PHATIC COMMUNION AS A UNIFIER AS PORTRAYED IN 'WONDER'

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ABSTRACT

Phatic communication or so called 'phatic communion' is said to be a kind of language used to create, to maintain and to strengthen the social bond between individuals. However, the concept of phatic communication in which it requires neither an exchange of information nor a specific purpose in its use raises the question regarding the necessity and the effectiveness of phatic communication. Responding to this issue, this study is conducted to show the significance of phatic communication in colloquial speech event. This study aims to prove the role of phatic communication as a unifier between individuals as portrayed in Wonder movie reflected in the life of a boy with Treacher Collins syndrome, Auggie. Considering the hardships he encounters in his social life, this study aims to see how phatic communication acts as a unifier for Auggie by scrutinizing the types and the functions of phatic communication in his social life. The analysis suggests that 1) the types of expressions serving as phatic communication in Wonder are divided into greeting, making small talk, agreeing on something and joking, and 2) the functions of the phatic expressions are to express solidarity and friendship and to create harmony and comfort.

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INTRODUCTION

Human is essentially believed to be a social being as stated by Ilyenknov (as cited in Bakhurst et. al, 1995) that human essence as the 'ensemble of social relations'. As social being, people need to make interaction with others in order to survive. This interaction is a form of social activity that can occur anywhere (Sari et al., 2016) and established for the sake of maintaining social relationship between people (Widyaningrum et al., 2017). This interaction between people can only be achieved through language by means of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires (Sapir, 1921).

When communicating using language, people do not always need to have a specific purpose such as informing something or getting informed as long as they "display a willingness and ability to collaborate" (Syah et al., 2017). People can talk about anything or even things out of the context just to keep social interaction. People can talk about small easy things to show their willingness in order to open or keep open a channel of communication (Wardaugh, 2006). This sort of verbal communication is known as phatic communication.

Phatic communication, as defined by Coupland (2000) is the process of fulfilling human needs for social cohesiveness and mutual recognition. Phatic communication does not require its speaker to have a certain point but only to make contact with others in order to maintain a good social relationship. Regrettably, due to this seemingly easy concept, phatic communication is usually undervalued for its use. Some people doubt the necessity of phatic communication in a speech event and assume it as a pointless unimportant small matter. Concerning this issue, this study is conducted to show the significance of phatic communication in colloquial speech event. This study aims to prove the role of phatic communication as a unifier between people by identifying the types and functions of phatic expressions as portrayed in Wonder.

Wonder is a 2017 American comedy-drama film, directed by Stephen Chbosky based on the 2012 novel of the same title by R. J. Palacio. Wonder talks about the struggle of a kid namely August Pullman, so called Auggie. Auggie has medical condition, commonly known as Treacher Collins syndrome, which has left his face disfigured. Auggie, who was homeschooled before, is asked to attend a private school by his mother. Being aware of his unusual condition, Auggie finds it really hard to fit in to his new world in school and the kids do not make it easier either. He does not have any friends because he is avoided by the other kids and even considered a plague. Considering the hardships he encounters in his social life, this study aims to see how phatic communication acts as a unifier for Auggie by scrutinizing the types and the functions of phatic communication in his social life. This study is considered necessary since people's awareness of phatic communication is relatively still low. Therefore, this study is hoped to be an eye-opening read so that it can raise the awareness of people towards the use of phatic communication to create a social bond between people as reflected in Auggie's life.

