical

function of phatic communication. But if we consider phatic communication as framed

within a politeness system, and offering at the same time a politeness framework to

conduct oneself accordingly, we could perhaps be prompted to think the examples we are

exploring in this sub-section are loaded with rudeness. However, that is actually not the

case.

Similarly, Coupland et al. (1992) looked at youth conversational styles through

storytelling in small talk, and observed how certain linguistic tokens that could be

considered "rude" or "bad" were used as nevertheless as part of safe conversational

protocols within a group. In-group cohesion was signaled by the use of such tokens, and

at the same time they were used as a distinction from other groups; this logic is followed

largely in youth subcultures across different kinds of behaviour, but communicative

behaviour in particular allows for a very explicit observation of such paradigm.

Rodríguez-Ponce (2011) had similar observations about the same phenomenon as well.

He analyzed the youth communicative style, and talks about a phatic function of specific

words, like a vocative, that are used colloquially in a way that does not convey their

literal meaning, but rather indexical information about the speakers and the situation

(Rodríguez-Ponce, 2011). An evident example would be the word "dude" when referring

to a member of someone's group.

But let us consider a more commonplace example of phatic jokes: subject X and

subject Y run into each other in class every day. One day, subject X makes a remark

about subject Y's dress: "Well, that dress makes you look pregnant!" Subject Y, given

stereotypical female concerns with body image, is naturally offended by the comment and

feels ashamed to be seen as pregnant when she is not. Subject X gathers information with

the cues subject dos is giving (perhaps she stops talking, lowers her head, or looks away)

and realizes her faux pas. A quick remedy could be to add: "Listen, do not take it the

wrong way, as pregnant as you look, you're still hotter than me!" or any other humorous

comment, really, perhaps even one that was not even related with the incident. She could

also use other phatic tokens to try to change the conversation back into a safe topic in

order to lessen the inflicted shame and preserve the bond; or maybe she could even tactfully pay her a compliment.

3.3.1.1.2 Compliments and complaints.

Phatic communication can certainly be an umbrella term for many other communicative strategies that, despite having their own specific characteristics, all share the phaticity of their use in terms of context, relationship or situation (i.e.: gossip, compliments, idioms, greetings, jokes, colloquial and standardized phrases, etc.). Boyle (2000/2014) takes on the work of Manes and Wolfson, who encountered three syntactic patterns that accounted for almost two-thirds of the 686 compliments they collected, which lead them to conclude that compliments in middle-class American society are formulaic in nature. For Boyle, the phatic function in compliments can be seen in the way it strengthens bonds. Manes and Wolfson's study has been replicated across cultures and the results obtained have been very similar, always having a high percentage (78%-86%) of communication that uses a short list of verbs and adjectives to perform the compliment. This, Boyle notices, has immense potential for those learning second languages as well, a topic I will touch on at the end of the model.

As Placencia and Lower (2013) explained while studying compliments in social media, "we take compliments to be expressions of 'positive evaluation' (Wolfson 1981: 120) or 'approval' (Vanderveken and MacQueen 1990: 215), that attribute 'credit to the addressee' (Holmes 1987: 492)" (p. 619). Compliments also work as a social lubricant, since they offer "a topic for conversation while at the same time establishing a point of

agreement" (p. 640), a moment where both interactants come together to share a laugh, which results in establishing or maintaining a bond.

On the other side, one of Schneider's (1988) recurrent observations when analyzing the data from his survey about small talk was that complaints were used as a phatic conversational device. Considering the premise here, that phatic communication maintains social bonds, there is an underlying sociological argument in Schneider's observations: our society has such focus on the negative that it can even serve a bonding function. It seems to come to us more naturally to complain than to acknowledge any type of positivity in certain scenarios. An indicator of this can be found in one of the examples Schneider provides from his survey in relation to how frequently people complained in waiting rooms; for example, they complained about the magazines being boring or old. By manifesting such displeasure, it seems like an opportunity to bond over it opens up, a way to let others know "I am in your same situation, and I also feel discomfort". As Malinowski (1946) put it, "such words serve the purpose of establishing a common sentiment" (p. 314), making interactants feel at ease despite their common unease. Working within Scheff's (1990) Deference-Emotion system, I assume this is due precisely to a need to pay deference to others by acknowledging a situation that is not ideal and that consequently causes some sort of distress in both parties, but also as something the speaker recognizes as distressing to the listener. It is a way of showing agreement.

3.3.1.2 Agreement.

According to Schneider, Mikes advised to "never contradict anybody when discussing the weather" (in Schneider, 1988, p. 8), to which Schneider adds: "it is also true that disagreement is normally avoided in small talk" (p. 8). The reason seems rather evident, disagreement can weaken or threaten an existing bond, or makes it harder to establish a new one. It seems like in a politeness context, disagreeing is typically considered rude.

Agreement is a protocol of politeness, a way to choose to be courteous in order to favor the bond. Schneider (1988) also uses agreement, as explained earlier, as one of the strategies to pursue the maxim of politeness, same way as I am framing it here. This notion is also present in Leech, and in Brown and Levinson's (1987) work, specifically when they talk about phatic communication as being "loaded... with markers of emotional agreement" (p. 64).

Interestingly, Schneider (1988) did contemplate the possibility of a *polite disagreement*, by being carefully nice about introducing a point of disagreement into the conversation. I will argue, however, that if an argumentative point like this is introduced, the conversation has ceased being phatic and has now transitioned into, of course, an argumentative discussion. Relatedly, Malinowski (1946) contemplates that within the dynamic of the interaction, if tension arises, it can be relieved if the interaction concludes smoothly:

... the hearer listens under some restraint and with slightly veiled impatience,

waiting for his turn to speak. For this use of speech the bonds created between

hearer and speaker are not quite symmetrical, the man linguistically active

receiving the greater share of social pleasure and self-enhancement. But

though the hearing given to such utterances is a rule not as intense as the

speaker's own share, it is quite essential for his pleasure, and the reciprocity is

established by the change of roles. (Malinowski 1946, p. 314-315)

According to Schneider, several conversational techniques can be used to convey

agreement between interactants. He explains there is an emphasis on emphatic tokens in

small talk, thus responses like confirmation, acknowledgement, and feedback tokens

which are, as he says, "comparatively weaker in ordinary conversation" (p. 160), are used

in phatic communication extensively. The specific techniques he mentions to convey

agreement, are: phonetic variation, iteration, combination, addition, and repetition (for

more detail on these, please refer to Schneider, 1988).

3.3.2 Ritual behaviour.

Wang et al. (2011) defend the importance of phatic communication by addressing

its cultural and ritual dimension, which they take from Firth (1972) in order to highlight

that these "cultural and ritual sequences are far from purposeless" (p. 48). In fact, what

Laver (1981) calls *speculative predictive mechanism* precisely details how interactants

take specific claims "about solidarity/intimacy and status relationships through particular

encoding choices within phatic talk", the authors say (Wang et al., 2011, p. 48). We can

agree that what to say in certain social situations is something that is socially constructed, and as detailed previously follows a normative structure, but furthermore, it is ritualized in order to have a formalized meaning within a culture. For example, when someone passes away, we immediately say "I'm sorry for your loss". A brief analysis of the phrase can help us understand the following: someone has died and because we understand the suffering this causes to those who outlive the dead, we manifest our sympathy by showing deference through a phrase that manifests our feelings, but furthermore, we are prompt to say this because we want to express in a readily understood way, standardized, conventionalized, that we are empathic and understanding. All the implications of this phrase allow us to simply say that and we can assume the receiver understands perfectly the purpose of the communication. As Burke (1945) says, the motivational proprieties of communication "characterize both 'the human situation' and what men are 'in themselves'" (p. 33); the utterance in itself is less relevant than the function of the interaction, thus becoming phatic. Wang et al.'s observation was also made by Brown and Levinson (1987) in their *politeness model*: "cultural rites find their origins in conventional, local demonstrations of person-respecting and relational management" (in Wang et al., p. 48).

Coupland (2000/2014), however, holds a different point of view by distinguishing between rituals and routines:

> Routines are more general, and any repeated activity is a routine. Rituals are routines, which have assumed specific socio-cultural significance - like television debates, funerals and playing the dozens (Labov's ritual insults).

This definition suggests that many structural, referential and stylistic features

of small talk are routine (conventional conversational openings and closings,

talking about the weather or updating on recent personal happenings, signaled

prosodic engagement) (see Schneider, 1988), but they are not necessarily

invested with cultural significance as rituals. Some small talk events,

alternatively, may reach this level of recognition and be culturally identified,

for example in 'gossiping' (where ratified participants are carefully monitored

and highly significant socio-cultural activities such as moral policing are

mutually achieved). (Coupland, 2000/2014, p. 58-59)

Paradoxically, right after these statements, Coupland recognizes the "under-analyzed

cultural significance" of small talk (p.59), which is followed by a thread of arguments that

seem to be not as much offered to her audience as they are offered to herself, as a means

to justify that even in formulaic social practices like small talk, we can see a reflection of

the entire social structure within which they make sense. I find this to be a given.

Regardless, that exploration led her to expose an underlying argument other authors, like

Holba (2008), propose: the practicality of such social conventions does have a

counterpart, a not so dynamical dynamic in which we sometimes fall when taking part in

different social protocols, like small talk; we trivialize the bond established and the

possibility of further deepening into a more meaningful, engaging connection. In Scheff's

(1990) terms, the option of sliding across the spectrum from a pseudo-bond, to a secure

bond is often missed. Coupland ends this argument saying, "we need to acknowledge that

formulaicity, while serving norms of politeness behaviour, can be tedious and communicatively incompetent" (p. 61).

My own personal interest in small talk comes from a similar place. When I moved from my native Venezuela to go to university in Spain I basically had to perform very rudimentary ethnographic work in order to decode the social protocols of this new society in which I was living. I not only had to pay attention to the language and how it was used differently — since the Spanish used in Spain is different from the one used in Latin America, which is diverse in itself — but also the purpose certain interactions served in order to gain some social capital I did not have as a foreigner. My re-socialization process was so successful that I was always taken as a native; I had decoded and mimicked all available social cues, from mannerisms to the use of language, to the accent itself. One of the things I found to be remarkable was the lack of small talk among the people from Madrid. I used to hate the excessive friendliness my fellow people from Caracas typically display; I thought it was irrelevant, and even annoying "Why would a stranger ask me about my day if she doesn't really care? People are just very hypocrite", I would say; but now that I was in an environment where these little niceties were not the norm, which consequentially made the whole city feel like a hostile place, I found myself missing them, and realizing the valuable role they play. Now, I cannot claim that Latin American societies are "closer" or made of more secure bonds with only my personal experience, but I can assure the reader very culturally rooted differences are visible with just a visit to both places. Nevertheless, as I have stated here before, using the work of Scheff (1990)

that pride promotes solidarity and shame leads to alienation, and the anecdote fits with

that rationale, given that what I observed was a higher sense of solidarity back home, and

a bigger sense of alienation in Madrid.

Cultural determinism implies specific ritualization processes depending on the

locus. Jakobson's (1960) phatic function, which he describes as a contact function, is

explained as aiming to prolong communication though the exchange of ritualized

formulas. This, he claims is the only function we share with animals and the first one we

learn as infants (p. 355-356). Ritualization allows for a quicker interpretation of

communicational encounters, it facilitates sociability and management of social capital —

in the case of phatic communication, management of social bonds. The work of Padilla

(2001) also treats this notion:

> Each social or cultural group establishes procedures to carry out different
>
> types of speech acts or to create relationships among its members; i.e., each
>
> social group establishes a certain sequence of actions that allows it to achieve
>
> a specific goal (Hayashi, 1994). (Padilla, 2001, p. 207)

Padilla especially references the work of Sperber and Wilson on weak and strong

implicatures, to indicate the kinds of cues interactants perceive and process in a

communicative exchange:

> ... in many cases of phatic communication, it will be the hearer's sole
>
> responsibility to extend the context of interpretation and to enlarge his
>
> inferential path until he achieves more weak implicatures when processing

these utterances. These weak implicatures can be about the social relationship

existing between him and the speaker. (Padilla, 2001, p. 205)

The concept of implicature has been offered here in the theoretical frame, according to

Scheff (1990). It comes to designate the assumptions we make about an interaction, based

not only on what's explicit, but also what's implicit or tacit. Thus, according to the

aforementioned authors, context is a key variable to construct meaning; a construction

that, as it has been suggested above, is relative to the individual: "Individuals have in their

brain a great number of assumptions that they use in communicative exchanges. These

assumptions are organized so that some are more easily accessible than others." (Padilla,

2001, p. 206). Of course, notions like *top of mind*, *the social imaginary,* or *framing* are

part of theories that aim to explain how we process information and ultimately construct

meaning, but that is beyond the scoop of the present work, unfortunately.

Nevertheless, it is undoubtable that ritualization plays a central role in mitigating

bond anxiety thanks to the ready-made meanings and social protocols that allow us to

establish and maintain social bonds with ease. As Padilla (2001) put it:

Apart from the social information that can be conveyed by them as weak or

strong implicatures, the information these utterances transmit is relevant in the

sense that the speaker communicates that she follows a series of internalized

assumptions that tell her the adequate or expected behaviour within a

particular social or cultural group. (Padilla, 2011, p. 207)

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As noted here throughout, this process occurs almost seamlessly for most of us because we have been socialized in a way that we already have the entire cognitive repertoire needed for sense-making of most social interactions, at least certainly all of those we encounter in our everyday life.

The work of Weick (1969), for example, explains how meaning is obtained through interactions by putting in place a mechanism that unfolds undetected, which he called Cycles of Behaviour. When we communicate, we monitor each other's performance in different aspects, such as linguistic content, non-verbal cues and cultural meanings; and while we do this, we determine and adjust the meaning we construct. Scheff (1990) talks about "repairs" as the interlocutive process that take place to achieve meaning: when a question or a statement is ambiguous, the interactants will clarify the intended meaning in subsequent phrases. The understanding or misunderstandings the interactants go through are part of their inner experience, thus only observable by the voiced manifestation of the negotiation of meaning between both parts. However, Scheff further says: "It isn't known how much repair occurs in ordinary conversations, but it seems safe to guess that it is relatively infrequent". Instead, he continues, "intersubjective understanding... Is based not on repair but in tacit analysis, on what I have called inner search", and this inner search is a constant ongoing process of construction of meaning, in order to reduce the characteristic ambiguity of communication" (Scheff, 1990, p. 66). And so, in the same way we monitor and adjust our behaviours, we live in constant bond surveillance, an ongoing process of great value, despite its low visibility.

Scheff also takes on the work of Steiner to explain what Richards (1953) called Comparison Fields: "every understanding involves a "translation" from the personal idiom and cultural background of one person to the personal idiom and cultural background of another, from one imagined world to another" (Scheff, 1990, p. 111). In Scheff we can recognize how perception is actually not only a matter of linguistics, but of meaning and understanding: "At times there is actual attunement, mutual understanding. At other times, however, we are living in the minds of others, but only in our imaginations; we have misunderstood" (p. 10).

In fact, as Goffman points out, "in a polite society, a handshake that perhaps should not have been extended becomes ones that cannot be declined" (Goffman, 1955/1972, p. 334). A situation that reflects saving face for others as a cooperative effort, product of solidarity and pertinent norms concerning politeness. Face changes and its perception is adjusted accordingly since it is a concept of external focus: it depends on social norms and on the evaluation of others, it has to do with our social performance and how we present and represent ourselves.

3.3.3 Cooperation.

Coupland et al. (1992) took a different stand on phatic communication and view phaticity from a negotiation perspective when they studied scripted dialogues amongst elderly people. Negotiation takes place because the interlocutors chose up to which level they wanted to engage once the conversation started, indeed thanks to a phatic utterance, which in their case was the opening greeting "How are you?" (HAY). From their

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negotiation perspective, there are two key dimensions that determine the kind of

communication that results from the interaction: on one axis, "positive relational goals",

and on the other "degree of expressed/perceived commitment":


```
        NEGOTIATING PHATIC COMMUNION


        Degree of expressed/ perceived commitment
       (to open disclosure, seriousness, factuality, etc.)


                              high
                               .
                               .
                               .
   TROUBLES-TELLING            .   SYMPTOM          TRANSACTIONAL
   AMONG INTIMATES             .   TELLING          TALK (e.g.
                               .   IN MEDICAL       booking a
                               .   ENCOUNTERS       ticket)
                               .
                               .
                               .
Positive                       .
relational   foregrounded .......................... backgrounded
goals                          .
                               .
                               .
                               .
                               .
   PHATIC                      .                    DRUNKEN
   COMMUNION                   .                    BANTER
                               .
                               .
                              low
```

Figure 9. Interactional Dimensions Locating Phatic Communion. From "'How Are You?': Negotiating Phatic Communion", by J. Coupland, N. Coupland and J. Robinson, 1992, *Language in Society, 21*(2), p. 215. Copyright 1992 by Cambridge University Press. Reproduced with permission.

As expected, they proposed phatic communion is high on relational goals, but low on

commitment; this stands diametrically opposed to transactional talk, just as I have

proposed here throughout. Almost as diametrically opposed in the graph, Coupland et al.

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(1992) conceive there is a type of communication in which patients can engage in to share their situation is high on commitment, but low on relational goals, since for instance, "I had an X-Ray today" is probably not the greatest (nor normal) conversation starter, but it is indeed rather informative. These authors further explain, quoting Berger and Bradac, the opening phrase HAY is often "not intended to produce self-relegation 'but rather *merely* to signal acknowledgement of the other'" (p. 217), as it has been indicated here before. As a sub-function of the main relational function of phatic communication, in this model acknowledgement represents a positive disposition to cooperate into further communicative engagement.

Another example of the cooperative nature of phatic communication is found in Vigara (1990). She analyzes a colloquial text, as it would be translated from speech, and points out certain expressions with phatic function that do not convey any meaning on their own, but are part of common oral communication, as minor hesitations of speech, or even *linguistic fillers*. These tokens are used to engage in the conversation with the interlocutor in order to signal investment via cooperation. In her analysis, she notices different pragmatic connectors that include (my translation; Vigara, 1990, p. 299-300):

- "Colloquial nexuses": they serve as a link for different phrases, although logic linearity can be affected ("then", "so", "that"). These are often empathized in verbal communication to serve a performance role (like the oral nexus "theeeeeeen").

- "Thematic nexuses": these introduce a certain orientation in the communicative dynamic, extending it ("anyway", "by the way", "so then", "also").

- "Conversational stimulants": these manage conversational silences and instead convey expressiveness ("let's see", "what else", and the rhetorical "right?").

- "Nonspecific formulas": stereotypical words that help complete meaning without being precise ("and such", "whatever"). These are often used to end a thought and pass to the next one.

And furthermore, Vigara also proposes other linguistic tokens or phrases that serve the same phatic purpose. These she categorized by function (my translation; Vigara, 1990, p. 300-301):

- Those for opening and closing of communication: these include greetings and parting tokens, but also courtesy formulas ("excuse me", "please", "sorry"), as well as interjections, vocatives, pronouns, imperatives, etc. (for example, "hey, listen...").

- Those that help conversational cooperation: these help interactants know their turn and sustain attention ("yes, exactly...").

- Those that stimulate the conversation: these have an expressive-phatic nature, some are culture specific ("eh"), some vocatives ("girl", "man", "bro"), sensorial imperatives ("listen", "look"), intellectual ("imagine", "who figures"), and some delaying formulae with modal value ("did I tell you...", "what was I saying...?", "where was I...?") .

In all cases, when it comes to oral communication, these expressions and tokens have mainly marginal manifestations and are dispensable, since they do not contribute to the

content or the logic of the elocution; their relevance is found in the way in which the

contribute to the continuity of the communicational exchange.

These linguistic tokens can also be thought of as pragmatic markers, consistent

with the work of Aijmer and Simon-Vabdenbergen (2004). They focus their research on

those pragmatic markers that denote expectation, as a way to indicate when one

interactant detects the course of the conversation is going in a direction he did not intend.

