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THE EXPRESSION OF PHATIC SPEECH ACTS THROUGH NONVERBAL MEANS

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Abstract. This article investigates the manifestation of phatic speech acts through nonverbal communication channels. It analyzes how facial expressions, gestures, eye contact, and body language function to establish, maintain, and terminate social contact. The findings reveal that nonverbal cues can either reinforce verbal utterances or independently fulfill phatic functions to ensure smooth interpersonal interaction.

Keywords: phatic speech act, communication, nonverbal means, gestures, facial expressions, interpersonal contact, social interaction.

Phatic speech acts have long held the attention of scholars. They matter not only as a distinct type of speech act in pragmalinguistics, but also because they fit the demands of the politeness maxims described by Paul Grice. According to B. Malinowski, E. Sapir, R. Jakobson, G. G. Pocheptsov, T. G. Vinokur, V. V. Dementyev, M. N. Kozhina, L. N. Murzin, V. B. Chernik, N. I. Formanovskaya, and many others, phatic speech acts are acts of establishing contact. In other words, how a conversation begins, how it continues, and how gracefully it ends all depend on phatic speech acts.

Because phatic speech acts are an integral part of any conversation, they carry a definite communicative intention even when they have no particular meaning or content. Greetings such as "Assalomu alaykum" ("Peace be upon you"), "Yaxshimisiz?" ("How are you?"), "Salom" ("Hello"), and "Qalaysiz, ishlaringiz yaxshimi?" ("How are you, is work going well?") serve to open a conversation. Expressions that come up mid-conversation, such as "Yo'g'e?" ("No way?"), "Rostdan-a?" ("Really?"), "Shundaymi?" ("Is that so?"), and "Haa…" ("Aha…"), serve to keep it going. At the end of an exchange, words and phrases like "Mayli, xayr" ("Alright, goodbye"), "Yaxshi dam oling" ("Have a good rest"), "Ertagacha" ("See you tomorrow"), and "Ko'rishguncha" ("Until we meet again") not only signal that the conversation has ended, but also leave both the speaker and the listener with a warm, positive impression.

Nonverbal means make up the unspoken layer of phatic communication. Nodding, smiling, holding someone's gaze, shaking hands, shrugging, changes in loudness and tone of voice, and even silence itself can take on phatic significance in certain situations. In his study of phatic communication, John Laver describes in detail how nonverbal signals are used systematically when opening a conversation, keeping it going ("yes," "I see," a nod), and closing it.[1] Nonverbal phatic means also play an important role in Uzbek communication culture. When greeting elders, for example, people place a hand on their chest and bow their heads slightly. When meeting an acquaintance they haven't

[1]Laver J. "Communicative Functions of Phatic Communion." In *The Organization of Behavior in Face-to-Face Interaction*, ed. A. Kendon, R. Harris, M. Key. The Hague: Mouton, 1975. Pp. 215–238.

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seen in a long time, they embrace, or shake hands while gripping the other's forearm with the free hand. These customs express phatic meaning without words.

The division of the phatic speech act into verbal and nonverbal components is clearly visible in works of fiction. The meeting scenes in Abdulla Qodiriy's novel O'tkan kunlar (Days Gone By) are a vivid example. In the scene where Yusufbek Haji and Otabek meet, the author describes not only the spoken greeting formulas but also physical actions such as placing a hand on the chest, bowing, and looking one another in the eye. This shows that in the etiquette of the time, nonverbal phatic means were no less important than verbal formulas. Analysis of such scenes shows that in Uzbek society of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the higher a person's social standing, the richer and longer the verbal and nonverbal makeup of the greeting ritual.[2]

A similar picture appears in English literature, in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice. In the introductions at ballroom gatherings, characters bow to one another and offer a hand, accompanied by stock phrases such as "Charmed, I'm sure" and "A pleasure to make your acquaintance." Here the nonverbal act (the bow) is an obligatory companion to the spoken formula, and omitting either one would have been considered rude, even insulting, in the English aristocratic society of the day. Analyzing the etiquette of conversation in Austen's novels, the literary scholar Tony Tanner notes that such ritual phatic scenes also serve to display social stratification in the novel.[3]

Phatic Communication through Facial Expression

Facial expressions, particularly smiling, frowning, or raising an eyebrow, are among the most common means of performing a phatic function. In their research,[4] P. Ekman and W. Friesen distinguish between different kinds of smiles. They show that some of them, such as the social smile, signal readiness to begin or continue a conversation, meaning that they serve a phatic purpose more than a semantic one. When a smile accompanies a spoken greeting, it strengthens the greeting's politeness, and sometimes it can replace the verbal element altogether.