This study is certainly not the only study discussing phatic communion. Arimi (1998) also conducted a study with the same topic entitled *Basa-basi Dalam Bahasa Indonesia*. This study aims to observe 1) the ethnography of Indonesian's small talk along with the usage rules, 2) the functions of Indonesian's small talk, 3) the types and strategies of Indonesian's small talk and its distribution in interactive discourse, and 4) the characteristic of Indonesian's small talk. Arimi (1998) found that small talk, as a symbol of social action, does not require its speaker to exchange information but only to greet others as a way to show politeness and to create solidarity and harmony between individuals. Based on Arimi, phatic communication is divided into 24 types based on the intention of the speaker, i.e. greeting (*salam*), introducing (*perkenalan*), addressing (*sapaaan*), congratulating (*konsratulasi*), expressing wishes (*pengharapan*), inviting (*ajakan*), offering (*tawaran*), warning (*himbauan*), forbidding (*larangan*), rejecting (*rejeksi*), agreeing (*persetujuan*), accepting (*penerimaaan*), understanding (*pemakluman*), promising (*janji*), complimenting (*pujian*), judging (*penilaian*), being humble (*perendahan hati*), sympathizing (*simpati*), paying attention (*perhatian*), reminding (*pengingatan kembali*), apologizing (*apologi*), welcoming (*persilahan*), thanking (*terima kasih*), and saying good bye (*berpamitan*). The similarity of Arimi's study and this study lies only on the object of the research i.e. phatic communication. However, this study is different from Arimi's study on the basis of language. The phatic communication observed by Arimi is in Indonesian while this study observes English phatic communication.

Jumanto's study is the same as this study in which it scrutinizes the types and functions of English phatic communication entitled *Phatic Communication: How English Native Speakers Create Ties of Union*. By interrelating the theory of 17 linguists, Jumanto (2014) found that there are 12 functions of phatic communion along with the types of it in every function. The functions are (1) *breaking the silence,* (2) *starting a conversation,* (3) *making small talk*, (4) *making gossip*, (5) *keeping talking,* (6) *expressing solidarity,* (7) *creating harmony,* (8) *creating comfort*, (9) *expressing empathy*, (10) *expressing friendship,* (11) *expressing respect,* and (12) *expressing politeness*. Jumanto also relates the phatic communication among English native speakers to politeness and is also verified by other significant theories in verbal human communication. In fact, Jumanto's result of 12 English phatic communication functions is adapted by this study to be one of the applied theories in gaining findings. However, Jumanto's study and this study is different in the data of the research. Jumanto collected the data direcly from English native speakers, meanwhile this study gained the data from English native speakers as portrayed in Wonder movie.

THEORY AND METHOD

This study is a qualitative analytic design which is defined by Creswell (2007) as a research which begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. Qualitative research is well suited for this research due to its nature which is to describe social phenomena that occur naturally without any attempt to manipulate certain situation under study (Hancock, 1998). Besides qualitative method, content analysis approach was also applied to analyze the data of this study. As defined by Krippendorff (2003), content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inference from texts (or other meaningful matter, which in this study is a movie) to the contexts of their uses.

The data in this study are verbal expressions taken from Wonder movie in form of words, phrases, clauses and sentences related to phatic expressions. In collecting the data, two steps were conducted, i.e. 1) watched and rewatched the movie to gain deep understanding and 2) took notes and highlighted the data which were related to phatic expressions. After being collected, the data were analyzed in four steps, i.e. 1) the data were identified as phatic expressions, 2) the data were classified based on types and functions of phatic expressions (as shown by 'Table 1' at the end of this part), 3) the data were interrelated with the theories to gain findings, and 4) the conclusion was drawn.

Data Classification

Phatic Expressions	Types of Phatic Expressions	Functions of Phatic Expressions
"Mrs. Pullman, so good to see you again." *"You must be Auggie. What a pleasure to meet you."*	Greeting (mentioning names, titles, or titles and names)	Breaking the Silence
"I am Mr. Tushman. You can laugh about that. Tushman. I've heard them all...Tushy. Butt man. Butt face."	Joking	Creating Harmony and Comfort
"What's the deal with the braid in the back of your hair?"	Commenting on Something	Making Small Talk

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the research findings and some adjustment with the applied theories, it is found that 1) the types of expressions serving as phatic communication in Wonder are divided into greeting, making small talk, agreeing on something and joking, and 2) the functions of the phatic expressions are to express solidarity and friendship and to create harmony and comfort. It should be noted that this study has limited the types and functions of the phatic expressions only to those indicating phatic expressions as a unifier which in this case is for Auggie, the boy in need. The results aim to show how significant phatic expressions are in creating and maintaining social relationships as it is shown by how it works for Auggie. In order to provide clear discussions, the findings are elaborated respectively in two sections as follows:

Types of Phatic Expressions in Wonder

Jumanto (2014) proposed 12 functions of phatic expressions along with its types of expressions in every function as the result of his elaborative qualitative research on Malinowski's theory of phatic communion [1], Jakobson's theory of language functions [2], and Brown and Gilman's theory of power and solidarity [3]. However, in this study, the types of expressions are restricted to greeting, making small talk, agreeing on something and joking due to achieving the aim of the study. The types of expressions are as follows:

Greeting

As portrayed in *Wonder*, greetings are occupied in both formal and informal occasions. This phatic expression is used longer when spoken to not-so-close hearers in formal event and shorter to close hearers in informal event. Greetings include mentioning names, titles, or titles and names and farewells at the end of the conversation. Greetings are considered phatic since it does not really convey real information besides the willingness of the speaker to make contact, as it can be seen in the subsequent example:

(1) Mr. Tushman: "You must be **Auggie**. What a pleasure to meet you."

The previous example occurs in front of a school where Auggie enrolls. Mr. Tushman welcomes him and greets him as shown by example (1). What is said by Mr. Tushman conveys no significant information but a phatic communication to create a friendly environment so Auggie can feel welcome to his new school and to make a good impression in their first meeting. The phatic expression Mr. Tushman uses to Auggie is a little bit long since they do not have a close relationship before and just met. The expression is also spoken in the formal event since it is in the school and between the head master of the school and the student-to-be. It is slightly different from the greeting used by Auggie's classmate, Summer in the following expression:

(2) Summer   : *approaching Auggie* "Hi, I'm **Summer**."

What is said by Summer as shown in example (2) is different from what is said by Mr. Tushman in example (1). Summer's greeting is shorter and more casual than Mr. Tushman's. This is due to the fact that she and Auggie are at the same age and classmates. The conversation also occurs in the school's cafeteria and in informal event. However, the way Summer introduces herself to Auggie still does not indicate a close relationship as shown by example (3) as follows:

(3) Miranda   : "**Major Tom**, is that you?"

Despite the fact that they are not at the same age, the way Miranda calls Auggie by mentioning the nickname she gave him indicates a close relationship between them, unlike examples (1) and (2). Considering that matter, it can be assumed that this conversation occurs in informal occasion.

Making Small Talk

As it can be perceived from the term, making small talk is the way to start and to develop a conversation based on various topics depending on the intention of the speaker and hearer and can be about family, holiday, weekend, TV program, mutual friends, work, school, weather, etc (Jumanto, 2014). Jumanto (2014) also added that the small talk is of common, safe, and polite topics, not personal or private, or not of touchy topics. One of the common small talks is also conveyed in *Wonder* spoken by Auggie's mother, as seen in the next quotation:

(4) Isabel   : "*So, Auggie. Hi,* **how was your first day of school***?*"

When having dinner together with her family, Isabel starts the conversation by asking Auggie about his first day of school as illustrated in example (4). This sort of expression spoken by Isabel as same as what people colloquially say is considered phatic. Besides his mother, Auggie's friend also makes small talk to him when they are at school by saying:

(5) Jack Will : "*Hey, Auggie.* **You feeling better**?"

Seeing Auggie comes to school after getting sick, Jack Will, Auggie's classmate, asks if Auggie feels better (see example (5)). He just asks him that anyway despite the fact that Auggie is already coming to school which means that he is getting better. This shows the expression spoken by Jack does not really seek for information but maintain social contact instead. The same thing also applies for the following expression:

(6) Jack Will : "**Not loving school either, huh**?"

Example (6) occurs when Jack hears Auggie grumbling about school when he passes by him to sit in front of him. He initiates the conversation by confirming something as the result of an implication he made according to what he heard previously. This can also be another way of making small talk.