Basically, they propose that as a way to avoid misunderstandings — which in the present

work can be a threat to the bond — we use words as "actually", "in fact", or "of course" as

pragmatic markers. These authors understand the ambiguous nature of language as a

feature that leads to reflectivity in language. Drawing from the work of Verschueren

(2000/2014), they define reflexive or *metapragmatic* awareness as "'self-monitoring' by

language users which 'at whatever level of salience, is always going on'... 'there is no

language use without a constant calibration'" (Aijmer & Simon-Vabdenbergen p. 1783);

quite in line with the work of the authors detailed in ritual behavior subsection above

(Richards, 1953; Scheff, 1990; Weick, 1969). These operations are of course a way to

show cooperative disposition to engage in the conversation, and consequently to establish

or maintain bonds.

Even though Brown and Levinson's (1987) work is centered in politeness, I have

included some of their observations here because they deal specifically with the dynamics

of interactions as well. The authors offer a very detailed analysis of various strategies of

politeness when face is threatened, one of which they have called

"Presusopose/Raise/Assert Common Ground" where they include gossip and small talk. Their notion of face is, of course, taken from Goffman (1955/1972), and they pair it with "public self-image" and highlight the creational aspect of it, since it is determined with every interaction (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 61). This politeness strategy can be achieved in two ways: first, through "point of view operations", with the purpose of reducing the distance between the speaker's and the listener's point of view, or through "presupposition manipulations", which assume knowing the hearer's interests or needs (p. 117-124).

Briefly, the first set of operations can be further divided in three: first, "personal-center switch", where the speaker typically asks rhetorical questions about a statement as a way to include the other tacitly in his narrative ("All my money is gone, hasn't it?"), which also works with the rhetorical phrase "You know?" ("I really had a hard time learning how to drive, you know"). The speaker could also reinforce a statement the interlocutor makes, in order to manifest empathy ("Yes dear, it hurts terribly, I know"), or he could talk in plural ("Now, have we taken our medicine?"). The second operation is "time switch", where the speaker phrases sentences in present for narrative purposes ("And Martha says to Bill, 'Oh Heavens', and I say..." even though the conversation occurred in the past). Lastly, Brown and Levinson mention an operation called "place switch", where the speaker uses distal demonstratives that express closeness instead of separation in order to convey involvement or empathy ("This was a lovely party"). This last operation can also be seen in the use of "come" versus "go", or "take" versus "bring".

In any case, what these authors propose is the incorporation of these linguistic tokens

through these point of view operations in the conversational dynamic as an aid to make it

more effective from a relational perspective, framed within a strategy of politeness (for

more detail on their research, please refer to Brown & Levinson, 1987)

4. Typology of Phatic Communication

As with the functions of phatic communication, different authors propose different

types of phatic communication, although in general typologies are not widely present in

the literature. Therefore, the organization proposed here is a consequence of the analysis

of the common aspects to most, authors found in the literature. The typology presented

here has three main categories with various sub-categories: according to context,

according to direction, according to content — where we find the new notion of

antiphaticity — and according to placement.

4.1 According to context.

The significance of context has been suggested here before when dealing with

ritualization and construction of meaning, given the importance that contextual factors

hold when participants interpret and evaluate an interaction, as noted specifically by many

authors here (Berendt, 1997; Coupland, 2000/2014; Drazdauskiene, 2010; Endrass et al.,

2010; Goffman, 1955/1972; Holmes & Fillary, 2000; Laver, 1974/1975; Padilla, 2001,

2005; 2013; Senft, 2005; Ventola, 1979; Vigara, 1990). Meaning is related to the context

of the situation and the context of the culture in which it is produced. We can identify this

reasoning with one of communication's axioms: communication is context plus

relationship. Hence, this category for "context" refers to all which is pertinent to the contextual aspects of the relationship between the interactants. As Holmes and Fillary (2000) noted "background knowledge about the role relationships involved, as well as the kind of talk appropriate in each setting, are always relevant to how participants interpret utterances in their sequential context" (p. 276). The context in which the interaction takes place, will be addressed in last section of the model, under scenarios.

Firth (1972) claims there are differences in greeting and parting protocols across cultures, but also across social situations, which means as well that the vicissitudes of any social encounter allow for different interaction dynamics where various rituals and social codes take place as well. As a result, the outcome of the interaction can be assessed within each interaction's paradigm. For example, we can deem as successful an interaction that ends with a subtle head nod, and also one that ends with a kiss; the difference, of course, would be the relationship, or bond, that exists between the interactants. In the first example, it was perhaps two strangers who were waiting for the bus together, and in the second a romantic couple. Both strangers cannot be disappointed if their interaction did not end with a kiss (under common circumstances for this sort of encounter, of course), but the lovers would indeed be quite perplexed if the outcome of their encounter was instead a head nod.

Ventola (1979) takes on the work of Goffman (1959) to say that indeed we have many different roles and we perform differently in various social situations, and we may even "simultaneously act out several social roles, all of which give some credit to our

total behaviour" (p. 269). Kenny (2010) also made this observation by saying we preclude through and across different social spheres, performing different social roles in each scenario. Similarly, Gruzd et al. (2011), in their research on social media said one person has multiple social identities and networks (p. 1295). Of course, in a complex social structure, we foster different identities or roles, and interact indeed with different communities: for example, I am a student, a daughter, a sister, a professional, a Pilates enthusiast, an animal activist, and a wine lover. For each of those groups of belonging, I have slight variations of my own identity, variations manifested in how I present my self in the different social spheres, to put it in Goffman's (1959) terms.

Interestingly, Laver (1981) offers a somewhat different perspective. He reserves phatic communion for those circumstances where the interactants do not know with precision their roles in the interaction, or how the interaction will unfold. For example, when we greet the doorman of our building every morning, we are not engaging in phatic communion according to Laver, as well as "in situations such as a university lecture, buying a railway ticket, or talking to a telephone operator" (p. 218). However, there is still information to be gathered from such interaction; as Laver puts it: "Apart from formulaic greetings, the tokens refer either to factors narrowly specific to the time and place of the utterance or, more widely, to factors in the context of situation in which the utterance occurs which are personal to the speaker and the listener" (p. 222).

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4.1.1 Existent or nonexistent bond.

Certainly, an important factor in how the interaction will unfold is whether it is between strangers, acquaintances, coworkers, friends, family, or lovers, for example. Throughout the present work, I have stressed the main function of phatic communication as the establishment or maintenance of bonds. Establishing bonds implies there was no previous bond, the interactants start as strangers and by engaging on phatic communication both manifest a desire to establish *some kind* of bond. A bond that is newly created is likely to be a phatic bond, given that first encounters start predominantly with phatic communication, at least in the beginning. If we visualize the Bond Spectrum I offered here in the theoretical frame, we can envision how an interaction necessarily starts at some point on the right side of the spectrum, and moves towards the left with each meaningful, intimate, deep interaction.

Thus, I propose here that there is also some theoretical linearity to the depth of the kind of bond that can be established when strangers meet: although it can also happen otherwise, the norm is that strangers first become acquaintances, and then after maintaining that bond, they can decide to further *promote* the bond onto something else, like a friendship or a romantic relationship. Regardless, an interaction that starts with a non-existent bond, between strangers, will have a different dynamic than that which starts with an existing bond. For example, the linguistic tokens exchanged, the tone, the body language, eye contact, and certainly the depth of the conversation.

On the other side, an interaction that starts with participants that do share an existing bond implies they have interacted before, or perhaps see each other regularly but have never interacted; for example, coworkers in the first case, and, in the second case, two people who live in the same neighborhood and get off the same bus stop frequently but have never talked. If they are neighbors and have at least greeted each other with a gesture, acknowledging each other and being polite about their shared situation is the nature of their existing bond.

As suggested before, the interaction will have a different dynamic if it is between, let's say, acquaintances, coworkers, friends or lovers. By presenting these *bond kinds* in linearity that reflects the progressive depth of the relation, I am suggesting the social distance between them diminishes from one to the other: lovers are closer than acquaintances, and friends closer than coworkers. Consider this for illustrative, rather than exhaustive purposes:

Strangers⟶ Acquaintances ⟶ Frequent Acquaintances⟶Coworkers ⟶Partners ⟶ Friends ⟶Close Friends ⟶ Romantic/Life Partners
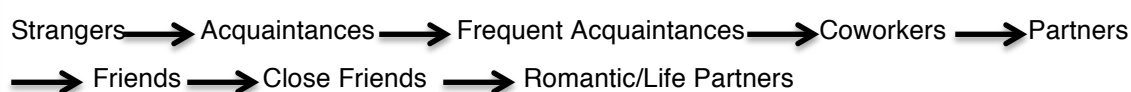
Figure 10. Linearity of Bond Kinds

4.1.2 Social distance.

For Ventola (1979) social distance is "the degree of familiarity between the interactants... [it] is at its minimum between two close friends and at maximum between

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strangers " (p. 275). The social lubricant function of phatic communication is clearly in action in order to ease interactions when the social distance is greater (acquaintances rather than friends, for example). We can assume from this that there is a correlation between phaticity and social distance: the conversation will be more phatic with greater social distance, and less phatic with less social distance. As I have suggested here before, there is a gradient to phatic communication that explains the possible different depths of engagement in the interaction.

Interestingly enough, two central authors here have different stands on social distance. First, Ventola (1979) believes that casual conversation can take place regardless of the social distance; however, this indeed changes the dynamic of the conversation. Schneider (1988), on the other side, suggests that small talk cannot occur in close relationships, like familial or romantic relationships, but it is indeed frequent in environments like workplace, bus stops, the doctor's office, or parties. His reasoning is that in those relationships silence is not awkward and is not interpreted as something that needs to be managed, perhaps channeled into a phatic conversation. His premise is that small talk occurs when participants have a greater social distance between them; in fact, he goes as far as saying small talk defines interpersonal relationships (Schneider, 1988, p. 11).

Based on his own statement, and in accordance to what is suggested here, we could infer the following: if the manifestation (or not) of small talk will determine the nature of the relationship, this would imply that when small talk occurs, we can see that

relationship as not intimate; and if it does not occur, then it is intimate. In other words, the nature of the bond is signaled by the presence or absence of phatic communication and its depth. To put an example in the familial scenario, it is likely that we engage in small talk with a distant relative, but it is less likely that we do so with our spouse. If we were to observe these interactions in a family reunion, for example, we could determine the degree of proximity or intimacy of each interactants' relationships based on the nature of their interaction and the presence or absence of phatic communication. As Schneider will later put it: "The relationship between interactants engaging in phatic talk is usually not close, but often maximally distant" and he further adds: "maintaining contact through phatic talk means maintaining a distance between interlocutors" (Schneider, 1988, p.28-29).

Interestingly, although at times Schneider denies the possibility of family-related small talk, in the answers to his survey conversation with distant relatives at a family get-together came in as second place in likelihood to the question "Other situations in which small talk can occur", with a big percentage of the respondents (54 of 74) agreeing to it (Schneider, 1988, p. 22). This result was shocking to Schneider, although he did not come across as shocked with the least likely scenario in that same question, which was "With family members at the breakfast table", focusing his attention on the fact that "only" 21 respondents agreed to it (Schneider, 1988, p. 22), thus overlooking the fact that familial relationships are indeed a locus for small talk.

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Laver (1974/1975) too contemplates the possibility of interactants having different "psychological distance", although he does establish a paradox about it in a very similar way:

> Because they [phatic tokens] constitute emotionally and assertive ground, the use of these tokens seems to serve to allay both undue hostility and undue curiosity on the part of the other participant... [This] has a very delicately balanced double function, asserting 'ties of union' of social solidarity, but simultaneously limiting their strength. (Laver, 1974/1975, p. 225)

Allow me to envision an example in a different setting; for instance, a work party. If employees bring guests, they too can engage in phatic conversation despite not being coworkers themselves. Most likely, however, the employee that brings a guest and the guest himself are indeed in a non-hierarchical relationship: for example, an employee brings his wife. In this case, we can say the status of the employee is transferable to the guest for the social purposes of the event, thus resulting in small talk to be still between *equals* when the wife talks to her husband's coworkers. However, another approach is to admit that she indeed has a greater psychological distance that separates her from her husband's coworkers, given that she is less acquainted with them than he is.

I propose here phatic communication can be manifested in all types of relationships and scenarios, thus more than merely detecting when it is in use, we can further measure the nature of the bond based on a negative correlation between the kind of bond and the depth of phatic communication interactants maintain.

4.1.3 Social hierarchy.

Ventola (1979) also believes the interactants have to be both strangers, or both acquaintances, or both friends, or both family members, or both coworkers, in order to be able to engage in phatic communication; their hierarchy must be equal. However, as with the social distance debate, I propose here, small talk can be present amongst participants of different hierarchy. For example, Pullin (2010) discovered solidarity arose between unequal interactants. He analyzed data from business conversations where perceived hierarchy was different: "In taking part in this small talk as an equal, the boss, in turn, appeared to be mutating his power, which can help in nurturing solidarity, and in this case appeared to help release tension and nurture a return to more harmonious relations" (p. 469). Even if the small talk leads to a more substantial talk, for instance after polite greeting the department manager inquires about a report that is due soon, the opening function of small talk is in action even if used instrumentally to transition into some informational or transactional conversation.

In fact, Laver (1974/1975) called what is in between the opening and the closing phatic marginal phases, "the business phase". He claims the choice of tokens used in an interaction is limited to the nature of the relationship, rather than social status: "if the relationship between the two participants is solidarity, the opening speaker, regardless of his relative social status, has a free choice of category for his opening remark" (p. 223). This would apply, then, to superiors talking to inferiors, as well as the other way around; and evidently also between equals. As he explains later:

> The pattern of choice of category that constitutes the polite norm is one
>
> where the speakers who are well-acquainted can freely choose a category, but
>
> where non-acquainted speakers obey a constraint which depends on relative
>
> social status... The effect of violations of the polite norm is often to negotiate
>
> a greater solidarity between participants. (Laver, 1974/1975, p. 302)

According to Laver, politeness is the maxim that guides all phatic interactions, so

working within politeness guidelines primes over any other aspect of the interaction.

Similarly, Padilla (2005) frames phatic utterances according to Scollon and Scollon's

politeness systems to explain in which degree (strongly or weakly) the speaker can

communicate information. According to this, there are three politeness systems Padilla,

2005, p. 234):

- "Solidarity politeness system": when interlocutors are at the same social level in

  terms of power and closeness (-P[ower], -D[istance])

- "Deference politeness system": interlocutors are at the same power level, but their

  social distance is big (-P, +D)

- "Hierarchical politeness system": one interlocutor does have more power than the

  other, which translates as an asymmetrical relationship (+P, -/+ D)

I argue here that a mix of certain hierarchical social categories can result in phatic

interactions under certain circumstances. For example, if a department manager interacts

with those he is in charge of, he could still engage in phatic conversation, especially if the

interaction is brief; and a similar scenario can be envisioned between a teacher and a student, a clerk and a customer, and so on.

However, Holmes (2000/2014) says it is up to the participant with higher hierarchy to decide when the small talk phase of the interaction is over (p. 89); he uses a workplace example between boss and employee. This is part of what Holmes calls "doing power" at work, by which he means the ways through which we communicate and consolidate power status at work through talk. Considering this, he observed that those in a position of power often *downplay* the power of their position in order to gain sympathy and solidarity from those of lower power status (p. 120), similar to Pullin's (2010) findings.

An interesting perception about inter-hierarchical relations can be found in Tracy and Naughton's (2000/2014) research of press articles. They found that small talk was not only a desirable quality for upper management, but also something expected; these people are supposed to "engage in gracious talk with lower-ranking others" and know how to "work a room" (p. 146). However, another particularly interesting observation these authors made came from observing two conversational styles from president of the Unites States Bill Clinton and presidential candidate Steve Forbes. Clinton on one hand, they say, masters small talk and has a friendly personality, which is often positively received by reporters. Forbes, on the other hand, gets both critiques and compliments for being the opposite: a man with a more serious air, typically limited to talking about the pertinent issues of politics that pertained to him. Reporters would be put off by his attitude, but

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some respected him for playing by his own rules and not submitting to the *typical* rules of

social interaction; after all, a president's role is not to make small talk. This led Tracy and

Naughton to conclude that at the top of power hierarchy, small talk use is "discretionary"

(p. 150). Nonetheless, they did not explore further, for example, the context and the

pertinence of small talk under specific circumstances: as useful as it is in its primordial

relational function, small talk seems to have a place and time, and that's precisely why

mastering it is a skill, not only because one must know what to say, but when to start and

when to end.

4.2 According to direction.

Laver (1974/1975) offers a classificatory scheme of the type of linguistic tokens

used in phatic communion, depending on towards which interactant, speaker or listener,

the linguistic tokens that are used in the interaction are directed toward.

4.2.1 Neutral tokens.

Firstly, linguistic tokens can refer to something narrowly specific of the time and

place of the interaction, like when we engage in *party talk,* or what Schneider (1988)

called weather talk, or what I have called journey talk. These, he calls "neutral" because

they affect the interactants equally or they refer to something all interactants have equal

access to, which is typically the situation they are in (a party, a place where they can

experience the weather, or traveling, respectively). This category he also calls "safe"*,* as I

have hinted here before*,* or "uncommitted". It is safe because since the situation is

common to the participants, they can both play with the available information in order to

exchange thoughts about it. Anyone can engage in the exchange of neutral tokens without fear of jeopardizing the bond, and such exchanges even offer "momentary solidarity" (Laver, 1974/1975, p. 224). The examples he gives for neutral tokens are: "'Nice party' (to a fellow guest) or 'Great view' (to a fellow tourist); or 'About time the trains were cleaned' (to a fellow passenger)" (p. 223). These tokens, he says, threaten no one's face, and so using the parallelism between face and bonds established here, we can claim they do not threaten the bond either. These tokens, Laver says, are primarily used in the beginning of an interaction (the opening phase).

4.2.2 Self-oriented and other-oriented tokens.

Secondly, Laver (1974/1975) says when linguistic tokens refer to something wider about the speaker, they can be self-oriented and other-oriented. The type will depend on the perspective of the comment (p. 222-223), if it is from the speaker's point of view or the listener's. He offers examples of self-directed tokens, such as: "'Hot work, this'" (to a coworker), "or 'My legs weren't made for these hills' (to a fellow country-walker)" (Laver, 1974/1975, p. 223). These tokens, Laver explains, are typically declarative statements (p. 223). The other-oriented tokens, Laver says, are instead very often in question form: "'How do you like the sunshine, then?' Or 'Do you come here often?'" although "occasionally there are other forms of comment, such as 'That looks like hard work." (p. 223), which remain to be oriented towards the other.

Laver says self-oriented tokens threaten one's own negative face, and other-oriented tokens threaten the listener's negative face, which I assume is a conclusion

reached by considering these tokens as being intrusive for a phatic interaction. As opposed to neutral tokens, Laver indicates these tokens are used at the end (closing phase) of the interaction, even though the examples we took from him are not necessarily closing phrases. However, I can see how other-directed phrases like, for instance, "Well, it looks great on you..." would be a better example for a closing token.

By categorizing these tokens in such manner, Laver says he is "preparing the ground for the speculative proposition that the choice of token category made by a speaker on a particular occasion is indexically significant for staking claims about solidarity and relative social status" (Laver, 1974/1975, p. 223). Thus, Laver suggests that social status determines which linguistic tokens can be used in phatic communication. Neutral tokens represent a safe choice for any type of interactants, regardless of their status, but for the self-directed and other-directed tokens, he offers prospective *guidelines*:

> In an 'upwards' interaction, where a nonsolidary inferior speaks first to an acknowledged superior, he may choose the self-oriented category, but not the other-oriented category. In a 'downwards' interaction, where a nonsolidary superior speaks first to an acknowledged inferior, he may choose the other-oriented category, but not the self-oriented category. In 'level' interactions between nonsolidary acknowledged equals, neither the self-oriented nor the other-oriented categories may be chosen. (Laver, 1974/1975, p. 224)

Paradoxically, Laver notes that when interactants use *permitted* linguistic tokens, it reinforces status differences, and when they use *forbidden* tokens, it opens a moment of

solidarity (Laver, 1974/1975, p. 225), as in the boss-to-employee conversation used above.

4.3 According to content.

Depending on the intention, or the level of engagement, I offer in this category two types of content that basically come to indicate the instrumentality phatic communication can have. This is why these can also be seen as another sub-function of the main relational function of phatic communication, in which case they would be called the transitional function, and a gradient function. Both precepts have been mentioned throughout the present work, in different sections, but they are included here for organizational and clarity purposes. The introduction of the new concept antiphaticity is here categorized as the third type of content.

