

PERSONAL AND COMMUNAL ASSUMPTIONS TO DETERMINE PRAGMATIC MEANINGS OF PHATIC FUNCTIONS

R. Kunjana Rahardi

Master Program of the Indonesian Language and Literature Education,
Faculty of Teachers Training and Education, Sanata Dharma University
Jalan Affandi, Mrican, Catur Tunggal, Sleman, Yogyakarta
kunjana@usd.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed to describe the manifestations of phatic function in the education domain. The phatic function in the communication and interaction happening in the education domain could be accurately identified when the utterances were not separated from their determining pragmatic context. The context must not be limited only to contextual and social or societal perspectives, but must be defined as basic assumptions. The data of this research included various kinds of speech gathered naturally in education circles that contain phatic functions. Two methods of data gathering were employed were namely listening and conversation methods. Recorded data analyzed through the steps as follows (1) data were identified based on the discourse markers found (2) data were classified based on the phatic perception criteria; (3) data were interpreted based on the referenced theories; (4) data were described in the form of analysis result description. The research proves that phatic function in the form of small talks in the education domain cannot be separated from the context surrounding it.

Keywords: phatic function, education domain, pragmatic context, assumptions

INTRODUCTION

The prolonged and heated debate on whether or not the study of the phatic function should be included in the pragmatic dimension must be ended. The phatic function is a part of the pragmatic study as it is closely related to contexts. A linguistic study which separates itself from contexts cannot be called pragmatics (Rahardi *et al.*, 2015a).

There are two kinds of contexts, namely the intrinsic and extrinsic context. The extrinsic context that is also called pragmatic context has been the researcher's concern for the past few years, because as a rule, pragmatic context is only understood as situational and socio-cultural contexts. The situational context is more closely connected to the issue of time, place, and atmosphere; whereas socio-cultural contexts are closely intertwined with the horizontal dimension, which is later understood as a social context only. The status-related social contexts generally have a vertical dimension and commonly referred to as a societal context (Rahardi, 2015).

Furthermore, it is worth noting that language, society, and culture are separate dimensions with a single identity. It means that one dimension cannot be easily separated from other dimensions. Speaking of a language which excludes itself from its social and cultural dimensions would be

asocial and non-cultural (Pranowo, 2015). However, the pragmatic context does not stop at a process of engaging itself in various dimensions.

Pragmatic context constitutes essentially of assumptions, both personal and communal. It is impossible to remove the interpretation of the nature and purpose of phatic functions from the context of pragmatic dimensions of personal and communal assumptions underlying it (Rahardi, 2015). What is the nature of the dimensional contexts of personal and communal assumptions and how the purpose of phatic functions should be identified and interpreted by basing on those personal and communal assumptions will be the focus of the discussion in this article. It has been the researcher's concern for many years to investigate the true nature of the pragmatic context in a linguistic study. In various scientific occasions, the researcher has promoted the identity of pragmatic contexts. It is deemed very important because, in many existing kinds of literature, contexts in pragmatic studies are understood in so far as its connection to the spatial-temporal setting (Rahardi *et al.*, 2015c).

Unless based on the perspectives on those aspects, specific pragmatic experts would build the contexts of the study on the social dimension, commonly known as social contexts. Social contexts are not generally specified clearly, whether the social dimension is related to status or social

classes. Sometimes, cultural dimensions are not clearly specified because in the Indonesian context, what is meant by the Indonesian culture is relatively and vaguely defined. The relativity is caused by the various ethnicities and races with their own cultural backgrounds so that the concept of Indonesian culture is difficult to be defined (Rahardi *et al.*, 2014).

The fuzziness of the identity issue of the pragmatic context is aggravated by the fact that the essence of pragmatic context itself, i.e. sets of assumption is not involved. Therefore, the researcher would like to assert that pragmatic contexts cannot overlook the sets of assumptions if the pragmatic contexts are meant to determine the utterance meaning or speaker's meaning. Determining an utterance meaning would be impossible when the only things being specified from an utterance are the contexts of time, place, and atmosphere which, in author's opinion, are nothing more than superficial. The utterance meaning and the speaker's meaning can only be understood if the contextual dimension has reached the essence of the context itself, namely the sets of assumptions.

The assumptions as the core of pragmatic contexts are classified in two, namely assumptions which are closely related to speaker's personality as the utterance creator, and the assumptions which are closely connected with the speaker's personality in the context of life with other speakers in specific domains of society and culture. The former assumption is generally known as the personal assumption, while the latter is commonly known as the communal assumption (Rahardi *et al.*, 2015b).

Regarding the nature of context in the pragmatic study, Huang (2007) has defined context as composed of three different sources—a view known as the 'geographic' division of context. In the first place, there is the physical context, which refers to the physical setting of the utterance. The second type is the linguistic context, which refers to the surrounding utterances in the same discourse. Thirdly and finally, people have the general knowledge context. Related to the focus of the discussion, the view of the context in the first dimension and the second dimension is not discussed here because it is irrelevant.

