

## PHATIC COMMUNICATION IN TEACHING YOUNG LEARNERS: USEFUL OR BEING IGNORED?

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The process of learning is an important thing that includes some activities to know how the students understand the material that is taught and the error that is done by students. Based on Littlewood (1981) and Johnson (1982), “language is meaningful to the learner supports the learning process then learning activities are consequently selected according to how well they engage the learner in meaningful and authentic language use (rather than merely mechanical practice of language patterns)”. According to that definition, language can be stated as an important attribute in teaching-learning process.

Phatic communication is one of several features in conveying communication through language. Phatic communication is a communication which is not to seek or give information, but it is a communication having a social function to establish or maintain social contact (Richards et al.; 1992: 214). People make an interaction using verbal communication in a specific meaning or function. Verbal communication has function to convey information to addressee, but it also occurs to maintain social relationship between speaker and addressee). In addition, children construct knowledge through other people, through interaction with adults. Adults/teachers work actively with children in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) because children learn through social interaction (Vygotsky, 1962).

By conducting this research, the researcher tries to find out the importance of phatic communication in teaching young learners. In the other word, is phatic communication useful in teaching young learners?

This research aims to reveal the importance of phatic communication in teaching young learners. Therefore, the researcher did a participant observation research. It means that the researcher involved in teaching process using phatic communication and documented the responses from learners.

The result shows that using a phatic communication that functions **to give chit-chat, sustain the conversation, show solidarity, create comfortable feeling, and express friendship**, occur in teaching-learning process. Those functions are the most used functions that change the class atmosphere. The documented responses show that learners give more attention to the learning materials when the researcher uses phatic communication; indicated by the written transcription that is being documented during teaching-learning process.

The researcher concludes that phatic communication is an important feature that should not being neglected in teaching process, particularly to young learners, because by using phatic communication learners retain attention from teachers or in an addition, learners will not feel neglected. Then it is also suggested that teachers should be able to use phatic communication in teaching young learners to make teaching-learning process run smoothly.

**Key words:** Phatic Communication, Teaching, Young Learners

## A. TEACHING YOUNG LEARNERS

Teaching is characterizable as an intentional activity; it is undertaken with the purpose of bringing about learning, which is why we can barely grasp what it is to teach in advance of some idea of what it is to learn. A skill in education and teaching is to be made by construing the performative aspects of teaching, especially those of communication and personal relationship. Besides understanding aspects of educational authority and classroom discipline in terms of some sort of managerial teaching, perhaps it is better understood in the context-specific terms of moral relationship for which appropriate resources of personality and character.

Teaching focuses on the four essential qualities that distinguish exceptional teachers; knowledge (teachers must be an expert in their field), communication skills (teachers must have the ability to communicate their knowledge and expertise to their students), interest (they can make students want to learn the material by making it interesting), and respect for students (teachers should give a concern and respect for the students in the classroom).

Moreover, teaching young learners differs from teaching older children in many ways. Studies of young children show how learning changes across development. However, we now know that even young child has a predisposition to learn in certain domains, and that young children are actively engaged in making sense of their world. Young children appear to be predisposed to acquire information. As Sarah Phillips (1993:5) describes YLs as follows:

*Children from the first year of formal schooling (five or six years old) to eleven or twelve years of age. However, as any children's teacher will know, it is not so much the children's age that counts in the classroom as how mature they are. There are many factors that influence children's maturity: for example, their culture, and their environment (city or rural), their sex, the expectations of their peers and parents.*

Children lack of knowledge and experience, but not reasoning ability. They are experienced with the knowledge they have. Precocious knowledge may jump-start the learning process, because of limited experience and underdeveloped systems of logical thinking, children's knowledge contains misconceptions. Misinformation can impede school learning, so teachers need to be aware of the ways in which children's background knowledge influences their understanding. Such awareness should help teachers anticipate children's confusion and recognize why children have difficulties in grasping new ideas. Therefore, strategies for learning are important.

Vygotsky's theory is described in detail in a wide range of child development and educational literature (e.g. Meadows 1993, Smith et al 1998, Light et al 1995, Lee 1999). For Vygotsky, the child develops cognition and language as the result of social interaction with more knowledgeable others in activities which have specific goals. As a result of the child's participation and the interactive, verbal give and take with a more skilled in undertaking of everyday problem solving and tasks, external, socially mediated dialogue is gradually internalized and personalized resource for the child's own thinking.