4.3.1 Transitional.

Phatic communication has been described here before as having a politeness function, or as being a politeness tool in general. This sometimes means that phatic communication is used in a transitional matter, to ease the shift to non-phatic talk with a more engaging topic or intimate topic, or to a more informational, ideational, or transactional form of communication. In Coupland's (2000/2014) terms, phatic communication is used to transition from social talk to transactional talk. Tracy and Naughton (2000/2014) called it "a catalyst for big talk" (p. 143). In Laver's (1974/1975) terms, phatic communication acts by "easing and signaling the transition to and from conversational interactions" (p. 234), which means it is used instrumentality to aid in such

transitions with ease. Coupland (2000/2014) talks about Laver's (1974/1975) marginal phases at the beginning and end of interactions as "means of establishing and maintaining social relationships and means of achieving transitions – into, within and out of more 'content-oriented'talk" (p. 44).

But if we look close enough, even the greeting tokens characteristic of phatic communication serve a transitional purpose as well. Both the opening and the closing stage of an interaction have a high level of phaticity, given that the tokens used follow politeness protocols to guarantee the bond remains intact, or is strengthened. These protocols reduce bond anxiety and are aimed towards the maintenance or establishment of social bonds. In the beginning, phatic tokens help in the transition from non-interaction to interaction, and at the end, they help to end the interaction by transitioning into non-interaction again in the best possible way.

Holmes (2000/2014) stated that "small talk serves as a bridge to the main business of the encounter" (p. 100), which Coupland et al. (1992) referred to as a "unique bridging potential" of phatic encounters (p. 226). Holmes also later calls small talk a "transitional device" and even a "time-filler", to "fill in the time between planned actives" (Holmes, 2000/2014, p. 114) very much so in the same way that small talk is said to help fill in silence.

It has been explained here how small talk can ease the transition into deeper talk, or transactional talk, but the opposite is also possible. In order to diminish hostility and

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save face, small talk can be used at the end of an interaction after very specific informational talk has taken place.

4.3.2 Gradient.

As it has been mentioned before, this notion was first introduced by Coupland et al. (1992) as "degrees of phaticity", which they conceived as part of a negotiation of engagement in the communicative act. As these authors stated, it is the interactant's choice to decide if they are willing to further engage in deeper levels of conversation besides phatic talk. In Tracy and Naughton's (2000/2014) terms, "small talk varies in kind from 'small' small talk to 'big' or meaningful small talk" (p. 151).

Ventola (1979) also contemplates these different levels of *intensity* or *depth* — regardless still rather superficial — of the interaction. She distinguishes between *minimal* and *non-minimal* types of casual communication. The first one corresponds to phatic communion as it was originally conceived, and serves exclusively to the maintenance of bonds with minimal interaction. The second one could be paired with phatic communication, corresponding with the distinction established here between "communion" and "communication" as one being the means to the other; or simply seeing it as lesser and further levels of involvement, engagement, depth, or intimacy in the interaction. As Ventola puts it, non-minimal casual conversation is about something, rather than the more ephemeral nothingness of phatic communion (Ventola, 1979, p. 279).

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Ventola's theoretical aim for organizing casual conversation ends up with four

categories, based on the two main variables: social distance and engagement, and it

results in a structure of increasing depth or complexity:

More simple

1- minimal conversation with maximal social distance

2- minimal conversation with minimal social distance

3- non-minimal conversation with maximal social distance

4- non-minimal conversation with minimal social distance

More complex.

(adapted from Ventola, 1979, p. 279[2])

This author notes a few specific details. For example, in the first case from the list above,

these interactions start with an indirect approach, because the interactants are strangers. In

the second case the only mandatory element is the greeting, because an already

established bond allows for minimal interaction in order to maintain it (at least to a certain

level). In the third case, it is also the norm for these interactions to start with an indirect

approach, but in this case, a direct approach follows necessarily as well, because to switch

to a non-minimal conversation the participants must a found a common interest that

required further acquaintanceship, a paradigm sustained here throughout. For this same

reason, Ventola says the protocols of leave-taking and goodbye become also obligatory in

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[2] From "The Structure of Casual Conversation in English", by E. Ventola, 1979, *Journal of Pragmatics, 3*(3), p. 279. Copyright 1979 by Elsevier. Adapted with permission.

the third case. No details are given about the fourth case on the list, but certainly it can be expected that being the closest kind there is much more freedom about the protocols of the interaction.

As it has been indicated above, we can establish grades of phatic engagement depending on the distance between the interactants, and I established that typically there will be a greater degree of phaticity as the social distance increases, which resonates perfectly with Ventola's (1979) structure. Schneider (1988), on his part, also noted this by explaining that the topics used to start a conversation depend on the level of acquaintanceship the interactants share: strangers normally start with the weather or complaints about their current situation, and people that already know each other usually enquire about their well-being or about work (p. 16). Schneider noted that in a bar setting, small talk is usually about the pub, the beer, the music, politics in a superficial way, local affairs, sports and games such as darts; all these in order of more-to-less frequent (Schneider, 1988, p. 20). These are what Laver (1974/1975) described as safe topics. Pick-up lines in a bar setting, which is not something Schneider contemplated, can be considered as phatic tokens given that they initiate the interaction in a polite manner.

However, Schneider notes: "if conversing strangers develop an interest in one another they may want to find out about their interlocutor's identity and occupation" (p. 20). This way, we can conclude that small talk not only has different grades, but also can be the initiator of more engaging conversation, transitioning away from phatic communication into non-phatic talk if the participants develop a mutual interest. Asking

questions, as Schneider also observed, is also a way test the level of desired commitment of the participants, which could open the possibility to deepen the conversation.

Allow me to suppose the following scenario: two acquaintances meet in their neighbourhood and after a cordial greeting, they stop for a brief chat. Now, obviously, according to what is organized here, the greeting alone works a conversation starter that would cover a need for politeness following social convention, and the small talk that followed would cover maintenance of bonds. Now, regarding depth, engagement or intimacy of the interaction, if one neighbour simply comments on the weather or on current events, then the level of depth is little; which means phatic engagement is very superficial. Ready-made phrases for all situations are already part of our cognitive repertoire of linguistic tokens that help us ease interactions with little engagement. However, a *deeper* level can be conceived: if the neighbour asks instead "How are your kids?" this implies the use of specific knowledge (neighbour one knows neighbour two has kids) and thus offers a deeper level of engagement, given the content-specific nature of the interaction. In this case, even though the nature of the conversation remains to be phatic, an added element of retrospective knowledge helps in the success of the communicative exchange, in order to maintain, or even strengthen, the bond further. For example, neighbour two can interpret neighbour one's question as genuine concern for his family, perhaps even promoting him to make a posterior evaluative comment like "Neighbour one is really nice, he always asks me about my kids". As we can appreciate here, the purpose of neighbour one's question was to maintain the bond by inquiring in

detail about neighbor two's children. On the other side, we can explore an outcome of the same conversation that would result, instead, in the weakening of the bond: after neighbour one's question, neighbour two replies "I don't have kids", or even worse, he could include an judgement of neighbour one, "You must be confused, I don't have kids" or "You must have mistaken me for someone else, I don't have kids". And consequentially, neighbour two's evaluation of neighbour one will be radically different: "Can you believe neighbour one asked me about my kids today? What a phoney!" In both cases, it should be noted, neighbour two 's appreciation of neighbour one is emotional, as it has been framed here within Scheff's (1990) Deference-Emotion system. The outcome of such interaction, and the assessment of the bond the neighbours make will certainly affect future interactions.

As Holmes and Fillary (2000) also observed, small talk can develop beyond "ritualistic utterances into more extended social talk", and they further elaborate:

> Small talk develops or expands in this way for a number of possible reasons...
> the participants may know each other well, or the period since they last had
> contact may be considerable, or they may be aware that a brief ritualistic
> small talk exchange at the boundaries of the speech event would be
> experiences as inadequate. (Holmes & Fillary, 2000, p. 279)

Making that choice, these authors note, requires sociolinguistic ability, as evidenced in their research. They found workers with intellectual impairment failed to distinguish when to talk more and when to talk less during small talk. This notion, also in the

workplace, was observed as well by Mak and Chui (2013), who said, "small talk can be

developed *from* or *to* business talk" (p. 120).

It is, then, up to the interactants to decide how much further to engage in the

interaction. They can start at a phatic level, and deepen into non-phatic topics if they

wish. Coupland (2000/2014) talks about "discursive renegotiation", which she explains as

"where, within a given speech event, speakers' orientations, framing and footings shift,

reflecting their changing local priorities as talk proceeds" (p. 58). However, speakers can

also chose to remain phatic, if that fulfills their communicational goals, or even to

somehow manage the bond with even less engagement, as will be detailed next.

4.3.3 Antiphaticity.

Besides Malinowski's (1946) isolated mention of "bonds of antipathy" (p. 314),

which are created by disagreement (note that it is not anti-pha-ty) no other antagonist

notion of phatic communication has been mentioned elsewhere. What I interpreted from

this brief remark in Malinowski's work is that hostility arises from an encounter in which

there was disagreement, and a consequential threat for the bond. Agreement has been

included in the present model as one of the sub-functions of phatic communication

precisely for this reason.

Hence what I propose here is the idea of *antiphatic* communication, which

includes a duality that needs to be addressed. Etymologically, the added prefix "anti" to

the word "phatic" would imply the meaning for the new word "antiphatic" is "that which

goes against, or is the opposite of, that which is phatic". But does that mean it is anti-

bonding? Or anti-polite? Or is it antiphatic that which avoids bonding while remaining polite, in order to, nevertheless, keep face and maintain bond status? I propose here that antiphatic is that which avoids further bonding in order to preserve an existing bond and not lose face.

There are specific gestures that explain the essence of antiphaticity perfectly, for example, smoking. Typically people that smoke in social gatherings like parties or reunions do so as an escape from the dynamic in such event, with the intention of *clearing the mind*, or even — paradoxically — going out *for fresh air.* With this gesture the individual ceases social contact and thus gives up the possibility to continue bonding, but in doing so within a cultural and social structure where it is permitted — and even common — the bond is typically not threatened and face is not lost.

Another more contemporary example of an antiphatic gesture is texting via our cellphones. Wang et al.'s (2011) considered texting a phatic technology in their research, and although certainly it can help connect people, it can also have an antiphatic use either by texting in the midst of a conversation with someone, or by excusing oneself to attend to any matters where the use of the phone is central, or by *fake texting*, which is when someone pretends to be texting in order to avoid the circumstances around her or him. In either case, potential participants close themselves to the possibility of establishing and or maintaining bonds with the people around them because they instead chose to remain asides de interactional dynamics that are taking place.

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On the other hand, I consider that since the possibility to deepen into a non-phatic

conversation once an interaction started through a phatic exchange is possible, as I have

explained here previously, the opposite should be possible as well: once a conversation

takes a turn in that direction, the participants can use phatic tokens with the intention of

having it remain phatic only. Consider the following continuum:

Figure 11. Continuum of Degrees of Phaticity

This suggests there is a depth to the classification of the type of discourse one could

engage in. The notion of non-phatic has been explained here before, and is considered as

everything else that is not phatic, referring to more ideational, informational or

transactional discourses. But the possibility of different degrees of phaticity has also been

detailed here, thus it seems like locating phatic communication in the middle of the

spectrum of possibilities, opens a space for a new kind of discourse located at the other

side; that is the antiphatic. It encompasses the most superficial degrees of depth of phatic

communication, but since it is nevertheless a kind of phatic communication, it is still

framed within a politeness protocol and thus it is concerned with bond and face

management.

For example, in his work about phatic communication in nursing Burnard (2003)

notes that when nurses use more formal greetings ("Good morning", instead of "Hi!") it

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can be taken as an indicator of the purpose of the interaction (p. 680), which has an effect

on the duration of the phatic phase: longer or straight to business. He offers different

outcomes for one same interaction as a way to illustrate how interactants can manage the

direction of the conversation. The examples below change the content of what the

interactants say in their turn from one example to the other so we can appreciate how the

overall interaction changes. Burnard does this by introducing or removing phatic tokens,

suggesting the use of these linguistic tokens, if properly interpreted, can indicate the

intention of the participants in the interaction: they can decide to leave it as a phatic

conversation or *upgrade* it into a deeper one, or as he explained it," the conversation

could have turned from being phatic to being information seeking and giving" (p. 680).

And so, Burnard offers a first dialogue where we can see the conversation remains at a

very phatic level, the phatic extreme I am calling here antiphatic:

Nurse: Hello, Mrs Jones, how are you?

Patient: I'm not too bad, thank you, despite things really...

Nurse: That's good. And your husband?

Patient: He's fine. Busy as ever.

Nurse: Well, I expect he likes that.

Patient: Yes.

(Burnard, 2003, p. 680)

Versus this possible other conversational dynamic, which evolves into a more

informational type of conversation:

Nurse: Hello, Mrs Jones, how are you?

Patient: I'm not too bad, thank you, despite things really...

Nurse: You don't sound too sure!

Patient: Well, those new tablets are making me feel awful.

Nurse: Which ones?

Patient: The antidepressants. They are upsetting my stomach.

Nurse: Are you sure it is those ones that are doing it?

Patient: Yes, the doctor took me off the other ones and these are giving me a

terrible stomach.

Nurse: Ok, well, we need to do something about that...

(Burnard, 2003, p. 680-681).

In other words, antiphaticity can be evidenced in the interactants' management of the

communicative encounter, specifically in the use of certain tokens to either commit

further into the conversation, or to back away from it. In the same way that one decides to

go out for a smoke to avoid establishing or maintaining social bonds but without the

negative repercussions of loss of face, one can chose to maintain a cordial exchange, but

focus on briefness in order to both maintain the bond, but not investing the time to engage

in-depth.

4.4 According to placement.

Holmes (2000/2014) says marking the limits of an interaction is "one of the most

obvious functions" of small talk (p. 113) right before introducing, as does every other

author, Laver's (1974/1975) work. Laver divides the temporal structure of interactions in three stages: opening phase, medial phase, and closing phase. He focuses in the opening and closing phases, because he believes are critical for phatic communion. As indicated before, both marginal phases are conceived as transition phases to ease the start and end of an interaction. For Laver, phatic communion in the two marginal phases is normally conceived as "a limited set of stereotyped phrases of greeting, parting, commonplace remarks about the weather, and small talk" (p. 218).

In these phases, the purpose of phatic communication is to make participants feel good and accepted in their interaction, to strengthen their bond, or to create a new one that sets their new relationship in good standing. Padilla (2005) refers to these phases as "social niceties that lubricate the beginnings and endings of conversations" (p. 137). Briefly, the first phase acts as a social lubricant, as it has been discussed here previously; and the final phase eases the transition when the encounter is coming to an end in order to preserve the bond, reducing bond anxiety. Schneider (1988) also analyses the phases of interactions similarly:

> The primary aim of the opening is to define the interactants' relationship, to establish or to re-establish social contact, and, unless the discourse occurs between strangers, to link the current encounter with previous ones. Similarly the closing phase reflects the present state of an interpersonal relationship at the end of an interaction, i.e. to what extent the interaction has reaffirmed or redefined (for better or worse) the relationship. Further, in the closing phase

the interactants express the wish to continue friendly relations in the future

(even if that wish is not genuine). (Schneider, 1988, p. 98)

Holmes and Fillary (2000) make an interesting observation about small talk being

predominantly in the marginal phases of the interaction: it is also more present in the

marginal stages of la journée. In fact, they consider the first encounters of the day an

obligatory instance for small talk, which when in absence is interpreted as "bad manners

or bad humors" (p. 280). However, these authors also found that phatic communication

was used at other times, such as short breaks or lunch break.

4.4.1 Opening phase.

I have stated here previously that Laver (1974/1975) uses the common expression

"breaking the ice" (p. 218) when explaining the opening phase of phatic communication,

and he further determines the functions that this crucial introductory stage serves. First, he

says, there is a "propitiatory function", which serves to *propitiate* the interaction. This is

when phatic communication ends silence and thus avoids the potential hostility that can

come from it. Second, there is an "explorato*y* function" because given the understanding

that phatic communication conveys indexical information, it is rational to say that the

management of such data allows us to *explore* the different variables of the situation. This

"allows the participants to feel their way towards the working consensus of their

interaction" (p. 221), by tacitly giving away indexical information about themselves.

Third, the "initiatory function", which very much relates to the propitiatory function, but

in this case aiming towards starting an interaction does not necessarily come from a state

of silence, but refers more to the notion of cordiality typical of phatic communication, following social protocols and norms.

When detailing the opening phase, Laver (1974/1975) talks about phatic communion as an "almost universal habit" (p. 218). However, there are certain occasions when it can be inappropriate, such as "where the interactants have already met that day, or at least within the last six or seven hours, and have already indulged in extended phatic communion in their first meeting" (p. 218).

Laver's (1974/1975) work is so detailed, he describes the following *steps* or *stages* in the opening phase of an interaction: first, interactants make eye contact, then they exchange "distant" gestures of greeting or acknowledgement, then they chose a face expression for the interaction (based on previous interactions or anticipated scenario), then they must approach physically each other, followed by the exchange of "conventional contact gestures of greeting" and the use of appropriate body orientation, then they will exchange "stereotyped linguistic symbols used as tokens in the transactions", and finally they will signal a disposition to go on into a conversation by "signals of transition", which can be both in verbal or body language, like "moving the head slightly... A slight shift in posture... distance between the participants... the use of a linguistic marker such as 'Well...", or more overtly transitional comments such as 'What I came to see you about was...,' or 'Well, what can I do for you?'" (p. 219-220).

In a later work, Laver (1981) establishes three formulaic types of greeting and parting: "general greetings and parting tokens" like "Good morning" and "Goodbye",

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"direct address greetings" like "Mr. Smith" or "Robert", and "small talk", which he now

directly pairs with phatic communion, like "Nice day for the time of the year" (p. 292).

Ventola (1979) also considers the importance of greetings by labeling them an

"opening move", following Goffman, and certainly agreeing with Firth's (1972)

distinctions of the different ways in which a greeting is manifested in the English

language depending on the relationship, culture and context of the interaction. Ventola

goes on to try to formalize the structure of casual conversations by noting the different

stages, every much like Laver (1974/1975). According to Ventola, however, the next *step*

after a greeting is *addressing*, which defines the addressee. In the case of strangers, she

explains, this element is evidently omitted; but, I believe, a general way to address the

other can still take place, for example "Good night, *sir*". Ventola's following element is

approach, which can be achieved, she says, by using "safe topics, social niceties,

breaking the ice, chats, small talk, etc. It is a means of getting the conversation going"

(Ventola, 1979, p. 273). The approach can be direct, which concerns something about the

interactant's self; or indirect, which refer to the immediate situation (very much in line

with Laver's (1974/1975) neutral, or self-directed and other-directed tokens).

4.4.2 Medial phase.

As commented previously, Laver called this phase "the business phase", although

he did not elaborate much about it, and neither did Ventola (1979). Padilla (2005),

however, phrases it quite eloquently saying, "phatic discourse cannot be restricted to the

margins of conversations... It also appears in the middle of the purely transactional phase

as a way to ensure the achievement of interactive goals because of the propitious and friendly atmosphere it creates or maintains" (p. 137), with which Vigara (1990) would agree.

Furthermore, in a later work, Padilla (2013) suggests there are specific functions that phatic communication serves sin this phase (p. 138):

- "Entertaining" function: because the purpose is bonding and not informing per se, the medial phase allows interactants to *pass the time*, while creating or maintaining bonds.

- "Reinforcing" function: strengthening previous information or feelings produced at a previously successful encounter.

- "Influencing" function: affecting other interlocutors' points of view.

With the opening and closing function Padilla paraphrases Laver and adds his own contributions to the functions he establishes, but in this case he offered these functions on his own and there seems to be something not entirely coherent about them. The first one basically denies the existence of a more transactional phase, conceiving as phatic the totality of an interaction. Other authors often locate the second one, which is perhaps the least incoherent, in the closing phase. And the last function seems to go outside how phatic communication is conceived here, seemingly indicating that phatic communication is performed in order to influence others, and not in order to bond with others. Although it is certain that perceptions and impressions are made and managed, and finally evaluated, they are not the focus of phatic communication.