"She smiled, and Harry felt instantly that he had been welcomed, though
neither of them had said a single word." (J. K. Rowling, Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone, 1997, p. 70)

In this passage, the character's smile takes the place of a spoken greeting and conveys goodwill and readiness for contact. Here the smile acts as an independent phatic act: it conveys no specific message, but confirms that the channel of communication is open.

"Yusufbek Haji smiled when he saw him and said nothing more, but that
smile was worth more than a thousand words." (Abdulla Qodiriy, O'tkan kunlar, 2018, p. 134)

In the Uzbek literary tradition, too, a smile is often used as a nonverbal way of expressing approval, warmth, or respect. In such cases the smile performs not only a phatic but also an expressive function, narrowing the social distance between the speakers.

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[2]Normatov U. *Mahorat sirlari* [Secrets of Craftsmanship]. Tashkent: G'afur G'ulom Publishing House, 2001. Pp. 76–84.

[3]Tanner T. *Jane Austen*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986. Pp. 105–118.

[4]Ekman P., Friesen W. V. *Unmasking the Face*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1975. Pp. 45–56.

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Eye Contact (Oculesics) as a Phatic Means

Eye contact, meaning the direction, duration, and intensity of the gaze, is an important nonverbal indicator of whether a person is opening a conversation or declining one. In their joint study,[5] M. Argyle and M. Cook describe the phenomenon of "greeting with the eyes." They show that brief eye contact between strangers often signals that spoken communication is about to begin. E. Hall, in his cross-cultural research,[6] shows that norms of eye contact differ among peoples. In some cultures a prolonged gaze is seen as disrespectful, while in others it is a sign of sincerity.

"Their eyes met, and in that instant, a silent greeting passed between them
without a single word spoken." (C. Brontë, Jane Eyre, 2006, 480 p.)

Here the meeting of gazes serves as the stage before spoken communication, that is, it opens the channel. Before either person has said a single word, each senses the other's readiness to talk.

"The girl raised her eyes for a moment and glanced at the young man, then
looked down at the ground again; yet that single glance had already said a great deal." (A. Qodiriy, O'tkan kunlar, 2018, p. 84)

In Uzbek literary texts, a short, fleeting glance often reflects a national character shaped by modesty and shyness. Contact is made through the eyes but broken off at once, and this is read as behavior in keeping with cultural norms.

Kinesic Means: Nodding and Hand Gestures

R. Birdwhistell, the founder of kinesics,[7] argues that body movements, combined with speech, form distinct units called "kinemes." Actions such as nodding, waving, and bowing are often used either on their own or together with spoken phatic formulas to express greeting, agreement, or farewell. D. McNeill treats gestures as an integral part of speech.[8] He emphasizes that most of them add no extra meaning to the spoken text but serve to regulate the communication process itself.

"He caught her eye across the crowded room and gave a curt nod of
greeting, a brief gesture that acknowledged her presence before turning away." (J. Galsworthy, The Forsyte Saga, 1922, p. 114)

In this example, the gesture fully performs the function of a spoken farewell or greeting formula. Where the distance between speakers makes talking impossible, the gesture is the only phatic means available.

"The old man raised a hand from afar and gave a little shake of his head,
as if to say 'Farewell.'" (O. Hoshimov, Dunyoning ishlari, 2017, p. 62)

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[5] Argyle M., Cook M. *Gaze and Mutual Gaze*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976. Pp. 23–31.

[6] Hall E. T. *The Silent Language*. New York: Doubleday, 1959. Pp. 60–72.

[7] Birdwhistell R. L. *Kinesics and Context: Essays on Body Motion Communication*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970. Pp. 33–40.