Agreeing on Something

Agreeing with somebody on something is another type of phatic expressions. It is also found in *Wonder* as what is said by Jack to Auggie in this following expression:

(7) Auggie   : "*When I eat, I think I chew like some prehistoric swamp turtle.*"
    Jack Will : "**No joke. Me too**!"

As it can be perceived from the conversation (7) between Auggie and Jack, the agreement made by Jack about him also chewing like turtle is not a real agreement since Jack is a normal kid and does not suffer from Treacher Collin syndrome as Auggie does. From this matter, it can be seen how agreeing on something can function as phatic and done for the social sake.

Joking

Joking is a very common and considerably effective way to be used for breaking the ice or so called phatic. Joking can be done both in formal event or informal event by people having either close or not-so-close relationship, as shown by the subsequent example:

(8) Mr. Tushman: "*I am Mr. Tushman.* ***You can laugh about that. Tushman. I've heard them all****…**Tushy. Butt man. Butt face*."

Mr. Tushman is known as Auggie's head master in his new school and clearly does not have neither close nor friendly relationship with Auggie. Yet, he makes some joke when he first met Auggie (as illustrated in example (8)) to break the ice in their first meeting. Not only can it be used for breaking the ice in the first meeting, joking can also be used with pals to maintain the close relationship as shown in the next conversation:

(9) Auggie   : "*There's tuna in your face.*"
     Jack Will : "***Yeah! Tuna man.***"

Jack Will is having some tuna in his face as pointed by Auggie in example (9). Instead of cleaning it up, he makes a joke by saying *tuna man* which makes them both laughing. Feeling close enough to Jack, Auggie also cracks some joke when they have lunch at the cafeteria as seen in the subsequent conversation:

(10) Jack Will : "*You ever thought about having plastic surgery*?"
       Auggie   : "***No, never thought about it. Why***?" Auggie laughs.
               "***Dude, this is after plastic surgery. It takes a lot of work to look this good***."

Knowing that Jack might feel bad and awkward for what he asked, Auggie chooses to answer the question regarding his condition with jokes. He does not want his friend to feel bad about him. The joke itself helps to lighten the sad mood between them and maintain their social contact.

Functions of Phatic Expressions in Wonder

Besides its essential function as a way to maintain social relationship, phatic expressions have other depth functions lying with it in its use, such as (1) breaking the silence, (2) starting a conversation, (3) making small talk, (4) making gossip, (5) keeping talking, (6) expressing solidarity, (7) creating harmony, (8) creating comfort, (9) expressing empathy, (10) expressing friendship, (11) expressing respect, and (12) expressing politeness, to hearers with different aspects of power and solidarity, and in different situations, informal or formal (Jumanto, 2014). However, this analysis has concentrated only on 4 functions out of 12 i.e. *expressing solidarity and friendship* and *creating harmony and comfort* complying with the aim of the study which is to show how phatic communication acts as a unifier for someone in need like August Pullman as portrayed in *Wonder.* It is to show the significance of phatic communication as reflected from the perspective of Auggie that this study strives for. In realizing that, here are the elaborations of the functions of phatic expressions i.e. *greeting, making small talk, agreeing on something* and *joking* (as previously identified as the types of phatic expression):

Greeting

Living Auggie's life must not be easy just like how it is perfectly portrayed in the movie, *Wonder*. Suffering from a rare disease that causes him to be different from other kids, Auggie does not have any friend. The kids at school do not even dare to get close or to

touch him, yet they just stare at him. Not only do they avoid having physical contact with him, they also call him a plague. Having friends is never really a part of his dreams.

However, greeting from his friends and surroundings as the manifestation of phatic communication does mean something to Auggie. The use of greeting serves the function of expressing *friendship* and *solidarity* which gives Auggie the feeling of being noticed and acknowledged from his surroundings. This can be seen from example (3) in the previous section of greeting, where Auggie's classmate, Summer, approaches him and introduces herself to him. At first, Auggie does not believe that Summer wants to talk to him. He thought she was just told by Mr. Tushman to be nice to him, yet at the end he knows that Summer really greets him with good intention and he really appreciates that. This phenomenon actually shows how significance a single greeting can be for somebody, whom in this case is Auggie, and how it can really build a social relationship between individuals in its manifestation.