4.4.3 Closing phase.

Although the opening phase of phatic interactions generally receives more attention, Laver (1974/1975) offers a detailed description of the closing phase as well. As with the opening phase, he believes phatic communion does not take place when the interactants know they will see each other again shortly, or where roles are clearly defined by the situation. According to Laver, phatic communion in the closing phase of an interaction serves the main function of establishing a "continuing consensus for future encounters", but it also serves a *supporting function* of consolidating the relationship experienced in the current interaction (p. 227).

Laver (1974/1975) also offers a series of *stages* for this phase, as he did with the opening phase: first, signals of transition are given by the initiator of the phase. These are phatic tokens that facilitate parting. Laver offers some illustrative examples: "gestures such as the ostentatious finishing of a drink, a cup of coffee, or a cigarette, or clipping a pen into a pocket, taking off, folding up and putting away spectacles, and so forth" (p. 228-229). What follows is an exchange of tokens of phatic communion, and then participants exchange conventional contact gestures of parting with the accompanying facial expressions, consequently increasing the physical distance between the participants so they can exchange conventional distant gestures of parting and ultimately break mutual eye contact (Laver, 1974/1975, p. 229) which evidently puts an end to the interaction. The constant use of the word "conventional" highlights the normative and ritualistic nature of

such interaction routines and the linguistic tokens used, as it has been stressed here before.

And of course, as he does with the opening phase, Laver comments on the functions of the closing phase: first, it mitigates a possible sense of rejection, which Laver notes, secures cooperation. In Bond Theory terms, it alleviates the primordial emotion of fear by securing the bond and avoiding bond anxiety. In a later work, Laver (1981) stated this function serves to save both the speaker's and the listener's negative face, which can come from the use of self-oriented, or other-oriented tokens. For example, he mentions the use of formulaic phases that may or may not rely on factuality, like "I'm afraid I must be off, I have a million things to do" or "I wish I could stay longer, but I have to get back to relieve the babysitter"; and the even more creative ones are those that express deference to the needs of the listener: "Mustn't keep you" or "I guess you have to get on, I'll be going" (Laver, 1974/1975, p. 230).

The next function Laver outlines is the *consolidation* of the relationship, which is evidenced in the use of certain phatic communion tokens of various nature, such as specific to the situation or the existing relationship like "It was nice seeing you" or "Say hello to Jeanie for me", or relative to caring for the other like "Take care now", or even benedictions like "God bless" (Laver, 1974/1975, p. 230-231). He also makes an interesting statement regarding the consequences to the bond that the phase can have, saying "conversations can be terminated amicably only by mutual consent" (p. 228), which justifies why in many occasions an initiation of departure from the communicative

situation is failed and the interaction continues only until both parties are ready to leave.

This, of course, is not always the case; many times one party leaves abruptly, or maybe

just in a manner that leaves the other party unease. In these situations, it implies a

weakening of the existing bond, or as Laver would put it, "a rift in the cooperation and a

decline in solidarity; and this naturally affects the nature of future interactions" (p. 231),

which is why in a later work, Laver (1981) said this function address the positive aspect

of face.

Face can be saved by introducing phaticity at the end of an interaction, in order to

mitigate hostility and contribute to a positive post-evaluation of the interaction and the

status of the bond. An example comes from Holmes's (2000/2014) research on small talk

in the workplace. The following dialogue occurs between a manager and her personal

assistant, who are talking about jobs to be done:

```
1  B: (and) the election briefing
2  H: yeah oh + + I think we've cancelled that + + you might need to check
3  B: yeah
4  H: I'm fairly sure that's been cancelled + + the panel on Friday afternoon's
5     been cancelled so everyone have to + cope their own
6  B: (pardon)
7  H: well it's nice to have you back welcome back
8  B: yes had a very good holiday [tut]
9  H: and feel well rested? so where did you go?
```

Figure 12. Small Talk Dialogue Number 3. From *Small Talk* (p. 158) by J. Coupland,
2014, Hoboken: Taylor and Francis. Copyright 2014 by Taylor and Francis. Reproduced
with permission.

Here small talk serves the same functions Laver (1974/1975) detailed in his closing

phase, it makes sure that the interaction ends smoothly, it maintains the good standing of

the relationship and eases the transition into, eventually, non-interaction.

And with a state of non-interaction, four of the five features the theoretical model

of phatic communication contemplates are now analyzed and explained. The model is

presented in a way that it offers also in its own organization a progressive knowledge

about the phenomenon, so we can learn more about it, and more in-depth with each

feature. Thus, most of the epistemic corpus that needed organization is structured now in

those features in a way that is easy to access and understand. I will now proceed with the

last feature of the model, which will help in seeing more of phatic communication in

action, in a variety of scenarios, starting with our everyday life.

5. Scenarios of Phatic Communication

This last section is dedicated to show some of the different settings in which

phatic communication can take place as way of delimiting theoretical categories that work

within the present model; however, evidently, these categories are neither exhaustive nor

exclusive.

It has been already determined that the scope of phatic communication

encompasses all forms of communication, despite being studied traditionally only under

oral communication. In fact, written communication will be predominant in the last

subsection here, social media, given that written interactions are the principal type of

communication form in social media in the online world for personal users to contact

each other. As for the offline world, I will take a look into everyday life, pop culture

manifestations, some professional fields that have looked into small talk from their own

lenses, and cross-cultural studies on phatic communication.

It is then evident that I have called here "scenarios" include not only the physical

place where the interaction occurs, but also it was worded that way with the intention of

alluding to the different perspectives through which the phenomenon of phatic

communication can be studied. These perspectives are in part the cause of what I have

referred to earlier as shortcomings of the study of phatic communication, since the

authors that chose to look at the phenomenon within a specific paradigm typically restrict

their own reach and ability to look into it comprehensively. This is something Coupland

(2000/2014) noted as well:

> For example, Schneider (1988) offers a perspective on small talk which has as
>
> its aim the development of 'sociopragmatic competence' in the language
>
> learning context. Thus, his focus is mainly on description of forms, structures
>
> and topics rather than the explanation of social functions which small talk
>
> may achieve for interlocutors. (Coupland, 2000/2014, p. 43)

This lack of holistic approach to phatic communication was precisely what drove the

focus of the present work to be theoretical and aiming at organizing phatic

communication in a comprehensive model that includes all aspects it encompasses.

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5.1 Everyday life.

Scheneider's (1988) work, widely used here, is outstandingly detailed and meticulous in examining the manifestations and nuances of small talk, including classifications that are original to his work. He performed a discourse analysis on a sample of recorded conversations of different nature, and also conducted a survey from which he determined the most frequent topics and situations (and topics for situations) that participants reported for small talk. Since Schneider examines the topics present in phatic communication throughout his work, at some point he had to explain what a topic is, its function, and how he conceived them. He understands "topics" as a "discourse structuring element" (p. 81), and perhaps that's why great attention is given to them in his work. Following a linguistic tradition, Schneider conceives a topic as a "'transaction' in the interactional structure" (p. 81), where discourse is maintained in blocks of content. In his surveys he observed participants had a remarkable understanding of what conversations topics are, and often agree on which they talked about (p. 82). A topic is developed through an interaction after an introductory stage, and can later be shifted or changed, even abruptly (Schneider, 1988, p. 85-96).

Endras, Rehm and André (2011) take on the work of Schneider (1988) to establish a possible *progression* in the depth of the topics participants can engage in:

1. The "immediate situation" holds topics that are elements of the so-called *frame* of the situation. In order to explain the idea of a frame, Schneider (1988) uses a Small Talk situation that takes place at a party. Possible topics within a party frame could be the

atmosphere, drinks, music, participants or food.

2. The "external situation" (later referred to as social topics) or "supersituation"

describes all topics that hold the larger context of the immediate situation. This category

is the least limited of the three. Topics within this category could be the latest news,

politics, sports, movies or celebrities.

3. For the "communication situation" (later referred to as private topics) interlocutors

are seen as a subset of the immediate situation. Thus, topics concentrate on the

conversation partners e.g. their hobbies, family or career. (Endras et al., 2011, p. 162)

The following illustration found in Schneider and Baroon (2008) displays the topics as

concentric circles (p. 104), two of which match Laver's (1974/1975) neutral tokens and

self or other oriented tokens. Their illustration should be helpful to illustrate Endras et

al.'s explanation further:
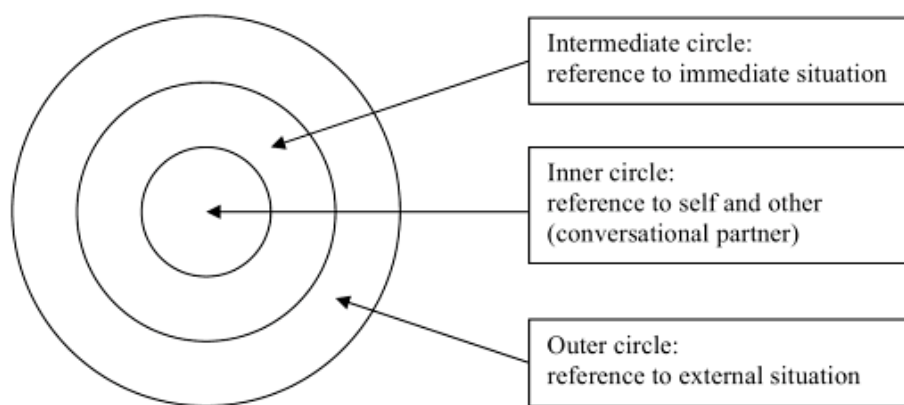
Figure 13. Basic Options for Topic Selection in Small Talk. From *Variational Pragmatics* (p. 104), by K. Schneider and A. Barron, 2008, Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins. Copyright 2008 by John Benjamins. Reproduced with permission.

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Endras et al. (2011) claim that typically an interaction will start with the *immediate situation*, and then move to either of the other two, depending on "the conversation partners, their personal relation and social context" (p. 162), an observation about the adaptability of phatic communication I have stressed here as well. Indeed, the context of the interaction, pertinent to the relationship of the participants, hierarchy and social distance, are variables that affect phatic interaction. Considering this, for instance: a conversation could very well start with *private topics*, and it can also move further, as explained here previously, into non-phatic topics as well. To illustrate this, here is a dialogue from their pilot study with Japanese speakers:

Example for a Japanese Small Talk dialog from our pilot study.

Agent	Utterance	Topic	Category
A	"This beergarden is really lovely."	Location	Immediate situation
B	"Yes. And because of the trees there is a nice shade."	Location	Immediate situation
A	"Oh yeah. It is exceptionally hot this summer."	Weather	Social
B	"True, the weather is really good this year. And it has hardly rained at all."	Weather	Social
A	"Like that I can go running quite often."	hobbies	private
B	"Oh, you are running?"	Hobbies	Private
A	"Yes. I run twice a week."	Hobbies	Private

Figure 12. Small Talk Topic Selection From Japanese Speakers. From "Planning Small Talk behavior with cultural influences for multiagent systems" , by B. Endrass, M. Rehm and E. Andre, E., 2011, *Computer Speech & Language, 25(2),* p. 167. Copyright 2011 by Elsevier. Reproduced with permission.

The most common topics Schneider (1988) himself found originally in his surveys were: the weather, current affairs, a superficial approach to politics, work, and children. Although it is mentioned last, and these results come from a small sample, I was pleased to see children as a listed topic. One of the things I have noticed in casual social

interactions myself here in Canada is precisely about the interactants' children: the subject

typically starts with "Do you have any children?" in circumstances where the speakers are

not yet too well-acquainted, and subsequent questions can include "How are they doing in

school", and the very stereotypical "Are they playing hockey?" with predictable

subsequent questions about their team or their skills level of play.

As mentioned earlier, Schneider believes the topics used to start a conversation

depend on the level of acquaintanceship the interactants share. Although formulaic

greetings like HAY, and the many variations of it, are a common conversation starter,

there is no guide to determine which linguistic tokens are used in the opening phase of an

interaction. In the same way, far beyond any classification, we could say any topic can

constitute a phatic communication topic, as long as its treatment is superficial or, as

Hayakawa puts it "subjects about which agreement is immediately possible" (quoted in

Schneider, 1988, p. 26), like when using what Laver (1974/1975) called safe linguistic

tokens.

Schneider (1988) offers a variety of examples of what people talk about in

different situations, like at bus stops while waiting for the bus, at party events, in the

theatre, at bars; but despite the location of the interaction, something that is always

accessible to the speakers, and thus constitutes the epitome of safe topics, is the

weather. He also found in his survey that the weather was the "small talk topic par

excellence" (p. 15). Indeed, a significant part of his work is dedicated to weather talk and

journey talk, which are the conversations about traveling circumstances that are common to the speakers.

In weather talk, he examines the topics and strategies used (like topping, comparison, temporal contrasting, expressing hopes and fears, for more details, please refer to Schneider, 1988), as well as the position in discourse where it takes place in the interactions, all enriched with various examples (p. 240-284). Weather talk was even considered a politeness protocol that people should master for social situations, as evidenced in the work of Mikes, who outlined a few phrases to engage in such conversation, and exhorted readers to "learn them by heart" because they are handy in any social occasion. For good weather, Mikes offers the following example of a conversation:

EXAMPLES FOR CONVERSATION

For Good Weather

'Lovely day, isn't it?'
'Isn't it b e a u tiful?'
'The sun ...'
'Isn't it gorgeous?'
'Wonderful, isn't it?'
'It's so nice and hot ...'
'Personally, I think it's so nice when it's hot –
 isn't it?'
'I adore it – don't you?'

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For Bad Weather

'Nasty day, isn't it?'

'Isn't it dreadful?'

'The rain ... I hate rain ...'

'I don't like it at all. Do you?'

'Fancy such a day in July. Rain in the morning,
then a bit of sunshine, and then rain, rain, rain,
all day long.'

'I remember exactly the same July day in 1936.'

'Yes, I remember too.'

'Or was it in 1928?'

'Yes, it was.'

'Or in 1939?'

'Yes, that's right.'

Figure 15. Examples for Weather Talk. From *Small Talk: Analyzing Phatic Discourse* (p. 7) by K. Schneider, 1988, Marburg: Hitzeroth. Copyright 1988 by Klaus Schneider. Reproduced with permission.

Particularly in the second example, there is also clear evidence of the subfunction of agreement, under the politeness function explained here.

Coupland (2000/2014), for her part, says, "much of small talk is topically founded in response to change... Recent past events (e.g. visits, news), changes to present circumstances (e.g. health), and future plans and intentions are all grist to the topical small talk mill" (p. 63). Particularly, Coupland has looked at small talk with the elderly, something I have not found elsewhere in the literature. As she notes, some of the topics of conversation or anecdotes elderly people chose to share are often seen as irrelevant, or mundane, but what they stand for, as phatic communication, is something much more

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meaningful: a desire to connect, to bond, that could perhaps be triggered, this author

contends, because of a typically characteristic state of loneliness that comes with old age.

Take the following example:

```
1 E: um (.) what else (.) and er er I rang M____ last
2    night I was in a panic=
3 J: =why?
4 E: when I came home from (.) er from er (.) Gloucester (.)
5    from K___'s birthday I took some snaps while I was there
              [   ]
6 J:          mm
7 E: (.) and I couldn't find my camera and I looked and looked
                                    [ ]
8 J:                                ah
```

Figure 16. Small Talk Dialogue Number 4. From *Small Talk* (p. 65) by J. Coupland, 2014, Hoboken: Taylor and Francis. Copyright 2014 by Taylor and Francis. Reproduced with permission.

The type of interactions Coupland is considering here as phatic, follow in no way what is

conventionally established as phatic by me, other authors, or even herself elsewhere

because it is not ritualized, conventionalized, formulaic, or marginal. In fact, there is a

chance that for elder speakers these matters are actually relevant to them, maybe because

of their alleged lifestyle of low social interactions. It seems, then, likely what makes it

phatic is its relational function, which was the case for the joking examples offered here

previously.

Another interesting observation in regards to topics comes yet again from

Schneider's (1988) work, particularly when he analyzes the role opinions play as part of

phatic interactions in a theatre setting. Except for opening or greeting sentences (such as

HAY), questions are generally close-ended: "Rather noisy, isn't it?" which Schneider

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describes as "a statement plus tag question requesting confirmation" (p. 16). This is the

case, too, for weather talk, for example: "Hot today, right?" there is a rhetorical nature to

the question, where an answer is not required, because the content of the interaction is

irrelevant; the addressee could, however, nod in an expression of politeness, reaffirming

the bond. In the theatre scenario, however, questions are open-ended: "And what did you

think of it?" and they address, according to Schneider, aspects like the play itself, the

performance, the actors, the playwright, other plays, the theatre, etc. (p. 18). These

questions seem to require a more engaging interaction, which is why Schneider says "it

must be emphasized that unlike in many other small talk situations, opinions play a

dominant role here" (p. 18); but not only the role of opinions is relevant, but the fact that

this interaction is a deeper kind, where participants go outside formulaic linguistic tokens

and engage further in the interaction, albeit in a limited way regardless.

 Drew and Chilton (2000/2014) looked into telephone conversations and the phatic

use of this medium to *keep in touch.* Although it might seem dated today, it should come

as no surprise given that we use other mediums for this same purpose when distances

separate us from those who we wish to remain in contact with, like social media. But a

few decades ago, the telephone truly was the precursor of such endeavor. As with many

other technological devices, it was initially formulated as a tool to solve a practical

problem, in this case the need of communicating important facts; but eventually its use

evolved allowing for other approaches, like calling without a specific purpose, simply to

keep in touch (Wang et al., 2011). Drew and Chilton's findings for interactional protocols

regarding small talk over the phone largely mirror those of face-to-face interaction, but they provide great insight and detail about the vicissitudes of phone conversations. For example, they paid special attention to small talk topics, like "noticings" concerning the immediate local environment, reports of the day's activities, and news updates (Drew & Chilton, 2000/2014).

Other great examples of everyday interactions are found in Placencia (2005, 2007). In her earlier work, Placencia (2005) looked at corner store interactions between Quito, Ecuador, and Madrid, Spain, to compare pragmatic variations in communicative interactions. From the data she collected, it became apparent that the people in the two cities had different approaches to the service industry, for example, as shown through interactions with the clerk at the stores. Spanish natives are much more direct in their demands, and Ecuadorians extend their communication and downgrade the command verb to convey politeness, an observation she was also able to make in hospital information desks earlier on (Placencia, 1998). I have noted here before that when I lived in Madrid I observed a lack of small talk as a common behavior; well, Placencia noted Quiteños interact in an amicable way with the clerk in these small neighbourhood stores, adhering to greeting formulae and other niceties which, she says, denotes a greater social distance; and Madrileños were much more direct in their transactions because they saw their relation with the clerk as intimate (Placencia, 2005, p. 584-585).

In a later work, Placencia (2007) looked at *contact conversation* in hairdressing places, where socialization is part of the job, and the communicative exchanges are

typically carried with politeness but in an informal way. Indeed, she observed participants (customers and staff) would interact as if they were friends, but introducing along the way the demands for the transaction (haircut); thus a duality and ambiguity was witnessed where they used formal and informal elements, informational and relational goals, and mixed friendship with business (p. 8-9). Placencia observed stories, anecdotes and gossip, were shared continuously, as well as explicit invitations to converse. The purpose, we can assume was to proactively avoid silence and maintain existing bonds. It must be said, however, the data was collected in a small neighbourhood hair salon, so I would equate these results more to that kind of relationship, rather than to necessarily the nature of the business.

Not only in beauty parlors, but also in other many businesses we come in contact with on a daily basis, putting in practice small talk as a part of the costumer service routine frequently recognizes the value it can have. Once, while I was working in retail our store manager congratulated a coworker for giving great customer service. She said once she took the customer to the fitting rooms, she introduced herself with her name and after that, for as long as the customer was there, they "became friends", the customer would call her by her name to ask for help and ended up telling our store manager how great and helpful she had been. Through a simple phatic interaction like that, instrumentally used in order to perform better at work, my coworker decoded a social protocol that enhanced the experience of customers. Coupland and Ylanne-McEwen (in Coupland, 2000/2014) researched this notion in travel agencies, and Kuiper and Flindall

(also in Coupland, 2000/2014) in supermarket checkout encounters. Coupland herself

said, "small talk may mean big business" (p. 270).