The relevant contextual dimension according to Huang (2007) is the third dimension, namely the general knowledge context. Therefore, the contextual dimension in pragmatics actually refers to the dimension of general knowledge. However, it is not enough to refer the dimensions as the general knowledge only because basically it is required to be shared, understood, and owned together by the members of the speech community. In Huang (2007), the general knowledge which is shared, understood, and owned together is referred to as a set of background assumptions shared. Thus, it is affirmed that a set of background assumptions which are shared, understood, and owned together is in fact the essence of pragmatic context. Further, he agrees with the nature of context as common grounds and distinguishes them into personal common ground and communal common ground.

The researcher would also like to assert that the assumptions as the essence of contexts must not be assumptions in the abstract and at the elusive level, but real assumptions which manifest clearly in the real world. Therefore, it is affirmed that the essence of pragmatic contexts is actually personal and communal assumptions, as clearly specified above. Such view of pragmatic context is made as a frame of reference in the research of phatic function in the education domain in Indonesia whose

cultural background is predominantly Javanese.

METHODS

Regarding research, data are defined as the research object of discussion that is gathered after the process of selecting various kinds of spoken expressions. The data of this research include various kinds of speech gathered naturally in education circles that contain phatic functions. Such linguistically and non-linguistically phatic function becomes the object of this study, and the other language forms are its context. In order to make the data for this research natural, valid, and reliable, the researcher records the teachers and students' speech acts, both with and without their subjects' acknowledgment. Two methods of data gathering are employed in this study; they are listening and conversation methods. Listening method is conducted by listening to direct conversations. During which, the researchers recorded the conversations and took notes.

The recording, which functioned as speech act data gathering, is conducted in a way that does not disturb the naturalness of the conversations. Besides the recording activity, the researchers also take field notes. This technique is conducted by taking notes on data cards and is then classified into categories. From the notes and speech recordings, the researchers gather the data.

Besides the aforementioned methods, the researchers also employ conversation method. This method is employed by conducting conversations between researchers and informants. This method uses stimulation technique since the conversation will only appear if the researchers provide stimuli to the informant to make language signs expected. Recorded data is analyzed through the steps as follows (1) data are identified based on the discourse markers found; (2) data are classified based on the phatic perception criteria; (3) data are interpreted based on the referenced theories; (4) data are described in the form of analysis result description.

The description of the research uses two methods, which are formal and informal methods. In this study, the interpreted data result in the data analysis step will be discussed informally. Informal data analysis result discussion can mean that the data is formulated with common words, not with certain symbols because this study does not require that kind of discussion model.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The unavailability of other studies on phatic function must be responded seriously by pragmatic experts. It is due to the fact that phatic functions generally manifested in small talk, is the salient pragmatic phenomenon among the Indonesian society, especially in the Javanese speech communities. It is safe to say that small talk is the salient and inevitable pragmatic phenomenon in the communication and interaction among members of a speech community.

Previous studies found that both Indonesian and non-Indonesian linguists do not have documented research on phatic functions. An Indonesian linguist who is keen on writing about phatic functions is Kridalaksana (1994) who wrote about parts of speech in the Indonesian language. Other linguistic books, including those which discuss word class, word categories, or word groups, do not describe phatic functions at all. Pragmatic books written by foreign experts or Indonesian experts do not discuss the issue of phatic functions in one of the chapters or subsections

(Rahardi, 2005; 2009). Therefore, it is ascertained that the unavailable documents of research on phatic functions, especially in pragmatic perspective, is very important and urgent. Based on the current fact, a study on phatic functions in the education domain by means of an analysis of pragmatic contexts as personal and communal assumptions is expected to complete the description of pragmatics set against the Indonesian cultural backgrounds.

Only through this means, a linguistic study on Indonesian pragmatics will thrive vigorously. In addition, the data-driven scientific findings on local cultures will complete the previous studies by linguists from outside Indonesia.

The conversation that occurs between speaker and hearer in a speech excerpt 1 (see appendices) takes place in a very pleasant atmosphere because there is a shared understanding of assumptions underlying the utterance. The speaker has a personal assumption of the hearer, while the hearer also has a certain personal assumption of the speaker. The teachers who are present in the staff room in the early morning before school begin to share common knowledge so they can create cheerfulness in the exchanges of jokes and quips to create a pleasant atmosphere.

Ownership of shared assumptions together is shown through the small talk expression: "Excuse me, ladies?" uttered by a male teacher. Then, the utterance is responded by another utterance: "Go ahead, Mr. Tri. Ms. Yuyun has been looking for you. Have you seen her?" In these two utterances, the intent of small talk is clearly identified, namely to establish human relations among the teachers.