[8] McNeill D. *Hand and Mind: What Gestures Reveal about Thought*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992. Pp. 105–110.

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In Uzbek communication culture, nodding and bowing with a hand on the chest also express differences in age, social standing, and level of respect. In this case the nonverbal means serves not only a phatic function but an additional one as well, marking social hierarchy.

Tactile (Haptic) Means of Phatic Communication

Nonverbal means based on physical contact, such as handshakes, a pat on the shoulder, and embraces, are an integral part of greeting and parting speech acts in many cultures. Describing nonverbal communication systems,[9] F. Poyatos notes that the phatic function of haptic means is especially evident in formal meetings, for example in the handshake at a business negotiation. Such an action contains no specific information, but it confirms that both parties agree to communicate.

"He placed a warm, heavy hand upon my shoulder, a silent gesture that
restored our companionship far better than any spoken words could have done." (Ch. Dickens, Great Expectations, 1861, p. 154)

"The two greeted each other and clasped hands firmly, feeling no need for
words." (Oybek, Qutlug' qon, 2014, p. 112)

In both examples, the handshake appears independent of speech yet equal to it as a phatic means. In such cases, physical contact by itself carries the meaning "I mean you well and am ready to continue our relationship."

Silence and Pauses as a Phatic Means

Among the nonverbal means that perform a phatic function, silence holds a special place. In his research,[10] A. Jaworski shows that silence takes an active part in communication and sometimes conveys more than a spoken reply. In some situations, keeping quiet can express agreement, sympathy, or respect, and in others it can express objection. What matters is that even this kind of silence does not cut the channel of communication entirely. It keeps the channel open in a different form, so the phatic function continues.

"They sat in a long pause, yet the silence between them was not a distance,
but a shared bond that kept them closer than any words could." (V. Woolf, To the Lighthouse, 1927, p. 118)

"No one uttered a sound, yet a sympathy for one another could be felt in
that silence." (O. Hoshimov, Ikki eshik orasi, 2015, p. 142)

In Uzbek communication culture, silence is often a recognized way of showing respect, modesty, or sympathy in a difficult situation. In such cases, what is left unsaid does the same work as a spoken phatic formula: it preserves the connection between the speakers.

Proxemics: Spatial Distance as a Phatic Means

The physical distance between speakers is another important nonverbal factor that performs a phatic function. In his theory of proxemics,[11] E. Hall divides the distance between people into intimate, personal, social, and public zones, and shows that each zone has its own norms of communication. When a speaker stands closer than usual, or conversely moves sharply away, this signals openness to

[9] Poyatos F. *Nonverbal Communication across Disciplines*. Vol. 2. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2002. Pp. 88–95.

[10] Jaworski A. *The Power of Silence: Social and Pragmatic Perspectives*. Newbury Park: Sage, 1993. Pp. 66–74.

[11] Hall E. T. [Proxemics theory; full reference missing in the original manuscript, likely *The Hidden Dimension*, 1966.]

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contact or withdrawal from it, without a single spoken word. In this case distance itself acts as an independent phatic sign: it can be an invitation to begin a conversation or a way of avoiding one.

"He closed the physical distance between them, stepping into his personal space as a silent invitation that the conversation was open to continue." (E. M. Forster, A Passage to India, 1924, p. 68)

"He moved closer to the table, thereby showing that he was ready to continue the conversation." (O. Hoshimov, Tushda kechgan umrlar, 2016, p. 98)

In both examples, the character signals willingness to talk simply by changing his position, without saying a word. In Uzbek communication traditions, keeping a certain respectful distance when talking with elders, and closing that distance among close friends and family, has become a social norm. This shows that proxemic means have a national and cultural character.

Conclusion. The examples discussed above show that phatic speech acts can be carried out successfully not only through spoken formulas but also through nonverbal means such as facial expression, eye contact, gesture, physical contact, and silence. The examples from English and Uzbek literature confirm that nonverbal phatic means exist in both linguacultural, but that their degree of use, emotional coloring, and social meaning differ according to each nation's communication traditions. For this reason, a full and comprehensive analysis of phatic speech acts requires studying them not only at the lexical-semantic level but as a coherent system of verbal and nonverbal means.

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