From a non-academic perspective, there seems to be out in the market everything

from handbooks to maternity books. There is a book for small talk for babies, dedicated to

practices to make them more sociable (Lathey & Tracey, 2013), and Wadsworth (2011,

2012) has published two handbooks. She dedicates her work to the value of small talk as a

social skill, particularly one that can help save face, ease social encounters, and help

impression management. Her 2012 book is called *The Small Talk Handbook,* and in it, the

author offers "tips" to master small talk in all kinds of situations, from business to

romantic dates, and particularly to those that are shy, awkward, or simply striving for

more out of their social interactions. Even though the book in a way trivializes the depth

of communicative encounters and social dynamics, it nevertheless treats phatic

communication as a tool for social capital, which is one of my premises here.

Remarkably, other interesting points are made throughout the book. Firstly,

Wadsworth (2012) proposes the quality of communicative encounters can be enhanced

with the right set of skills, which means the encounter itself — the main protocols, and

outcomes of a phatic interaction — will remain to be the same, but it is upon us to make it

worth something. Secondly, the author talks about body language as another way to be

welcoming and friendly during an interaction. Thirdly, there is an argument of special

relevance when the subject of "everyday mingling" is addressed. The author here says

practicing small talk makes us feel more connected to those around us (p. 77). Lastly,

considering her work is more of a general handbook for social interactions, and socializing, the centrality small talk plays suggests that most social interaction takes place at a phatic level, at least initially.

5.2 Pop culture.

In this subsection I offer some examples of phatic communication being addressed in pop culture, specifically in five television shows, one of them developed in a Public Relations industry setting, and another specifically focused on online friendships. These phrases help illustrate everyday references that people use of small talk and their perceptions, as well as the familiarity with the topic, which seems to be of common domain.

From the show **Curb Your Enthusiasm.**

In an episode the main character, Larry, explores what happens when one runs into someone in a public setting: "You can't just say hello, you have to stop and make a little small talk", to which he later referred to as pulling a "stop and chat". In another episode Larry is waiting for the doctor in the waiting room and after seeing others' behavior, he said: "Who makes small talk at the doctor? That just makes everyone wait longer" (David, 1999).

From the show **Spun Out.**

This is the show about Public Relations, and interestingly enough it is Canadian production. There was a whole episode dedicated to small talk with a few highlights. Small talk was referred to as a way to refrain from being negative or insensitive, a sort of

social skill to avoid offending people; pointless and not meaningful, but serving a function. They mention, *elevator talk,* and the characters suggest permissible elevator conversation topics featuring the weather. Dave, one of the main characters, says: "As long as you stick to it, you can't get into any trouble", and he will later recommend a specific safe phrase to his daughter, who seemed to lack skill in small talking: "I'll give you a phrase that you can use practically with anyone, anywhere: 'Another day, another dollar', practice it". Of course, ready-made phases, idioms, and linguistic tokens have been mentioned here throughout; they work as phatic tools.

Another phrase they mentioned on the episode was one to use when someone's grandmother died: "Easy come, easy goes", and the implication was that you could simply say that in such situation, convey a meaning, and avoid making any further awkward conversation. Other examples in the same note were "Working hard or hardly working", "All is well that ends well" (Biederman & Piaskoski, 2014).

From the show Bones.

Very similarly to the examples used above, in this show the phrase "Tell me about it" came up, and it was being used as a parting protocol in the closing phase of the interaction, as a leave-taking token to end the conversation. However, one of the interactants did not know the conventional meaning of the phrase and continued *telling about it,* leading to an awkward explanation of what the phrase actually meant. The same happened when one of the characters asked, "What's shaping" as a conversation starter (Hanson, 2005).

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From the show **The Big Bang Theory.**

In an episode one of the main characters, Penny, a socially skilled young woman, is driving Amy and Sheldon, two prominent scientists who are portrayed on the show as socially awkward. Since they were both in silence, Penny tired to get them to engage in some small talk in the car because she found silence to be uncomfortable. In another episode, Howard, another socially awkward scientist, is left alone with his fiancé's father, having just been told he is going on a fishing trip, in order to manage the awkward silence, he asks: "So you like fishing...?", to which his future father in law replied with an almost angry look.

In an episode where Amy wants to get Sheldon into a "social science experiment", she suggests an experiment based on gossip; so after having her initiative critiqued by Sheldon, she says: "Evolutionary anthropologist Robin Dunbar has identified gossip as an aid to social bonding in large groups". Another reputable scientist's work was quoted in the show in an episode where all the main characters are at Penny's Halloween party; there, after observing people at the party, Sheldon decoded the rituals of interaction amongst the guests, who could be considered a different tribe than the one he belongs to:

-Leonard: I don't know how to talk to these people

-Sheldon: Well, I actually might be able to help… Like Jane Goodall observing the apes, I initially saw their interaction as confusing and unstructured, but patterns emerge; they have their own language, if you will

-Leonard: Go on…

-Sheldon: Well, it seems like the newcomer approaches the existing group with the greeting 'How wasted am I?', which is met with an approving chorus of 'dude'

In another episode, Sheldon asks Penny: "So how was your day?", she replied: "Oh, sweetie, you don't have to make small talk", to which Sheldon said: "No, no, that's the standard social convention...". A similar dialogue can be found in yet another episode where Sheldon approaches Penny with ulterior motives:

-Sheldon: What's shaking?

-Penny: I'm sorry?

-Sheldon: It's colloquial, a conversation opener... So, do you find the weather satisfying? Are you currently sharing the triumph with some local sports team?

-Penny: What's going on you're freaking me out

-Sheldon: Just striking up a casual conversation with you... S'uup?

-Penny: ... Please don't do that

-Sheldon: Ok, but I'm given to understand that when you have something awkward to discuss with someone it's more pliable to practice it with banal chit cha (Llore & Prady, 2007).

From the show Selfie.

This show has not aired at the time this thesis is being written, but from the previews and trailers it looks like it deals with the raise of individualism, self-centeredness, and looks-obsessed culture that is promoted through certain online behavior, specially those present in social media. The protagonist was an ugly duckling in

high school and later *transformed* herself into a fashionable and attractive woman, who seems to be way too invested in posting pictures online and getting high amounts of Likes and other kind of praise from those in her network. It seems like in the series she gets help of a coworker in realizing her shallowness and starts questioning the importance of popularity online, and she says, "Being friended isn't the same as having friends" (Kapnek, 2014).

5.3 Professional fields.

This subsection is organized to offer some examples of research conducted in professional fields, different to the common academic fields where most research on phatic communication has been performed: in pragmatics, first of all, in linguistics, sociology, language, communication, and even psychology. The research present here approaches phatic communication from the perspective of other professions, like human resources, business or medicine.
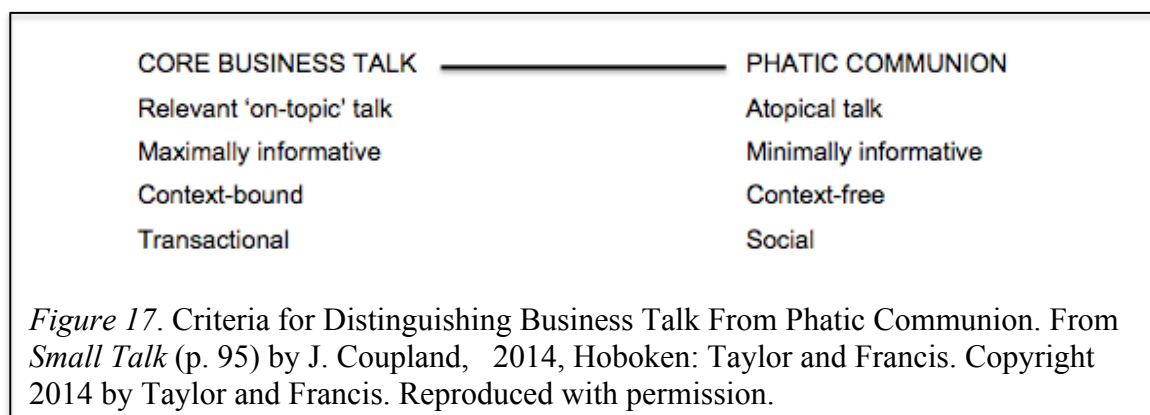
Schneider (1988) noted the literature assumes phatic communication is of general knowledge and only worth approaching superficially (p. 29), a reason why some authors working with phatic communication in professional fields do not even define what small talk is, but rather use synonyms or give examples (Felice, 2013; Holmes & Fillary, 2000; Penn & Watermeyer, 2009; Posner & Hamstra). This is an interesting paradox because small talk being something relevant because of its function and not its content, many authors refer to the content as a way to delimit — however, not define — what small talk is. Such is the case of phrases like "Small talk is when people do chit chat about the

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weather". This is something Tracy and Naughton (2000/2014) also observed: "people

know what it is so there's no point laboring the obvious" (p. 151). Nevertheless, the

observations made in works that lack definition are still insightful and relevant; they

simply focused on the practical aspect instead.

Holmes (2000/2014), for example, points out how even in an environment where

transactional talk primes, like the workplace, small talk is nevertheless not necessarily

easy to identify. Moreover, in order to do this, we have to first make sure we are certain

about the types of talk that take place and their limits and characteristics. He uses a

continuum of his own to go from "core business talk" to phatic communion:

CORE BUSINESS TALK	——————	PHATIC COMMUNION
Relevant 'on-topic' talk		Atopical talk
Maximally informative		Minimally informative
Context-bound		Context-free
Transactional		Social

Figure 17. Criteria for Distinguishing Business Talk From Phatic Communion. From *Small Talk* (p. 95) by J. Coupland,   2014, Hoboken: Taylor and Francis. Copyright 2014 by Taylor and Francis. Reproduced with permission.
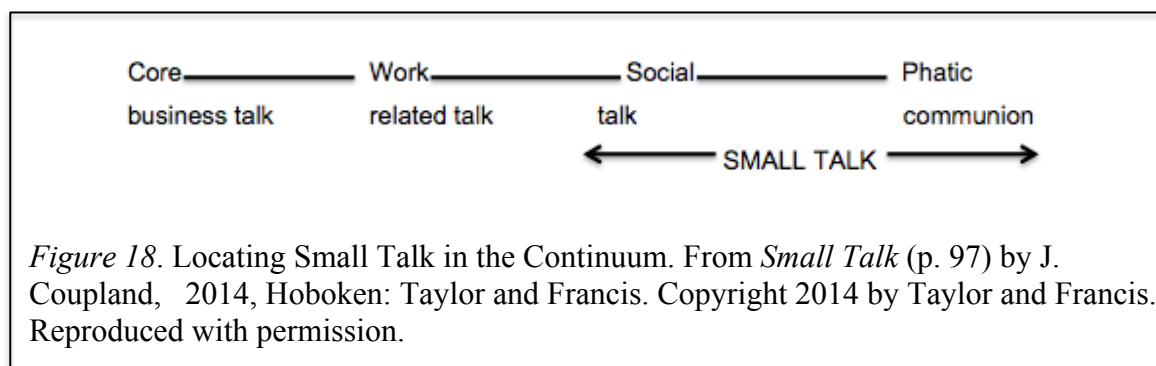
To develop this continuum, Holmes uses criteria like relevance, informativeness and

context-bound. The transactional side of the spectrum contemplates talk that is high in all

three criteria and pertinent to the scenario where it takes place, which is the workplace.

Small talk at work, Holmes (2000/2014) says, "serves the organization's goals

indirectly by maintaining good relationships between employees" (p. 97). For him, small

talk is not phatic communion, although it includes it, but it encompasses a wider range of

the continuum, as he proposes in the following edition of the continuum:

Figure 18. Locating Small Talk in the Continuum. From *Small Talk* (p. 97) by J. Coupland,   2014, Hoboken: Taylor and Francis. Copyright 2014 by Taylor and Francis. Reproduced with permission.

In any case, he explains how in most of talk these typologies are overlapped and

constantly going in and out of different forms, so in reality it is harder to identify which

talk we are in the presence of, because a conversation likely includes several different

types. It has been proposed here that phatic communication has a gradient which allows

for its transitional function to aid in the transition in and out a deeper kind of talk; this is

perhaps, as Holmes hinted himself, part of the reason why the continuum is not a static

classificatory scheme of boxes and drawers, but rather it is proposed as a theoretical

device in order to structure the types of talk, but in practice it is a rather malleable and

flexible notion. This he calls "permeability of boundaries" (Holmes, 2000/2014, p. 100).

Continuing with some workplace examples, one mention out of four of the word

"phatic" in the latest *Yearbook of Corpus Linguistics and Pragmatics* (2013) comes when

Felice (2013) examines the social function of speech acts of commitments in business

English. In her article, she researches if practice meets theory in the way in which verbal

commitments relate to politeness. Felice equates a phatic communion function with a

social function and defines it as having "the role of maintaining good interpersonal relations in the workplace by showing consideration of the hearer's needs and positive face" (p.165), or in Scheff's (1990) terms, showing deference in order to preserve the bond.

Pullin (2010), for his part, believes that in an increasingly multicultural work environment, small talk helps develop solidarity between coworkers, aiding in overcoming communication problems between speakers of business English as a lingua franca (BELF). She calls it "a prime means of nurturing relations between coworkers" (p. 456), even though "it had often been regarded as a peripheral or even a distraction in the workplace" (p. 458). The data she analyzed uncovered topics like music or food as safe topics, especially in situations off-productivity, where coworkers could unwind and bond.

Similarly, Coupland (2003), as it was mentioned here before, attributes a pro social function to small talk, and considers it a skill that improves conversational interactions, and even plays a large part in "the maintenance of a cohesive working environment" (p. 4). A parallelism can be drawn here between Scheff's (1990) statement of bonds being *the force that holds society together* (p. 4), and cohesion in the workplace, which is considered in organizational culture as a smaller-scale, society-like subsystem. In fact, the level of complexity small talk can truly achieve could even derive in the creation of internal jokes, concurrent topics, or endemic sayings or idioms within a group.

Relatedly, Mak and Chui (2013) study the socialization process of a new coworker from Philippines in a Hong Kong company by analyzing small talk as a sign of cultural

adaptation and appropriateness. These authors use Holmes' (2000) continuum to note that even though they are at opposite ends in it, "business talk and small talk sometimes run parallel with each other" (Mak & Chui, 2013, p. 120). They call small talk a "double-edged sword" because although its can be quite beneficial after a successful interaction, the opposite can happen as well, and for a newcomer it is challenging to figure out what to say and how. Nevertheless, it is apparent that by engaging in small talk, the newcomer takes the opportunity to adapt, and the existing members can get to know her or him (p. 130).

Holmes and Fillary (2000) also research sociolinguistics skills necessary to engage in small talk at work, something they realized when analyzing conversations where cognitively impaired workers participated. Small talk aids in "constructing and maintaining friendly relationships among co-workers" (p. 274), and "good rapport between those involved" (p. 277). Holmes (2000/2014) himself looked into workplace interactions guided by small talk and, amongst his findings, he realized small talk worked as a discourse strategy to "do collegiality" by signaling mutual interest in the maintenance of the relationship, even when it remains largely a symbolic convention; for example, when we say "We should get together sometime".

Social skills are important for a successful career, as some of these authors note quoting extensive research that has come to similar conclusions; this means not being able to make small talk implies a disadvantage for those who lack that ability. From the data analyzed, Holmes and Fillary (2000) were able to determine which were the main topics

of small talk at work, and concluded it includes those which "typically focus in non-controversial topics such as the weather... ritualized enquires about health... out-of-work social activities... sports... generalized complaints about the economy... positive comments on appearance... work", and they also indicated even the selection of the topic in itself is a task that requires some skill (p. 278). On the other hand, they indicate such sociolinguistic skills can be learnt in the same way non-native speakers learn them in the foreign language; specifically, they suggest watching soap operas and role playing at work as activities that can help.

Looking into the medical professions, Burnard (2003) studies phatic communication in mental health nursing, given the importance of developing close relationships between patients and nurses. An interesting note this author makes is in regards to redundancies and niceties in communicative exchanges, which he sees as phatic since they do not add anything to the core information (p. 679). The example of communication exchange given before from his research as antiphatic really speaks to the skill needed to use phatic tokens to our advantage, detecting where the conversation can go. The author's point is to exhort nurses to be more aware of the cues and the purposes of phatic communication in order to manage the conversation in whichever direction she or he needs.

Penn and Watermeyer (2009) *define* small talk as that which "serves the purpose of framing comfort levels, is generally used to align the interpreter and patient or offer guidance" (p. 393). Their research looked into medical consultations in South Africa,

where few doctors, they explain, speak the language of their patients given the country's linguistic diversity, so most patients require an interpreter. They consider small talk to be part of "asides talk", fragments of conversations that patient and interpreter share that are not ultimately translated because they are not relevant to the diagnostic. The types of what they considered as small talk found include opening of interactions, transport to the clinic, weather, clinic files and clarification requests. These authors take a general-medical definition of small talk from Aranguri, Davidson and Ramirez: "socially oriented talk that is designed to further relationships rather than establish medical facts" (Penn and Watermeyer, 2009, p. 393). The authors believe interpreters serve more of a cultural mediator function, indicating not only the importance of cultural factors for understanding and dealing with medical issues, but also a need to build relationships with trust, for which asides and small talk, can help (p. 397).

Finally, Posner and Hamstra (2013) take a look at small talk with patients while performing pelvic examinations on females by students. Communication, they say, is a skill that compliments the technical ability needed to perform the examination. However, when it came to practice, students that were assigned a doll-practicing patient performed better than with those with whom they could make *real* small talk. In this particular study, small talk is seen as a distraction, something that prevents a better professional performance. This notion, however, is not contemplated in any other study, and it would be interesting to see in which other areas performance can be affected by small talk (if at all). Mak and Chui (2013), however, do believe one of the functions of small talk is

"facilitating work efficiency" (p. 120), a notion they take from Hessing . The other functions they name are "helping to open meetings, maintaining solidarity for group work, filling in abnormal silence in conflict... and releasing previous disputes" (Mak & Chui, 2013, p. 120).

However, when interviewing a coworker, these authors found that small talk could be a distraction for business and assessed this saying "Hong Kong people appreciate small talk in the workplace for releasing the pressure of money-mindedness, they still stress practicability and immediate achievement in business communication" (Mak & Chui, 2013, p. 128). Relatedly, Tracy and Naughton (2000/2014) considered from their research a negative perception for small talk, especially when performed in a particularly skillful way: "There is a downside to being an effective small talker. Exceptionally good small talkers run the risk of being seen as slick, insincere or superficial" (p. 151).

5.4 Cross cultural communication.

As it has been described here, cultural determinism plays a central role in the production of meaning. In a different work to the one used here consistently to discuss phatic communication, Malinowski (1946) says the science of human behaviour is the science of culture, because "culture, in fact, is nothing but the organized behaviour of man" (p. 440), implying that by observing human behavior of a certain group, we can have a closer understanding of their culture. This, of course, is at the core of ethnographic work, which Malinowski performed. Through his paper he offers cross-cultural examples that, he suggests, should be analyzed according to: the economy, politics, the mechanism

of law and custom, education, magic and religion, recreation, traditional knowledge, technology and art (p. 442) of any given culture.

The same applies to communication, as Padilla (2001) noted: "the differences existing in the linguistic behaviour among individuals belonging to different cultures can be explained, therefore, as differences in the type of behaviour considered correct in a particular situation." (p. 208). Padilla also elaborated on the indexical information inferable from an interaction, something that also comes from behavioural protocols. Across the literature there is a diversity of examples that convey this notion of cultural determinism and inter-cultural differences in a variety of fields. For example, Alquinai (2010) states, as do other authors referenced in this section, that phatic acts are different across cultures and, even more so, they depend on the circumstance and characteristics of the participants. She takes different Arabic expressions and translates them to English, and comes to the conclusion that we often get "lost in translation", since what might be appropriate in one language, is not in another; however, with deep knowledge we can find translatable expressions that work in both languages.

When dealing with politeness, Schneider (1988) mentions Norrick's work where he gives specific examples of cultural proverbs that work as conversational taboos in certain cultures:

- If you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all.