The first teacher responds to the second teacher's teasing cheerfully without hard feelings. This is in line with what Malinowski's statement (Arimi, 1998), that the ultimate goal of phatic communication, in this context manifested in small talks, is mere to establish a social bond between speaker and spoken to. Thus, phatic communication does not have a clear utterance meaning, but the meaning is embedded in the various intents of the utterance. For example, in the pragmatic utterance of apologizing, a small talk intent is embedded. Similarly, the pragmatic utterance of congratulations contains a small talk intent in it. Therefore it is now clear that small talks can be classified based on the intention underlying the utterances, because as a rule, phatic communication or small talk does not have a clear intent other than to establish the relation between the speaker and hearer and other interlocutors. In the excerpt of utterances above, phatic communication is inherent in the utterance: "Yes, sir. Don't mention it. I wonder what is going on between the two of you". Of course, the meaning of the utterance is not that the speaker wants to know Mr. Tri's motivation to visit Ms. Yuyun in her house. The utterance is intended to establish solidarity between them and to establish social bonds between speaker and hearer.

The speaker also uses phatic communication in responding to the phatic expression by saying, "Oh, nothing. I have important business with her husband. You know, business! Hehe...". In the second excerpt, the speaker invites or offers the hearer to join him. He will go to a place for an errand, but to show politeness and small talk, it is appropriate to invite hearer to join him. However, is it true that the speaker's intention is to invite the hearer to join him? The answer is no. So, the invitation or offer is merely a small talk to establish relations between them. Similarly, to scrutinize the hearer's response, "*Monggo, silakan. Sendiri saja*" (Please, go ahead. You can do it alone!), is it his intention to let her/him go alone? The answer, of course, is

no. It is not the hearer's concern whether the speaker will go alone or with someone else. In other words, the utterances are pure small talk, without any specific intention inherent in the utterance, other than simply to establish relations and cooperation between speaker and hearer. Regarding this, let us scrutinize the utterance (see utterance excerpt 2 in the appendices).

In utterance excerpt 3 (see appendices) between co-workers in the same department, it can be seen that the question of "tidings" which is formulated in a question, "How are you, Ma'am?". It is not a referential question asking for someone's wellbeing, but actually it is a manifestation of phatic communication. Phatic communication is intended to establish social relations between the speaker and hearer. Therefore, exactly the same argument applies to the answer formulated as "*Baik-baik saja kok, Bu*" (I am fine, Ma'am), which is non-referential to ask for someone physical wellbeing. Again, such utterances are the manifestation of phatic communication which is deeply rooted and salient in the Indonesian society and culture.

This is exactly the case of the people who will go to a specific place of worship, on Sunday or Friday, being asked by the bystanders, "*Badhe tindak pundi?*" (*Where are you going?*). It is clear that the utterance is not intended to find out where the people are going, but it is merely phatic communication to establish social cohesion in interacting with other members of society. People who are not aware of the intention of these small talks will probably respond curtly to the question because for them it is clear where they are going and being asked an obvious question can be annoying. The sample cases can occur because of the speaker's and the hearer's lack of awareness of pragmatic contexts, i.e. personal assumptions. Therefore, the better the members of society understand the pragmatic contexts, the closer the relation and communication among the members of the society.

In Utterance Excerpt 4 (see appendices), phatic communication is inherent in the following utterance, "*Hallo Pak, selamat pagi?*" (Hello, Sir. Good morning), expressed by a female teacher to the school principal in the teacher's room before the school begins. At first, the teacher greets with a colloquial expression, "hello" and followed by a phatic expression "good morning". Phatic communication expressed by the teacher is responded by the principal with the same expression "*Selamat pagi juga, Bu.*" (Good morning to you too, Ma'am). Thus, it is clear that phatic communication is generally responded with phatic expression in the practice of communicative exchanges.

Such responses can occur because both parties have shared the same assumptions, either personal or communal. Their togetherness at school has created in them the same assumptions, which can be manifested in their phatic communication. However, the atmosphere changes slightly when the principal continues with a question regarding her late arrival to school, "*Baru datang yah?*" (Have you just arrived?). The utterance has changed the warm and familiar atmosphere to formal and rigid one. Timidly, the teacher answers the principal's question by saying "*Iya nih Pak. Maaf agak terlambat.*" (Yes, sir. I'm sorry for being a little bit late"). Of course, the teacher's apology is sincere, not a form of small talk. The utterance excerpt is closed with a phatic expression "*Ndak masalah!*" (No problem) by the principal. Is it true that late arrival is not a problem for the principal? If it is not a problem, then the expression is not a small talk. However, if the principal thinks that her late arrival to school is a problem, then it must be asserted that

actually the expression 'tidak masalah (*No problem*)' is a manifestation of phatic communication.

CONCLUSIONS

In a nutshell, it can be concluded that phatic function in the form of small talks in the education domain cannot be separated from the context surrounding it. The context must not be limited to textual, social, societal, and cultural contexts, but must be defined as assumptions. The assumptions forming the essence of pragmatic context could be divided into two, namely personal and communal perspectives. In interpreting the speaker's meaning, such pragmatic context must be implemented in the right way.

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