Making Small Talk

Small talk is often used to initiate a conversation as a way to build a social relationship between people. Containing neither sensitive nor deep topics, small talk is usually used to get one's attention. Making small talk shows the willingness of an individual to make a contact, thus it signals friendship and solidarity as what Jack does to Auggie.

Auggie, who does not have any friend at school, is suddenly approached by Jack at the cafeteria. Jake makes some small talk about Auggie not liking school (see example (6) on *making small talk*). Auggie, however, is very pleased by Jack's friendly move and takes the fact that Jack makes small talk to him as his willingness on making friends with him. Auggie is so delighted to know that someone actually wants to talk and hang out with him despite all the mock he gets. Consequently, this experience of Auggie shows the significance of phatic communion on daily basis.

Agreeing on Something

Agreeing with someone on something does not always mean that the hearer completely agrees to a certain point of what the speaker says. By agreeing with someone, it can also be an act of consoling as what can be perceived from Jack's agreement to Auggie (see example (7) *agreeing on something*). Auggie confides his guts to Jack that he is ashamed of the way he chews food and assumes that nobody wants to eat together with him. Subsequently, Jack responds to it by saying that he has the same issue.

However, Jack's statement is known to be false. Eating issue that Auggie has is the result of his Treacher Collin syndrome and some surgeries he underwent, meanwhile Jack does not have such conditions. Jack's agreement is just a phatic expression to console Auggie so that Auggie does not feel bad about himself. Jack's response indicates his solidarity towards Auggie by supporting his feeling and giving the impression that he is not alone in his problems. What Jack did shows that agreeing on something functions as a way to create harmony and comfort.

Joking

Joking has been known to be the best way to avoid awkwardness and to create a good social relationship between individuals. The jokes, as long as it is not too much, can light up the mood between the participants of the speech event. Moreover, it creates comfort as well as harmony as it is illustrated by Mr. Tushman and Auggie (see example (8) on *joking*).

When meeting Auggie for the first time, Mr. Tushman makes a joke about himself as he introduces himself to him. He jokes about how ridiculous his name is that many people

mock him behind his back. He says that confidently and makes Auggie laugh. The joke made by Mr. Tushman lightens the mood and erases the awkwardness between Auggie and him in their first meeting. It sends a message to Auggie that even Mr. Tushman, the head master, also gets mocked, therefore he should not be afraid to start school. This phenomenon shows the function of joking as a phatic expression to create harmony and comfort.

CONCLUSION

Phatic communication is often undervalued because of its use which does not seek or convey information but only maintain social contact. Consequently, it is assumed to have no significant part in communication. Concerning the low awareness of most people about phatic communication, this study aims to show the significance of phatic communication by identifying the types and affirming the social functions of it. These aspects of phatic communication are portrayed in the movie namely *Wonder* and specifically in the perspective of a boy suffered from Treacher Collin syndrome, Auggie.

The findings show that phatic communication in *Wonder* is divided into 4 types i.e. *greeting*, *making small talk*, *agreeing on something* and *joking* and these types respectively serve the functions of *expressing friendship and solidarity* and *creating harmony and comfort*. The discussion also reveals the significance of phatic communication and how it acts as a unifier for someone in need like Auggie.

However, this study is still far from being perfect. Other important findings on the discussed topic are probably not yet be revealed. It is to be hoped that this work will stimulate further work in the field of phatic communication involving its relation with politeness and examining much more types as well as the functions of phatic expression as this study has concentrated only on 4 types and functions of it due to the aim of the research which is to examine the case from the perspective of Auggie. Subsequently, this research model on phatic communication can also be adapted or even be improved by other researchers to conduct another research on phatic communication concerning another data source and possibly another language.

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