-Never admit your true age or weight.

-Never discuss politics or religion. (Schneider, 1988, p. 74)

Especially the first and last one are relevant to phatic communication, because they are related to politeness and agreement. However, the first one proposed a different solution to silence than what phatic communication is supposed to do; and the last one mentions topics that can be very superficially tackled in phatic communication, at least within our culture.

In fact, Wang et al. (2011) take on the work of Robinson, Basso, Bauman, and Davies to point out some striking cultural differences about the social lubricant function of phatic communication that seems to make so much sense in Western civilization. These authors all looked at different cultures, tribes or societies where the use of language in a phatic manner was seen as disrespectful. For example, "research has shown that in some modern communities, such as the Paliyans of south India, very verbal, communicative persona are regarded as abnormal, even offensive" (Wang et al., 2011, p. 49).

Another issue that changes with cultures is topic selection. Selecting a topic in small talk is like blindly picking from a drawer what we will wear, given that all that we can find in that drawer has been previously selected carefully in order for it to be adequate and useful. For this reason, topic selection also must be considered within a cultural system, since the norms in each culture will determine which topics should go in the drawer, and such selection is part of the sociolinguistic skill necessary for a successful phatic interaction. For example, Schneider refers to the work of Tannen, who looked into the differences between English and American interactants when it comes to engaging in

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personal topics, and concluded that Americans find it is rude to not share personal

information (Schneider, 1988, p. 84). Similarly, Berendt (1997) offers a cross-cultural

analysis between Japanese and English that brings to our attention the many ways in

which we can observe significant variations in three of the major exchange structure

phases (clarification, relationship bonding and preparatory expressions) in spoken,

spontaneous, dyadic conversations.

Endras et al.'s (2011) work with Japanese speakers quoted before was centered in

their aim to come up with a model for virtual small talk in order to build a multi-agent

system where small talk varies depending on the culture of the agent. They considered

small talk as "low-context", which translates to the present work as being formulaic and

conventionalized. This kind of communication is characteristic of Western cultures, they

say, and it is not common in Asian contexts, which led them to propose *private topics*,

those that concern the lives of the interactants, are likely to not be common in small talk

amongst Asian speakers (p. 163). They found indeed that private topics were a little over

20% more common amongst German participants than with Japanese participants;

conversation about the *immediate situation*, on the other hand, was almost 20% more used

amongst Japanese participants than between Germans; and lastly, conversations about the

social sphere, a topic in-between private topics and immediate situation topics in terms of

intimacy, was relatively equal for both nationalities (Endras et al., 2011, p. 165).

In a later work, Schneider (2011) explains how different principles of the maxim

of politeness can be justified by pragmatic differences in language and by cultural

determinism as the work he quotes in relational pragmatics demonstrates (he mentions Barron & Schneider, Nord, Schneider & Barron, and Wierzbicka). A related term that receives less attention is "appropriateness", even though after a search in different platforms Schneider found that the adjective is used over others like politeness.

This led him to conclude that behaviour is perceived and judged in terms of appropriateness over politeness (Schneider, 2011, p. 1026). In fact, he proposes a framework for studying appropriate behaviour across cultures taken from variational pragmatics and performed by analyzing discourse. His research questions were oriented towards finding out what is appropriate in certain social situations, how can it be established, and unveiling differences across varieties of English. For this purpose, he conducted a research on party small talk amongst strangers by asking them to write an imagined dialogue that reflects what would be appropriate party behaviour to them (p. 1030). The answers were analyzed in two groups to observe the differences and similarities between types of English and social variables (age and sex). For the first group, they found significant similarities in conversational openings and casual conversation. However, differences were found across groups within this first group, especially concerning conventions of form or lexical choices (p. 1031). For example, Americans showed a focus on the identity of their interlocutor, by asking for their name right after the initial greeting, but Irish participants were more prone to making remarks about the party after the greeting, and English respondents limited their first turn in the conversation to the greeting alone (p. 1032). On the other hand, for the second group of

analysis, concerning age and gender, they focused only on the American sample and looked into teenagers and young adults. They all started with a greeting, but there were two significant differences: most teen females introduced themselves after the initial greeting, but most teen males asked their interlocutors HAY. This revealed an interesting gendered protocol for introductory conversation that suggested females are more likely to properly introduce themselves, and males are more likely to focus on less committing questions. The results were the same for the young adult group, although males where not reluctant (or nervous?) to disclose their identities.

5.4.1 Second-language acquisition.

As part of the cross-cultural studies in pragmatics and sociolinguistics, many authors have looked specifically into the role of phatic communication as an aiding mechanism for learning English as a second language (ESL).

Padilla (2013) looked into native Spanish speakers learning English, and realized that when it comes to engaging in phatic communion, learners could experience difficulties given that its use requires a "meta-pragmatic awareness of a wide range of complex and subtle issues, such as when and with whom to engage in it, the underlying reasons to do so, the types of phatic tokens that may be exchanged, the topics that such tokens may address, or potential effects achievable" (p. 131). Interestingly enough, as noted by Vigara (1990) as well, didactic material for language acquisition does not incorporate this important discourse mechanism or explains its socio-cultural implications in order to provide students with the sociolinguistic skill needed for small talk. Both

authors indicate learning techniques focus on content and the speaker's ability to transmit

information or convey meaning, so they try to simplify the way interactions are actually

spontaneously presented, leaving phatic expressions excluded or ignored.

On his part, Padilla (2013) proposed phatic communication should be included in

second-language learning programs. He then suggested a method to teach the pragmatics

of phatic discourse to ESL students, which I have broken into two parts for clarity

purposes. The first part, which encompasses three stages, is related to knowledge: it

would start with teacher awareness and research of the topic, followed by a reflection of

phatic discourse according to specific examples, and finally, receiving information about

phatic discourse. In this particular case, Padilla suggests teachers should study the

different types of phatic utterances and what the propositional content of those utterances

may relate to (p. 140) using Laver's (1974/1975) classification of neutral tokens, or self-

oriented and other-oriented tokens. The second part of his method is related to

performance, and the three stages it includes are: reasoning about phatic discourse,

rehearsing phatic discourse, and revising learners' performance.

Certainly, mastering a second language is not only about knowing its grammatical

structure or the meaning of its words, there is an underlying dynamic of all speech acts

that generally causes differences between natives and foreigners to be apparent. Hence, an

issue Padilla (2013) mentions in regard to second language learners is that it can

sometimes lead to funny anecdotes or minor misunderstandings, but overall what it

implies is lack of communicative competency. A sign of phatic inaccuracy and

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pragmalinguistic failure (faulty use of language) can be seen in the attempts foreigners

make to translate their own idiomatic expressions to the learnt language. Padilla (2013)

mentions the example "fresh as a daisy" being translated by Mexican English learners as

"fresh as a salad". This is a communicative faux pas I can personally relate to, but I'll

provide a different example: in a 2013 television interview with Conan O'Brian, Mexican

actor Diego Luna tried to explain all the different expressions used in his native land by

translating them literally to English. Of course, this resulted in a highly comedic sketch,

but in my experience there is an underlying truth to this sort of situations. Luna used the

expression "No mames!", which could be the equivalent of "Get out of here!" in English,

or, of course, the much more colloquial "F*** off", which is actually a better match

because the Spanish expression is quite vulgar, too. However, he translated "mames"

literally (from the verb "to suck", as in lactation), and was quite pleased to tell Conan "It's

like saying 'don't suck'". While the host remained perplexed, because of course this does

not make any sense, the guest tried to accommodate his made-up expression to a familiar

one: "Yes, like suck it!". And at this point all meaning was lost.

    In an earlier work, Padilla (2001) describes two types of pragmatic failures, one of

them being pragmalinguistic failure, such as the example described above, and he second

one, Thomas calls it sociopragmatic failure, which:

    ... can be explained from a cognitive viewpoint in terms of difference in the

    specific knowledge internalized by interlocutors about the expected behavior

    in a particular situation", hence attributing valuable function to phatic

utterances, despite the impression that no relevant information is transmitted,

because indeed they are framed within specific sociocultural conventions and

internalized assumptions. (in Padilla, 2001, p. 199)

Specifically when explaining the importance of ritualization, noted earlier here, and

context in analyzing phatic utterances, Padilla further notes:

…in the cases of cross-cultural communication in which sociopragmatic

failures arise, participants can be said to be in the same situation, but they act

following different behavioural rules which have been internalized in

agreement with those that the social group they belong to has established as

being the correct ones for that specific situation" (Padilla, 2001, p. 207).

The opposite of pragmalinguistic failure would be what Padilla (2001) calls

metapragmatic ability, using again Thomas' terminology. This implies having the skill set

necessary to use language successfully in all circumstances, due to a deep knowledge of

language and its use.

Vigara's (1990) work on phatic expressions and communicative tokens in second

language learners offers some pertinent information for this section as well. She mentions

that phatic expressions are easily and seamlessly inserted in verbal interactions and often

go undetected (unless it comes to an extreme), both because we have already adapted to

the dynamic of the interaction, and because we have been trained to pay attention to

meaning, rather than form. For this reason, most of these expressions, and how they are

used, are culturally determined; as Padilla (2013) also observed. Vigara realized that even

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though phatic expressions are "normalized" in language, for a foreigner to learn them, it requires high communicative competency, and are thus quite hard to fully master.

Lastly, in the last *Yearbook of Corpus Linguistics and Pragmatics,* phatic communication is mentioned two times in relation to second-language learning. The first mention is in an article about spoken intercultural communication by Lin (2013), who states that there is an inherent phatic nature in the way young learners communicate when they meet, because they were "focused more on social interaction instead of specific information" (p.124). The phatic nature in this case is attributed to the frequent use of three-word sequences, following the work of Kjellmer. These sequences are at the core of Lin's analysis, due to a theoretical frame that assumes "natural language has a certain block-like character [because] words tend to occur in the same clusters again and again" (Lin, 2013, p.105).

Lin found that, on one hand, multi-word sequences exist in our language as "prefabricated patterns, routine formulae, lexical phrases, lexical clusters" (p. 106) and other similar terms he borrows from other authors to explain the functional use of language. On the other hand, he refers to the three-word sequences specifically, which were used frequently by a group of Taiwanese students he observed during a year of learning English as a second language. These included "I think that…", "…and it was…", and "But I mean…", for example; although other more complex phrases were observed as well, such as "I want to…", "I am + word", "I like to…", "I have a…", all phrases that are easily learned when starting to practice communicating in another language.

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The other mention in the yearbook came in Amador-Moreno, McCarthy and O'Keeffe's (2013) article about response tokens in Spanish and the possibility of being predicted by a framework in English. These authors use "small" words used to reply to statements in Spanish as the response tokens. For example, "vale", which means "ok", "claro", which can mean "right", and "bien", which means "good". These response tokens can certainly be thought of as phatic tokens as well due to their use and function, as Vigara (1990) did in her work. However, interestingly enough, these tokens are actually frequently used in-between the interchange of phases in an interaction, and not in the beginning or end which are the most salient ways in which phatic communication is manifested. Nevertheless, these responsive tokens are used to let the interlocutor know we are following their message, rather than necessarily agreeing with their statements, which would be the literal use for saying "ok", for example. When "ok" is uttered to convey understanding, its inherent meaning ("all correct") has a phatic function: "they are seen as responsive signals and are also a means to achieve conversational continuity and flow" (p. 181). However, in other cases, "ok" can be used as a discourse marker, signaling, for example, pre-closure, as the authors note (p. 181), or it could indeed mean "all correct", to agree to the interlocutor's statement. For example, subject one asks, "How was the meeting?" and subject two replies "Ok". The authors later indicate this precisely: "'bien' has a phatic function, and it can be used to convey happiness or annoyance" (p. 192). The versatility in the use of these markers makes them all the more relevant in

communication, because despite their literal meaning, their use is instrumental to different purposes in the interaction – especially the relational purpose.

5.5 Social media.

In the theoretical frame of the present work, I have offered a necessary preface for understanding what the online world means to phatic communication. Specifically, Miller's (2008, 2011) phatic culture is the reigning paradigm to understand social interactions online and the groups that are formed by individuals who chose to either extend their socialization processes from the offline world, or to develop their bonds online primarily.

It was also introduced before the existing debate over the term "online communities" and Miller's preference of the word "network" instead, as well as my proposed notion of phatic community, a debate that will continue here. What does the ways in which we socialize online mean in terms of phaticity and the nature of the bonds we form and maintain? If we see these communities as groups of people that come together online, it is noticeable that a very specific characteristic of online communities is that, because it is free from space and time constraints, one's engagement is voluntary, as well as the degree of involvement (Miller, 2011, p. 191). So many important decisions in our life are determined by our physical locus: school, job, partners; but the online world offers a *universal*, *spaceless* sphere of social interaction. However, online communities are not as ideal as that statement might suggest, and in fact some researchers are very critical of them. Wilson discovered that 50% of the content in an online community was

posted by only about 1% of the members (quoted in Miller, 2011, p. 194). So how much of a *community* is that?

Pertinently, Li (2007) offered a typology of users according to the level of involvement in social platforms online: first, there is a distinction between "creators", those who produce content actively, and "inactives", establishing the two polarities of the spectrum of participation; and in between we find the "joiners", who indeed join social media initiatives, as well as the "critics", who only post comments, the "collectors", who re-post and post links only, the "spectators", who check what is posted but contribute little to nothing, and finally, the "conversationalists", who only post status updates (in Placencia & Lower, 2013, p. 627-628).

Wang et al. (2011) touch briefly on the theory of Social Construction of Technology, which contemplates groups of users at the center of technological construction because these groups come together to use technology in a certain way, with a common purpose, which ultimately could impact how all users use that technology (p. 45). For these authors, user groups form "a community defined by the social function that is the 'raison d'etre' of phatic technology" (Wang et al., 2011, p. 45), and that at the same time generates a culture of use exclusive to that group where behavioural patterns and systems of values and beliefs emerge as well. They also explain there is an *interpretative flexibility* of the use of a technology according to the theory of Social Construction of Technology because "users may play a role in shaping the uses of the technology, and they may use the technology un unexpected ways, which may lead the producers to

change their design of it" (Wang et al., 2011, p. 46). Interpretative flexibility has to do with the different ways in which different users use a technology and make it theirs, something we see constantly in online platforms and which indeed leads to changes from the producers to fit the users' needs better. A great example these authors give is the use of the telephone: even though it was produced for business purposes, a large segment of its users were women who used it phatically, to stay in touch (Wang et al., 2011, p. 47). Cell phones, as well as social media platforms are part of what they have called phatic technologies.

Miller (2011) himself talks about a forum he used for connecting with the surfing community of his area, but realized its use was merely instrumental because as soon as he got busy with other interests, he stopped using it (p. 193); in fact, he says "the web is littered with non-active forums, abandoned blogs and moribund profiles that people have abandoned when their interests have changed, or when they have what they want from them" (Miller, 2011, p. 193). This, paradoxically, translates into more individualization and trivialization of human interactions (p. 194), a reason why I propose here the relationships we form online are more likely to be pseudo-bonds than secure bonds, in Scheff's (1990) terms. In fact, as Miller (2011) points out, time spent online is often seen as time taken from the offline world (p. 192), and even as having a careless attitude toward what happens around individuals in the offline world; consequentially further contributing to the detrimental nature of the issue of offline community that perhaps was what started a migration movement to the online setting, where community seems to

remain utopic as well. Take for instance Gruzd et al.'s (2011) analysis from their

research on Twitter. Even though these authors try to defend the possibility of emerging

communities online, some indicators are undeniable:

> If we reply on the traditional definition of community-as a spatially compact
>
> set of people with a high frequency of interaction, interconnections, and a
>
> sense of solidarity (Wellman & alright on, 1979)-Twitter could not be
>
> considered a community... Yet despite the asymmetric and sparse nature of
>
> personal connections on Twitter (Cheng & Evans, 2009), there is a possibility
>
> that Twitter can host sets of interlinked 'personal communities' (Wellman,
>
> 1979). (Gruzd et al., 2011, p. 1296)

To contribute to this point, Miller offers a shocking insight: what about the online

communities where people who society would deem as unfit or even mentally ill meet?

Forums for the suicidal, the anorexic or the psychopath, or forums where they promote

illegal activities? These places exist, and people use them to escape from the laws and

norms of society and finally feel like they are amongst peers; so these types of behaviours

are encouraged in a place where there's no responsibility and certainly no reprimand for

erring (Miller, 2011, p. 194-195). These are "communities" nonetheless and members do

use them in the same way as any other, to form bonds.

Jensen and Scott (2013) explored the notion of friendship in Facebook and write

about how social network sites require users to manage their friends, or contacts, by

prompting people to create a list of "friends" (their quotation marks - and I agree) when

they join (p. 49). These authors call this the "re-articulation of friendship". By engaging in

social media and managing one's online profile, including a list of *friends,* indexical

information can be deducted from status updates and other formulaic — phatic — ways

of interacting online. In their survey, most respondents admitted to seeing their offline

and online social lives as separate things, which not only implies a duality in the

representation of self, but also a duality in socialization strategies and, consequently, in

ways of bonding. Furthermore, these authors use the work of Boyd and Ellison (2008) to

conclude that "Facebook in particular promotes a type of bonding that is best understood

as 'friendship performance' and 'impression management' generated by 'the ego-centric

network'- implying that what is at stake is a kind of surrogate friendship" (Jensen & Scott,

2013, p. 50). Specifically, they recall from other authors that typically people use social

media to maintain rather than establish networks, particularly with those with whom we

have weaker ties, like colleagues, co-members of leisure groups, cultural associations or

political organizations (p. 54). This notion is consistent with a differentiation between

offline and online social life they found in their survey, even though many respondents

said they typically add people they have met face-to-face to their social networks online

(p. 55). An interesting find from their focus group research is in age differences. These

authors say that younger users (below the age of 34) use Facebook to build and maintain a

network that "might be useful later on, whereas the older respondents emphasized the

contact with family and friends they have known for a long time (or maybe knew once)"

(p. 55). In order to maintain such networks online, regardless of the social platform,

bonding is often limited to brief interactions that are sometimes formulaic to the extent of turning into a button, like the Like button — hence Miller's (2008) observation of *flattening of social bonds* (p. 387).

In Placencia and Lower's (2013) research on Facebook, they also observed similarities and differences between online and offline behavior, particularly in complimenting practices. Their findings are consistent with the early findings of Manes and Wolfson in complimentary behaviour, which discovered that most compliments are formulaic in nature "a small set of syntactic and semantic patters accounted for a large number of the examples in their corpus" (in Placencia and Lower, 2013, p. 621). These authors also found the most common compliments amongst men were about possessions, and were generally less frequent that the compliments women paid to each other, which were mainly about appearance, something Placencia and Lower found to be true in Facebook as well, where from the comments they analyzed 56% were compliments and an overwhelming 91% were from women, as well as 84% of the Likes. Compliments were also observed to be a predominantly female behaviour in Holmes and Fillary's (2000) research on New Zealand's workplaces, mainly between females and only from a female to a male when the age difference was big.

Placencia and Lower (2013) describe Facebook's Like button as a formulaic expression of a compliment, saying it "expresses the ultimate evaluation in explicit terms (though the word *like*), the object of approval is something that is of then ambiguous" since there's "no explicit indication of what is liked" (p. 634). In the present work, as it

has been already established, I see the Like button as more than just a compliment, it is a

phatic gesture. Surely it still expresses approval, and it still remains a complimentary way

of interacting, but my contention is that its use is more phatic, to maintain the

relationship, than to truthfully or genuinely convey appreciation or taste. It comes down

to "Yes, I like what you're saying, but I like it because I already like you and your

information pops on my screen constantly; I'll like what you say so you know I still like

you, and others as well can know about us because we share a bond". In fact, Placencia

and Lower eventually call it a *phatic affirmation* and acknowledge this rationale:

> [Posting pictures] can be interpreted as 'hello friend, I'm still here, don't forget
>
> about me'. The response that those actions get may be interpreted as a kind of
>
> affirmation of the relationship: 'I haven't forgotten about you' and even more
>
> than that when compliments or 'Likes' are offered: 'I value you/I value what
>
> you like'. In other words, photographs and the comments elicited in
>
> themselves appear to constitute a kind of phatic communion... through which
>
> the contact between the interactants is maintained and the relationship
>
> supported... In the case of compliments on FB, the actual content of the
>
> compliment seems to be less important than the act of compliment itself.
>
> (Placencia & Lower, 2013, p. 639).

