

## Using Phatic Communication as A Default

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### Abstract

*In this reading you will discover the meaning behind Phatic Communication. The main focus is to decipher the real reason into why it is human nature to use this form of communication. The research conducted goes over possible reasons as to why humans use Phatic Communication in everyday life.*

The field of communication is full of an array of ideas. A topic I have been researching is Phatic Communication and why we use it. I chose this topic because I find myself using this style of communication quite often. It also serves purpose in everyday society because everyone is using Phatic Communication. This is important to study because it would be good to know why society uses it so much and if it is good or bad to rely on in conversation. Phatic Communication is a form of communication that serves as social pleasantries. It is often used in first interactions to better your face. To better your face means to give yourself a better look in one's opinion of you. Not only do I use Phatic Communication every single day but so does the rest of society. Every time people walk past each other they often smile or nod. This is a form of nonverbal Phatic communication. It's not that people are that happy all the time or that they are concerned about how others are doing. It simply is meant to come off polite in public settings. This makes Phatic

Communication significant to everyday life for everyone. You would use this in; job interviews, school, work, in a store, talking to someone older or younger, etc.

While there have been previous studies conducted on this topic, further research is still needed." An interesting study is, "Phatic Communication Use in Employment Interviews: Predicted Outcome, Value, Liking, Relational Closeness and Communication Satisfaction" by Jennifer Louise Hanson. This study evaluates how people go into job interviews and if Phatic Communication affects the interviewer. Hanson says, "Phatic Communication is pertinent in interpersonal interactions because it serves a few important purposes" (Hanson, 2016: page, 7). In its findings the data found that Phatic Communication heavily works hand in hand with first impression, therefore it was very prominent within the mock interviews. Concluding that we often use Phatic Communication in our first impressions, it is likely that it will remain a constant in the daily life of society.

Two other studies that have focused on Phatic Communication are qualitative studies unlike the one mentioned above which was quantitative. The study, “Phatic Interpretation and Phatic Communication” by Zegarac, Vlad, and Billy Clark talks about how people may not even realize they are using Phatic Communication. They refer to Phatic Communication as small talk which, in a sense, that is what it is. In the findings of the study, they all found that if small talk is obvious, then it may not be considered Phatic Communication. It is only considered Phatic if and only if both participants are unknowingly using small talk.

The third study, “Phatic Communication: How English Native Speakers Create Ties of Union” by Dr. Jumanto. The purpose was to evaluate how Phatic Communication is used in interviews. It was a qualitative study. Dr. Jumanto says, “Phatic Communication among English native speakers is used for expressing politeness [maintaining the social distance], for expressing politeness and friendship [shortening the social distance], and for expressing friendship [eliminating the social distance] to different headers in the factors of power and solidarity” (Jumanto, 2014 : page,27). Overall, the study found that human communication requires Phatic Communication in all settings. It is additionally found that people use this form of communication in a large variety of situations.

In all, the studies above show a trend in a similar setting. Each setting involves people during their first encounter with one another. From the three studies it can be concluded that people are using Phatic Communication to find the best face in themselves and one another.

To help the research along with Phatic Communication I proposed a hypothetical study that could be conducted on Millersville’s campus. My hypothesis is “In a first impression setting people are likely to

use Phatic Communication to better their face”. The research paradigm for the hypothesis takes a quantitative stance.

The main method to answer the hypothesis is to have students take surveys. A set of questions will be sent out to every student/faculty member on Millersville’s campus that holds a Millersville email. This would be about 10,000 participants. This many emails are needed because the number of people that will answer is unknown. To obtain emails, researchers will go to the president, Dr. Wubah, and show official documentation as to what the research is, why it is being done, and who is doing it. The emails also will NOT leave the president’s office or whatever space the emails will be sent out in. Under the supervision of the president and the researcher present, the emails will stay confidential to the domain they were sent out on. The domain meaning computer, will be owned by Millersville University so all emails sent and received will be held on campus under the supervision. By emailing them to every person with an email on campus the study can eliminate small groups answering the survey. Since the answers can be confidential and online the results can and should be diverse. Being that this study is taking place on a college campus it is good to keep in mind all of the cultures of the participants. (See Appendix A) The questions in the survey will ask about their general knowledge of phatic communication.

The objective was to see how people answer in regard to wanting to improve their first impressions intentionally or whether people use Phatic Communication consciously or unconsciously. By going through the answered surveys and calculating the participants' answers, we will know why they think they use Phatic Communication, which would overall answer the hypothesis. For example, a reason to use Phatic Communication on the survey is to keep a

good face. If the majority of people answered that option, then the overall answer to the hypothesis would be that people default to Phatic Communication to keep good face with others. This research would be very accountable if one option is chosen at a higher rate than the other three options as well as if the study sample is as large as expected. There will be 20 researchers collecting data. Each researcher will receive 500 emails each (if all 10,000 participants answer). When the emails were sent out they

were attached to a researcher's email to be emailed back to with the finished survey.

The limitations of the study is a low response rate. Even though all submissions are confidential people still may not answer for a multitude of reasons. Once the hypothesis is answered research can then move forward with possibly asking new questions about Phatic Communication. By getting to the root of Phatic Communication human beings can possibly better their interpersonal communication.

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## Appendix

1. Can you give me your definition of Phatic communication?
2. Can you describe a time when you think you would use phatic communication?
3. Have you ever used Phatic Communication knowingly?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
4. More specifically, have you ever used Phatic Communication in an interview?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
5. If you used phatic communication, do you know why you used it?
  - a. To gain personal satisfaction of a better self image
  - b. To get an advantage by having better face
  - c. Unknowingly used it
  - d. Not apical/ never used it
6. If you had to choose why people turn to Phatic Communication which option would you pick?
  - a. To gain personal satisfaction
  - b. To get a personal advantage
  - c. They don't know they are using it
7. How likely would you be to use Phatic Communication while knowingly doing so?
  - a. Very likely
  - b. Likely
  - c. Somewhat likely
  - d. Less likely
  - e. Not likely
8. Would you agree that Phatic Communication increases your chances of obtaining a job?
  - a. Strongly agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Neutral
  - d. Disagree
  - e. Strongly disagree
9. How effective would you say Phatic Communication is on a scale of 1 - 10. One being not effective, 10 being very effective.
  - a. 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10
10. How formal would you rate Phatic Communication on a scale of 1-5. One being casual and 5 being formal.
  - a. 1,2,3,4,5

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