Indeed, the otherwise laborious task of connecting with one's network is facilitated by

social media platforms by not only providing a means to communicate with that network

through different kinds of messaging protocols, but also thanks to various gestures. Both

mechanisms are considered to be phatic because their main goal is to establish a new relationship or maintain an existing one through a very simple exchange, which meaning is already standardized.

However, the nature of online interactions is in many ways very different from the ways in which we interact offline. For example, Kulkarni (2014) looked into personal direct messages online and found in a significant number of cases interactants skipped the opening and closing phases of interactions, where most of phaticity can be found. Several reasons came to mind; one being that the nature of the medium changes interactional dynamics. Secondly, I thought about the premise of Laver's (1974/1975) work, that states that once you have already greeted someone that day, it is not necessary to do so again in subsequent encounters. Finally, I thought about the context of the relationship and the kind of bond these interactants shared. As it turns out, Kulkarni conceived all of these factors as well:

> In IM, as the programme prefixes the message with the user's name, interlocutors do not have to identify themselves. Further, as IM interactions are often between friends, information about the availability and interest of the other person in having a conversation is also often known. Therefore much of the work that an opening is intended to do is already in place. In this context it is not surprising that speakers choose to omit the opening sequence completely. Interestingly, such non-routine pings were found between two extremes of the solidarity continuum. They were found either between people

who shared a very close relationship or between those who shared a very

formal relationship (Kulkarni, 2014, p.123)

In any case, a new paradigm for social interaction is being created and re-created online

every day and phaticity is taken on new meanings.

The asynchronicity of interactions in Facebook introduces a variable that is not

present in offline interactions, for example, which allows perhaps more freedom to the

type of reply users can send, as well was the medium, which is written instead of spoken

and integrates several phatic gestures as a shortcut for maintaining bonds. Even though

initially users tried to mimic the way in which they interacted in person to perform their

interactions online, it seems like today an online culture is so established that users

seamlessly use a set of endemic codes of socialization, becoming a second nature.

Of course, the most preeminent example is the use of what Yus called

"mechanisms of textual deformation" (in Placencia and Lower, 2013, p. 621), which

include the use of capital letters for phrases to emphasize intonation, or the use of

repeated characters for the same reason, in order to compensate for the lack of nonverbal

language, as well as the use of *emoticons* constructed with standard characters (like the

":)" for a smiley face), or inserted images, and more recently, "memes". Very succinctly,

memes are cultural products spread on the Internet which do take from Dawkins original

concept of an idea that is transmitted within a culture, but in the online communities

today it refers specifically to a visual mockery which is made of an image with

established meaning, perhaps taken from another medium like television or cinema, in

which users insert a variety of short phrases pertinent to the image's meaning in order to

express different opinions or emotions that are already pre-understood, and thus easy to

quickly grasp. Memes are relevant today because they emerge from users themselves and

only their common and extended use ensures the meaning is perceived easily, and that it

stays relevant.

Sharing these products, as well as links and media is a common activity in social

media, if not the heart of it. *Shareability* can be seen as a sign of phaticity because it

implies a desire to connect with others, and most certainly social media platforms work

on providing connectivity. For example, in Facebook, you can write on someone's wall,

you can repost something on their wall, you can tag them in a post otherwise located, tag

them in a photo, send them a direct private message, or send them a *poke*, an invitation to

play or Like something, Like their posts or pictures, comment on their posts or pictures,

etc., the possibilities are quite diverse. Although it has been mentioned here before and

included as a phatic gesture online, pokes have not been defined:

> Facebook has a distinctly phatic feature called *the poke*. "The poke is an
>
> inbuilt function that was created by Facebook 'without any specific purpose'"
>
> (Vetere, Smith and Gibbs 9). The idea behind the poke is to simply let the
>
> recipient know you are there and thinking about him or her. (Graham, 2013,
>
> p.4)

In Twitter increasingly, as both platforms take from each other, the use of the

favorite (star button that appears on each tweet) has been recently predominantly used as

a "Like" would on Facebook, which was not the case five years ago. One can also retweet, quote a tweet and add something, tag someone in a tweet, send her or him a direct message, include him or her in a list, or connect with him or her through a hashtag. All this communicative actions and gestures are performed in order to maintain our bonds, strengthen them, or create new ones with the intention of expanding our network.

Certainly, Miller (2011) himself considers interactions alone, and not only dialogues, as a way of "binding people together" (p. 203), and he then addresses directly phatic communion in relation to technology using Malinowski to explain phatic communication (however not communion) as a way of "creating sociability through the acknowledgement of another's presence" (Miller, 2011, p. 203), which can be achieved through any communicative gesture and has a solely social intention, to maintain bonds. This social intention Miller relates to a sense of community, which can be established, he says, through:

> Gestures and nods, winks and waves; small talk such as 'how are you?' and
> 'hi'; idle chat about banal or in controversial topics such as the weather ('nice
> day'), the annoyances of modern life ('these trains are always late'), or the fate
> of local sports teams are all more about making a connection with others
> around us than they are about saying anything in particular. They basically
> say 'I am here, and so are you. We're together'. (Miller, 2011, p. 203-204).

Or, as he explained in his earlier work, constant posting of information on social media platforms is mainly by "the obligation or encouragement to say 'something' to maintain

connections or audiences, to let one's network know that one is still 'there' (Miller, 2008, p. 393). However, this increased connectedness with a much wider social network has seemingly made us dependent on technology to manage our social relations in an increasingly virtual way. Licoppe and Smoreda explain how this postmodern dynamic of relationships and bonding in online contexts, as well as the connected presence that comes with it, have lead to a rise in "compressed expressions of intimacy" (in Miller, 2008, p. 395) which are conveyed precisely via phatic gestures and other phatic exchanges and consequently form pseudo-bonds, a low-intimacy kind of bond.

Facebook particularly is the epitome of social media platforms for bond management or connections management.. It offers to the user's network content about the user's life, and at the same time, all the tools for the network to send back feedback to the user, conveying their validation (or the opposite) about the information shared. This reciprocated dynamic translates into validation of the individual, which at the same time stands for validation of their bond, and signals pride. This happens when we Like someone's post or picture, without the need to engage any further; bonds can be maintained quite effortlessly. The diversity of content a user posts on Facebook is often taken as a reflection of his life: there's information about the person, his tastes in different aspects, his preferences about other aspects, things he follows and likes, and even religious orientation; so this way, a Facebook profile is meant to be a reflection of someone's self, identity and life. Even though many other specialized social platforms offer similar validation systems to the Like button and the comments on Facebook, their

scope is limited to a specific aspect of that person's life, like art or music, such as, for example, Devianart, MySpace, Pandora or Spotify.

5.5.1 A closer look into Twitter and hashtags as phatic tokens.

With the intention of providing a more in-depth example about the relevance of phatic communication today, I chose a social media platform to look into in more detail in order to analyze if phaticity is still present and what is its relevance. I chose Twitter because Facebook is inherently a place where we mimic our interactions offline, often as a way of continuing our social life in an online setting; so this means the validity of phatic communication that has been discussed here throughout applies to Facebook in quite an evident way. Twitter, however, has a different dynamic worth studying.

Twitter is a microblogging platform founded in 2006; it allows users to post short messages called "tweets", and it is today considered one of the biggest social media networks, after Facebook. The nature of Twitter, however, is different, since it is focused more on content and sharing all kinds of information instead of being centered in someone's life happenings and relations, like Facebook and other social networks. In Chang's (2010) terms, "social networking is not Twitter's sole utility; rather, it is employed for real-time content sharing... The relationships between followers and those being followed do no rest on friendship... but rather on information exchange" (p. 3). Indeed, on Twitter relationships are not about friendship, although it can certainly be developed, hence the terminology itself is different from that in other social networks, where you connect with "friends"; here, you can *follow* and be *followed* by people,

resulting in you having access to the information the people you follow post, and you giving information to the people that follow you.

Gruzd et al. (2011)'s research on Twitter led them to believe this social media platform can promote a sense of community even when its dynamic could indicate all the opposite, especially due to its asymmetric nature: people can follow someone and not be followed by them and vice versa. In fact, Twitter was designed basically as an online alternative to cellphone text messaging (SMS), which is interpersonal, direct, and typically practical. Nevertheless, these authors found some degree of interconnectedness between a Twitter user and his followers and who he follows, by looking at their interactions in terms of interests and mutual influence, which lead them to assume some sense of community had to be present amongst them. Particularly, for these authors, a sense of community emerges through the display of four indicators: membership as conveyed by interconnectedness of people in the network, influence between participants, integration and fulfillment of needs of participants in regards to support from the network, and lastly, shared emotional connection as shown by sharing experiences and time spent together (p. 1308-1312). It must be said that since Gruzd et al.'s research was published, Twitter has launched other initiatives to work toward making it more "community-like", For example, Twitter now sends you a notification when a couple or more of the people you follow do the same action, such as following someone or retweeting them, so you can see in which direction the people who interest you move, what they are up to. So the intention is there, as it is in many other platforms; the issue is in the relativity of its worth.

Miller (2011) describes Twitter as being mainly phatic, but it must be said, he started writing the book in 2009 when Twitter had barely started going mainstream. This platform used to ask people "What are you doing", which, as with Facebook statuses, limits the type of information one would instinctively share, so naturally most of Twitter's content was about such phatic updates, like plans for the day, thoughts, meals or other parts of the routine, Miller explains. Graham (2013) agrees:

> Participants use their cell phones or the web to constantly post brief messages
> - often devoid of substantive content - that simply update their social network
> about what they are doing: "going to the store", "feeling overwhelmed with
> this paper", "enjoying the beautiful day". The purpose of this kind of "tweet"
> is primarily phatic; participants simply want to stay connected to one another.
> (Graham, 2013, p. 4)

Twitter has the exclusive characteristic of limiting the information that can be shared to 140 typed characters, which makes it very easy to read and share with one's own network. Twitter can also include media, and one can add links to further continue with one's statement or links to some other website hosting information or media. As O'Reilly and Milstein (2011) note, a very special characteristic about Twitter is that the messages are public and available for everyone, without a need to be "friends" (however private profiles do exist, in which case a request is necessary in order to become that person's *follower*).

But how do we access the information we are interested in? The first option is to follow users that provide such information, people or entities one is already familiar with, or those found while searching for a topic and that, according to their profile, seem to be what we are looking for. I once read somewhere in my own Twitter feed that Facebook is about the people you used to know and Twitter about the people you would like to know. In any case, the information that the people you follow post -their tweets- are displayed consecutively and in chronological order in your Timeline, which is the information feed composed of people's tweets.

Although this is very convenient if you, for example, take the bus to work, where you can dedicate that time to check your Timeline, it is rather inconvenient if you decide to check what is being said about a certain topic. The reason being that, depending on how many people you follow, you will likely get several, tens, or even hundreds of messages per minute, which is extremely difficult — and even impossible —to keep up with. An alternative option is to go to the profiles you have already selected to follow and check what they have said; but you are likely to focus on a small number of *information sources* since, again, it would be impossible for you to check anything over 100 profiles consistently.

Another way to access all that available information is to focus on what you want to be informed about by selecting certain topics or keywords in relation to your informational needs, and one way to do this is through hashtags. Chang (2010) defines hashtags as a "tagging convention" (p. 1), on which O'Reilly and Milstein (2011) agree,

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and they further explain that the word comes from the symbol used to denote the term, a

hash mark, and what the term is, a tag (p. 43). For Gruzd et al. (2011), hashtags are part of

a folksonomy, "a user-created naming system, which is quite distinct from a taxonomy, a

centrally created naming system" (p. 1301), and they stress as well the use of other

linguistic conventions users commonly use in Twitter language, like "RT" for retweeting

by quoting a tweet. *Folksonomy*, Zappavigna (2011) explains, is achieved through

"collaborative tagging" (p. 791) when users insert hashtags to participate in the

conversation on Twitter.

A brief history of the hashtag can be found in KnowYourMeme.com, a very

popular website where one can search for different Internet phenomena, not only in action

through examples, but also through clear definitions the site offers. According to this site,

"The use of hashtags began on IRC [Internet Relay Chats] networks, whose chat rooms

all begin with a hash symbol followed by the topic name"; and likely taking on this

notion, in 2007 Chris Messina, an early user, suggested on a tweet they could use the

pound symbol for groups on Twitter and later posted about it on his personal website as a

proposal. Shortly after, "web anthropologist Stowe Boyd coined the term 'hash tag' in a

blog post", KnowYourMeme explains. However, the familiarization of users with the use

and function of the hashtag took some months to sink in, becoming much more frequent

towards the end of 2008. The use of hashtags promote heteroglossia, says Zappavigna

(2011), by which she means the coming together or different voices, because it

"presupposes a virtual community of interested listeners who are actively following this

keyword and who may use it as a search term" (p. 791). Hashtags are a way of offering

metadata, data about the data, by cataloguing the content and even extending further on it.

O'Reilly and Milstein (2011) explain the nature of the hashtag by saying "because there is

no way on Twitter to categorize a message or to say, 'All these messages are about the

same thing', users created an ad hoc solution" (p. 43) to designate related messages.

But hashtags not only designate messages, they also help convey complementary

information to the short statements allowed in Twitter, and work at times as added

emotional feeling to the message, since their meaning is ready-made, shared, and

understood by users. Hashtags, then, have a twofold purpose: they serve an organizational

function for the enormous volume of information on Twitter, in a way that allows users to

access to certain topics or ideas, including branded messages, campaigns and events; and

they also provide complementary meaning to the message, given that a hashtag has a

meaning of its own.

This later function is considered by Zappavigna (2011) as well, when she says:

"The inline nature of #tag usage opens up the possibility of play with users creating tags

that are unlikely to be used as search terms and which instead seem to function to

intensify the evaluation made in the tweet" (p. 800). She is referring to what I call

personal hashtags, as will be explained below; and she further explains, "hashtags

identify meanings that have become 'hyper-charged' with an additional semiotic pull that

may be likened to a gravitational field" (p. 801). Considering this, we find evidence of the

three functions language serves according to the linguistic Theory of Affiliation: first, a

textual function of organizing information, then a *ideational* function of enacting

experience, and finally an *interpersonal* function of negotiating relationships (Halliday &

Matthiessen, cited in Zappavigna, 2011, p. 794). For hashtags specifically, these functions

I call *organizational* and *complementary*, as stated above, and the later leads to a

relational function, which is why it is phatic.

For example, one of my favourite hashtags, and actually one of the reasons why I

joined Twitter is "#not", which is used typically to convey sarcasm. For example, I could

tweet "Isn't it lovely to come home late and find out your dog made a mess with the

garbage? #not", and people instantly understand I'm being sarcastic. Although that phrase

was almost self-explanatory, it can also be used in a much less clear example: "Great job

today, @myfriend #not", in which case if it were not for the hashtag, the meaning would

be completely the opposite. In this way, if I want to see sarcastic tweets from other

people, I can do a search on Twitter for that hashtag, and find tweets of numerous

different natures, but all sharing the same tone, and most of them complaining about

something they would rather express through sarcasm. By doing this, we have the

opportunity of connecting with other people through a shared interest or feeling. To offer

a different example, take the following fabricated tweet: "What a great day!

#MarriageEquality #LoveisLove"; in this case if it were not for the hashtags the meaning

on the tweet would be incomplete, but thanks to an understanding of what the hashtags

are referencing, one can construct the intended meaning of the tweet, which celebrates the

approval of legal rights for same-sex marriage, as indeed the Twitterverse celebrated in 2013 with those same hashtags.

As Zappavigna (2011) observed, Twitter offers *searchable talk*, "that is, online discourse where the primary function appears to be affiliation via 'findability'", and she further proposes, "search is beginning to function as a community-building linguistic activity... Hashtags function as linguistic markers enacting the following social relation: 'Search for me and affiliate with my value!'" (p. 789). Affiliation is perhaps, in my opinion, a too specific word for the type of dynamics that are predominant on Twitter, but certainly if not affiliation, it is about sharing a common interest, feeling, sense of humor, of informational interests, for example.

Hashtags like "#not" are what I call *timeless*, they were created and continue to be used for general communication purposes long after their creation. Many hashtags are of this nature, like "#win", or "#fail", used to depict something positive and exciting, and something negative and disappointing, respectively. Some hashtags are harder to figure out, like the ones using acronyms, such as "#lol" (laughing at loud) or "#ftw" (for the win).

Another type of hashtags are what I call *temporary*, they are created with a very specific purpose and disappear shortly after they serve their purpose; such is the case of those hashtags created for an event, a campaign or promotion, happenings in the offline world, or simply something that references something going on online. For example "#grammys2014" (note that "#grammys" alone would fall in the following category),

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"#BeckhamForHM" or #RootGiveaway", "#earthquake", or "#thanksObama"

respectively.

Another kind of hashtag can be detected, as Ma, Sun and Cong (2012) noted,

which is those that were once popular, then went away from the twitterverse, but ended

up coming back; this kind I have called *intermittent*, and an example is

"#AmericaFuckYeah", which emerges every once in a while when something either to be

proud of, or ashamed of, happens in the United States. In the previous example,

"#grammys" can, and does, come back every year in the days surrounding the ceremony

of those music awards. These three types match Lehmann et al.'s (2012) classification as

continuous, *bursty*, and *periodic*, and all pertain a classificatory criterion of popularity, or

are defined by the time during which they are popularly used.

However, a final type of hashtag can be identified, which is those that have no

quantitative significance because they are created and used by one individual, perhaps a

few, and typically refer to very specific matters; these I call *personal*. The examples are

endless, but for illustrative purposes, consider this: I am always complaining about

different minor issues on my Twitter account; aware of this but unwilling to do anything

about it, I come up with the hashtag "#ShutUpFabiana", which only I use and serves only

the specific purpose of letting me vent at the same time that I — very implicitly —

 apologize for being so repetitive to my network. This category also includes specific

hashtags created for small group conversations, like for example "#honeymoonTE2014"

for Terry and Erick to talk about their honeymoon plans for this year.

Regardless of the type, the use of hashtags in Twitter, as well as in other social media networks, allows us to establish new bonds with strangers who are using the same hashtag, and to maintain existing bonds with our network by providing additional meaning to our tweets through a code that is mutually shared. Relatedly, O'Reilly and Milstein (2011), propose three "cool tricks" as different ways to use a hashtag. First, group chats: assign hashtag to a conversation by creating a unique hashtag and sharing it with the participants, so they can track and join the conversation by searching the hashtag, or, as they propose by using tools like TweetGrid or TweetChat. Two, ask questions and give a unique hashtag so you can locate the answers. And three, share an experience: search on Twitter how people are referring to a certain topic and join the conversation (O'Reilly and Milstein, 2011, p. 131). In Chang's (2010) words, "Twitter hashtag adoption is a unique form of folksonomy since the initiating adaptors of the hashtag can be viewed as innovators and they attract of influence another group of users, namely imitators, to conform the same hashtag" (p. 3).

Sometimes this *coming together* is quite visible, as we have seen through protests and cyber-activism on Twitter, by using certain hashtags to manifest a group's discontent with a specific issue. The first time a hashtag was used to unite people in the form of a protest, KnowYourMeme.com reports, was against Amazon for labeling LGBT-themed books as "adult" in their commercial web page. Twitter users then took to the platform to express their anger towards Amazon by using the hashtag "#AmazonFail". Of course, hashtags have also been widely used to raise awareness, particularly in politics, a field

where Twitter has come to represent an extremely important tool to manifest voters' will and concerns, which used to be part of the "public opinion" every media used to fight over to figure out, merely 10 years ago. For example, the Canadian hashtag "#IdleNoMore" was created to give voice to indigenous rights and culture in the platform.

In any case, the way a hashtag is used and eventually spread can be established, as Ma et al. (2012) note, according to the connections between users. Some will be "users who have adopted a hashtag from a virtual community" and some other will be "users who are not members of the community but have some relationships with the community members" (p. 1400) and engage as well in the interaction. This *contextual feature*, as the authors call it, is what is most helpful in determining the popularity of a hashtag, over its *content feature*, they say, which is what the hashtag is about.

O'Rielly and Milstein (2011) also address the related feature of Trending Topics, which, as they explain, lists "the top ten most popular and fastest-growing words or phrases being tweeted about at any given moment" (p. 53). This list of trending topics also includes, of course, hashtags, and it can be filtered geographically, so you can see what is trending locally, world wide, or in other places. The list is refreshed constantly, and these authors explain "it values velocity over volume, popular topics sometimes disappear as they age, even when they still draw lots of tweets" (p. 53). The algorithm for trending topics must have changed after the "Beliebers" collapsed Twitter numerous times back in late 2010 and early 2011. The Beliebers are fans of Canadian singer Justin Bieber, very young, avid technology users, and due to the gigantic size of his fandom and their

constant bombardment of social media, the singer was constantly trending on Twitter, which evidently was extremely annoying for every other user. Now, as Ma et al. (2012) note, "the popularity of a hashtag is defined as the *number of users* who post at least one tweet containing the hashtag within the given time period" (p. 1399), which implies a higher number of people tweeting about the topic is required for it to become a trend, rather than having a smaller group of people posting hundreds of tweets each, continuously.

When it comes to the phaticity of hashtags, both of the functions they perform — classifying information and providing additional meaning to statements — is precisely what helps establish and maintain bonds, the reason why a user follows another, favourites their tweet, replies, or retweets it to her or his network, all of which are signs of deference, a phatic marker of friendly behaviour. Following Scheff's (1990) Deference-Emotion system, we have previously established here that phatic communication has low visibility because it encompasses interaction rituals and tokens that have become naturalized through our socialization process, and we engage in them quite seamlessly. In the case of online communication, however, we find these phatic markers to be more evident, perhaps because the current use of technology is not yet as naturalized in our behavior. Hashtags in particular are extremely visible, to the point that they are indexable, but their use as a communicative token to connect with others makes them an undeniable phatic tool.

A surprising coincidence of framework with the present work, is found in

Zappavigna (2011) when she explains the bonding process on Twitter: "Here [in Twitter]

we affiliate with a copresent (Goffman, 1963), impermanent, community by bonding

around evolving topics of interest" (p. 800), and she continues: "Interpersonally-charged

tweets invite with their hashtags an ambient audience to align with their bonds. The

'hypercharge' of the hashtag involves the tweet in a larger bond network of values." (p.

801). Hashtags bring us closer, and that is why they are considered here as phatic tokens.

They are phatic because they are formulaic, and offer the possibility of connecting with

others in a succinct, but effective way, establishing and maintaining social bonds.

Due to the nature of Twitter, as it has been detailed here, the platform makes it

particularly easy to establish new bonds, simply by searching interests, topics, or

hashtags. But there is also another inherently phatic quality about hashtags, something

O'Reilly and Milstein (2011) observed too, and it goes very much in line with Vincent

Miller's (2008, 2011) notion of phatic culture. These authors say:

> Although status updates may sound mundane, people on Twitter have found
>
> that becoming aware of what your friends, family and colleagues are doing
>
> (without having to respond) leads to a *lightweight but meaningful connection*,
>
> sometimes called 'ambient awareness' or 'ambient intimacy', a term coined by
>
> Leisa Reichelt (@leisa). (O'Reilly & Milstein, 2011, p. 9)

This implies a low reply rate, which was also observed by Zappavigna (2011) and Ma et

al. (2012), specially when comparing it with Facebook, or LinkedIn, they say, and this is

a reason why Twitter is considered as having a dual nature: primarily, it forms a huge

information stream by microblogging, but it also has features that allow for it to be

considered a social network, as we have proposed before, like following, favouriting,

replying and retweeting, all of which are all phatic gestures. Nonetheless, this notion of

low engagement in the interactions is precisely what makes it a particularly phatic

medium. Has all the typification of communicational dynamic online led to trivialization?

5.5.2 Discussion: So, how bonded are we, really?

The notion of phatic bonds and pseudo-bonds offered here previously is suitable to

denote as well the kind of bonds that users typically establish and maintain online,

particularly through social media, and matches Miller's (2008) notion of phatic culture.

Within a phatic culture, we establish and maintain phatic bonds, through phatic

interactions, which can be conversations or gestures. In an online setting, we find there

are certainly *connections*, but there are not necessarily *relationships*, which can be

considered a deeper way to bond with people. This difference is justified in the

community-network debate and the depth of the bonds formed. People are *connected* very

much so in the way the pieces of a network are connected, hence the term *social network*,

but they are not always *related* in the sense of establishing deep and meaningful

relationships in the form of strong, secure ties, in a way that a community is supposed to.

I have proposed here before accordingly that what we typically find online is a phatic

community.

Besides instrumentality, for bonds to be more than phatic bonds, there has to be an emotional connection, a moral commitment even. If phatic communication signals low visibility pride and it is a marker of deference, up to which extent can it contribute to the evolution of relationships up to a point where the markers of pride are more visible, implying the relationship itself is evolving into something deeper? For example, if we not only wave at each other, or greet as we move along, and rather we stop and talk, that is more visible and therefore signals pride in a more visible way. What if we not only Like our friends, or "friends", posts and instead look for ways to truly bond with them? Even if it comes across as a dated paradigm, I believe that because these connections are considered social capital, and hence our *social worth* can take on very visible ways when we engage in various social interactions, especially online: "Subject 1 and Subject 2 are now *friends*", we sometimes get lost in a huge network of connections and forget the meaning of true bonding.

Even though I am framing phatic communication within Scheff's Deference-Emotion system, small talk is not emotional at all; it is instrumental, and social platforms online are instrumental as well. The success a user can experience depends on the goals that led this person to use this medium in the first place. If it is used to keep in touch with acquaintances, that can be easily done. If it is used to have a group of friends to play video games with, this is very easy to do as well. Perhaps one joined in order to keep in touch with persons one cannot see offline due to distance, in which case these platforms can very well be the best choice. However, I believe that in order to create and maintain

substantial bonds, secure bonds, one-on-one time must be the core of the interaction; and although most of these platforms do offer the possibility of engagement in such person-to-person interactions via various software sand add-ons, the nature of these social platforms online is actually to present others with one's profile and actions, opinions, interests, pictures and the alike rather than initiating contact with others. It's networked individualism at its best.

Nevertheless, that does not mean it has to remain as such; but clearly, to be able to connect with others, putting up a profile is not enough. Presenting others with one's life is not bonding; one has to become part of other people's life, too. For what I can observe in user behavior, many use social media as a *meeting point* because they know it is a place where their network of various social relationships are, and can be easily accessed, reached, and managed. Bond management online is increasingly made simpler with technology, with the option to get alarms or notifications for certain people's updates or actions; we do not even have to monitor bonds online proactively, we can just wait to receive these updates in our pockets, through our cell phones, whenever they happen.

And yet, the offline world seems to offer an additional *something* that allows for that connection to be further deepened into a bond or a deeper kind of relationship. There is something about being able to look someone in the eye, and let all other senses come in place: their smell, their touch, even their sound without technological interference. I believe this "something" is simply an added intensity to emotions. Even though emotions can be indeed developed online, the fact that most online relationships are later taken to

the offline world, when possible, seems to be something worth considering when making

evaluations about the quality or depth of online versus offline relationships. For example,

couples that meet online, eventually meet in person, and people that maintain for

whichever reason a relationship online, feel more strongly when they reunite in person.

Biologically, mothers bond with their babies through bodily contact, and animals do the

same. Perhaps it is chemistry, or perhaps it is the relatively new history of these

technological advancements that have not given time to allow such interactions to feel

truly like second skin; but whatever it is, it allows us to feel more intensely. We can

speculate it is about trust, or about attention, or about being able to truly get to know

someone in person, which cannot be achieved otherwise.

For some people network management is about trust. We can think about it as

concentric rings that expand, where the core is a privileged group of close friends that

have all your trust and the last ring, after several other rings, is one where social

relationships have a maximum social distance, and thus a minimum level of trust. The

way of interacting with the different people in our network depends on the *ring level*

where the person we are interacting with is situated, and thus the tools and settings, and

scenarios, and even the topics or the conversation, will be chosen according to

appropriateness. In fact, Facebook introduced in 2011 a system of "circles" to create

different lists of friends corresponding to different social spheres or groups, so that users

could chose what to share with whom. But differences in the content shared are also

present across platforms, for example, typically the level of intimacy some users share on

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their Facebook, is not the same as the level they display on Twitter, or Instagram, most definitely not the same as in LinkedIn. Each social media platform has its own functionality. I feel like, for instance, Facebook is a window to your life, what you do, and Twitter is more about your opinions, and your interests.

Of course, I must insist that is not to say relationships cannot arise from online interactions, in the same way that some offline bonds can remain phatic without deepening any further into a relationship; but typically interactions in social media are rooted on connections and not relationships. The key in either scenario is the emotional connection, and in absence of such, we remain merely polite actors behaving phatically. The dynamic of an interaction offline is more spontaneous, because there is not a search bar to look up things as an aid to make the conversation more interesting, there's no filter for your appearance, or windows to multitask. But, evidently, it cannot be put aside that social media and other social platforms have brought with them the unprecedented capacity of connecting people across the world, in the most extensive variety of different places, across all different time zones, in various different cultures; and this is certainly something of high value, because it has torn down barriers for making connections, and it has offered the possibility of connecting, and even bonding people with similar interests, desires or occupations regardless of all other variables.

Relatedly, these platforms offer context on the person that can make it easier for people to connect or bond, compared to how awkward initial interactions can be offline. Profiles offer the possibility of *getting to know* someone at a glance. For example, if I

meet someone in a social platform specialized in art, I already know we will have

something in common, albeit considerable differences could arise. One could also, within

that context, only connect with people that specifically like impressionist paintings, or

particularly Monet. Similarly, if I meet someone through Twitter, and I am able to check

their tweets, I have at my disposal a reflection of this person's identity, something that

would take much more time to acquire through face-to-face interactions offline. Of

course, one could craftily create a profile to convey a very specific idea about oneself that

is not necessarily truthful, but most certainly this is also something that happens, to a less

explicit and instantaneous extent, in offline representations of self. Regardless, there

seems to be a visceral appeal in the possibility of *getting to know* what people are about

— or at least what they say they are about — so easily; a sort of voyeuristic pleasure that

seems to trigger online snooping practices.

Ultimately, even though we create these symbols for bonding, and we manifest

our membership (by subscribing, by befriending, and by following), our taste (by Liking,

by favoriting, and by sharing), our fellowship (by using hashtags, by creating groups, and

by joining networks), the nature of these bonds is normally weak precisely because of the

nature of the environment and the low commitment that characterizes interactions in

social media. It is up to the users to manage their connections and turn them into bonds,

to recognize the potential of having the whole world in — literally — the palm of their

hands, and using these phatic tools as a means for bonding and creating meaningful

relationships with others as the foundation of community. Agency is very clear when it

comes to this particular discourse mechanism: it can go either way, but it is certainly a

great way to get started.

Chapter 5: Concluding Thoughts

Is Phatic Communication Still Relevant Today?

The present work can be described as an epistemological journey to explore phatic communication in a contemporary manner. Phatic communication is a phenomenon often overlooked because of its assumed *simple* nature and even *purposeless* quality, however here it was analyzed under a vindicating light in order to bring about its importance at a micro and macro sociological scale, as well as its appeal to the field of communication.

This required a holistic approach to the study of the phenomenon: I was required to look into every field of study, every argumentative position, every evaluation other authors have made, but also everything that surrounded me in my own everyday life as a way of experiencing phatic communication in real scenarios. I paid special attention to the understanding of phatic communication, by analyzing, explaining and generalizing its details in order to propose a much-needed organizational scheme that works as a theoretical model.

Initially, a broad research question was raised: is phatic communication still a relevant discourse mechanism in the establishment and maintenance of social bonds today? Different implications came along with such a question that required the development of a theoretical frame previous to the discussion of phatic communication itself. This framework provided information on what social bonds are, and what could be considered as an interactional dynamic proper of our time. Of course, the sociological

Bond Theory of Thomas Scheff (1990) and Vincent Miller's (2008, 2011) innovative concept of phatic culture made this possible, but that was only the beginning.

An overwhelming collection of data since 1923, when Burnslow Malinowski coined the term "phatic communion" was taking me to various cognitive scenarios to approach phatic communication. For instance, related notions, like that of politeness, which has a field of study of its own, also required my attention in order to be able to frame phatic communication and perform some sort of paradigm shift in the way of approaching this phenomenon: certainly phatic communication is framed within a politeness system, but does that system act as well as a function of phatic communication, given that it allows for phatic interactions to provide certainty in regards to the outcome of the interaction, precisely because it follows politeness protocols? Yes, it does.

This thesis underwent a process of rethinking phatic communication that implied conceptual operations like this paradigm shift, but also the bringing together of existing knowledge to form a comprehensive scheme in order to organize phatic communication in a theoretical model. This was a shift in itself, and quite the challenging one. Despite encountering a great variety of authors and approaches, the limitations of their work made it harder for me to see through patterns that made them all relatable; patterns that eventually allowed for a model to be brought together.

Once that was achieved, it became clearer the validity of phatic communication still stands strong today. All the aspects it encompasses, all the vicissitudes of its reach, were evident within the model. I was able to see social interactions around me in both the

offline and the online world and notice all the different functions in numerous actions and performances, I could determine the type of phatic communication I was witnessing, or the scenario; and this would not have been possible without a clear delimitation of the different features that the model proposed here offers.

Phatic communication is a relevant discourse mechanism that takes place in social interactions, allowing for an easier, stress-free dynamic that aids in the establishment and maintenance of social bonds with a wide variety of individuals across the social spectrum, and thus its functionality continues to be of high importance today. Its different uses, on the other hand, makes phatic communication a versatile tool that enables users to become more or less engaged in the communicative encounter based on their desires and needs.

When we turn to social media in particular, phatic communication is shown as a very helpful communicative tool that assists in the maintenance of a variety of networks users can have online. In the same way as in the offline setting, phatic communication online eases the beginning of an interaction, and provides certainty about the outcome. Its formulaic nature allows for facility of use and works as a convenient tool for bond management through one's networks. But of particular interest is the wide range of phatic gestures and markers that are characteristic of this *new* scenario of social interaction.

Throughout the present work I have explored different perspectives in order to study phatic communication in a multidisciplinary way. This was of great help in providing rich insights about the phenomenon and also in understanding the different approaches various academic and professional fields have to phatic communication; and

this worked as well as a testimony of the complex mechanism phatic communication is, especially from a cognitive, sociolinguistic and pragmatic stand. Of course, the framing of phatic communication within a social and cultural system reflects in itself the inherent complexity of this discourse mechanism as well.

This complexity is precisely what suggests further empirical work on phatic communication should be performed. For example, even though there is some research conducted on phatic speech, the corpus is certainly not exhaustive and could be further explored and looked at under a more contemporary light. Phatic gestures lack study as well and research on these markers specifically could be beneficial for the overall understanding of phatic communication. And, of course, further research on phatic communication in social media should be performed, not only looking at the connections, or bonds, people share online, but rather analyzing the ways in which the different functions of phatic communication take place, and exploring the level of awareness users have of phatic communication as a tool.

The brief analysis of hashtags offered here as a way to illustrate the validity and relevance of phatic communication in its different forms today, created a theoretical framework that can further be studied through empirical research. Also, the notion of phatic communication as used by corporate entities and brands online has not been studied and not only would it be interesting to explore because of its novelty, but it could potentially be of special interest from a public relations perspective for the management of audiences online. The new concept of phatic communication offered here with the

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intention of bringing this discourse mechanism to contemporary times, includes corporate

communication in order to address a common scenario of social interaction and

communication online, but unfortunately the study of such communicational dynamic was

beyond scope of the present work.

Lastly, although the present work covers the theoretical needs of the study of

phatic communication, future innovative and challenging analysis is always encouraged

in theoretical thought, since different ways of looking into an already established structure

or a phenomenon that is thought of as already understood can ultimately promote further

theoretical improvement. Specifically, the new concept this work offers, antiphaticity,

should be explored in more depth and perhaps developed into a model of its own in order

to achieve full understanding. Antiphaticity can also be researched empirically, for

example by initially considering the same variables phatic communication researchers

have looked into, and observing how this new concept differs from the existing one.

In any case, there is still a significant array of possibilities to explore in relation to

phatic communication, various directions, different cases, various settings, different

participants, and overall innovative research is within sight. Personally, I expect my work

to be of help in such endeavors by triggering a newfound curiosity for an old phenomenon

in order to further explore it, and understand it, from both academic and practical

perspectives.

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Appendix

Online and Offline Examples of Phatic Communication

Here I offer examples with the mere intention of illustrating the points above,

certainly not aiming for a detailed description of each possible manifestation, but only to

situate the reader within the scope that phatic communication reaches both offline and

online:

Table 1: Online/Offline-Personal/Corporate Phatic Communication

I - Offline examples:

	General Communication	Phatic Communication
Oral Interpersonal	Face-to-face interactions where participants exchange thoughts about something.	Greetings or brief chats about *safe* topics in order to manifest our desire to create or maintain a social bond.
Oral Corporate	Public relations events to enhance brand image.	Greeting and parting protocols at such PR events uttered in the name of the company.
Written Interpersonal	Leaving a personal note in the fridge that explains one's whereabouts.	A thank you note, or even a birthday card.
Written Corporate	Written messages to their audiences, like offers or	A thank you note sent from a company for purchasing their

	coupons in the mail which companies send with commercial intentions mainly.	products or services, or from an association for making a donation.
Gestures Interpersonal	Pulling out a thumb when hitchhiking.	Waving one hand towards someone as a greeting, or a brief touch on the shoulders to convey sympathy. Gift-giving is also high in phaticity under certain circumstances; for example, when the giver does not know the receiver well. The gesture expresses the giver's desire to connect with the receiver, either by establishing a new bond or maintaining an existing one with a gesture that conveys a socially constructed meaning.
Gestures Corporate	These are unlikely to happen since companies are not embodied, but if someone is	A reverence that this brand or corporate representative gives at the end of her or his speech

	representing the company or the brand, we could take her or his gestures as coming from the company or the brand. For example, giving thumbs up after giving good news.	to thank the audience for their attention.

II - Online examples:

	General Communication	Phatic Communication
Oral Interpersonal	Using software like Skype or apps like FaceTime, where users can mimic their encounter offline through video calls.	While using that software, what makes an exchange phatic is the topics and level of engagement of the interaction. For example, asking people about their day.
Oral Corporate	Advertising displayed in audiovisual platforms, like YouTube.	Audiovisual material online without a direct commercial intention. In this case, given that its objective is to connect with an audience, it can be deemed as phatic. For example, sponsored funny videos with the intention of

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		establishing or reinforcing brand bonds.
Written Personal	Chat rooms where participants type in order to converse with others.	Sending a message that says, "Just saying hi!" or "Just wanted to check on you", either by personal direct messages or public posts to the addressee, by mail or chat, or through any social platform. Again, the topic and the engagement if what will determine if the interaction is phatic.
Written Corporate	A company's corporate website.	Branded or corporate profiles that send an unidirectional message to their followers or subscribers, or when they *talk* to their audience one-on-one and try to connect with them and establish or maintain a bond. As suggested above, this is the strength of corporate communication online, a brand personified in a profile has equal

		opportunities to talk to users as any other individual.
Gestures Personal	The use of emoticons, Likes, pokes, retweets and favorites.	Sending just a *smiley face* to someone, or liking a post they made, or retweeting something they said. Without any need of words, simple gestures represent our bond status and act as bond monitoring. As I will discuss ahead, what Miller (2008, 2011) contends is precisely that communication online is mostly phatic. Gestures are a great example, because they represent that desire to stay connected, to maintain the bond, but with very little effort.
Gestures Corporate	The embodiment needed to perform gestures in the offline setting suggested before is not needed in this	Again, the virtue of the online environment for companies and institutions is in the possibility of interacting with users in the same

| | case; and this is precisely what has allowed companies and brands to perform and interact with individuals online in the same way that individuals would interact with each other. This has been quite the powerful shift, loaded with opportunities for brands and corporations. | way they would with each other; so when a brand or a company Likes your post, follows you, or retweets your tweet, it is a phatic corporate gesture. |