The area in which children can perform an action or task, provided more skilled or knowledgeable person is available to help, Vygotsky termed the 'Zone of Proximal Development' (ZPD) which defines as "learning was ahead of development and for development to occur, interaction with adults or peers who are more knowledgeable is needed". As it is described in a diagram;



**Diagram ZPD (Zone of Proximal Development)**

In this way, ZPD provides a valuable conceptual framework in an educational context for situating the level of challenge in activities and tasks that may be appropriate for children at any one time. The tasks which challenge, stretch and extend learning will make them for success.

The children have their own characteristics, which are different from adults. The characteristics cover their ways of thinking, their attitude, and their aptitude. They also prevail to the children's ways of learning language. This, of course, influences the ways of teaching them. To give the best quality of teaching English to the children, the teachers should know and understand them.

Phillips states that in learning a language, young learners respond to the language, depending on what it does or what they can do with it rather than treating it as an intellectual game or abstract system (1995). Brewster (1997) supports it by saying that "theories of the children's learning require that young learners be supported by moving from the abstract to the concrete and through being involved in activity. It can be understood that the children need activities (something to arise their background knowledge) that are more concrete rather than abstract and to be involved in those activities in order that they can learn the language well.

## **B. COMMUNICATION IN TEACHING**

The important way of teaching is how teachers can make a good communication with them, especially young learners. All forms of communication require a sender, a message, and a receiver.

Communication requires that all parties have an area of communicative commonality. There are auditory means, such as speech, song, and tone of voice, and there are nonverbal means, such as body language, sign language, paralanguage, touch, eye contact, through media, such as, pictures, graphics and sound, and writing.

Thus, communication is called as a process by which meaning is assigned and conveyed in an attempt to create shared understanding. This process requires a vast repertoire of skills in intrapersonal and interpersonal processing, listening, observing, speaking, questioning, analyzing, and evaluating. It is through communication that collaboration and cooperation occur. There are also many common barriers to successful communication, two of which are message overload (when a person receives too many messages at the same time), and message complexity.

Communication can be seen as processes of information transmission governed as a pragmatic that is concerned with the relations between signs/expressions and their users. Furthermore, communication is a social interaction where at least two interacting agents share a common set of signs and a common set of semiotic rules, as it can be applied in

pragmatic, especially in Phatic Communication.

### C. PHATIC COMMUNICATION AS A PART OF PRAGMATICS

Pragmatics itself is the study of relationships between linguistic forms and the users of those forms. The advantage of studying language via pragmatics is that one can talk about people's intended meanings, their assumptions, their purposes or goals, and the kinds of actions that they are performing when they speak.

In Pragmatics study, there are many kinds of subject discussed. One of them is Phatic Communication/communion (Small Talk). It is a conversation for its own sake or is spoken communication that is intended more to share feelings or establish an atmosphere of sociability so that they can communicate facts and ideas.

The phenomenon of small talk was initially studied in 1923 by Bronisław Malinowski, who coined the term phatic communion to describe it. The ability to conduct small talk is a social skill.

Phatic communion (often relabeled phatic communication or phatic speech) also refers to a form of relationship communication (as opposed to content communication) which opens the channels of communication. Its purpose is to communicate openness for communication, rather than, about content, say finances, the last movie you saw, or anything external to the relationship between you and the other person. It is a kind of preface to the main business to be discussed. It is the small talk that precedes the big talk.

In addition, teaching young learners by using phatic communication in giving scaffolding (include planning, organizing, doing and/or reflecting on the specific task) makes it easier for the young learners to undertake a task successfully and extends what is possible for young learner to perform and expands the ZPD.

The related concepts of ZPD and Phatic Communication provide teachers of foreign languages to children with a framework for understanding important processes in children's learning, enhancing their self awareness and professional development and improving their everyday classroom practice and the quality of children's learning.

Therefore, the use of phatic communication in giving scaffolding to young learners can be an effective way to encourage young learners to learn.

In terms of content, phatic communion is trivial—how are you? What's new? Where you been? Or have you ever gone to the zoo?—But in terms of relationships, it is extremely important; it assures us that the normal social rules for communicating are operating here and that the two individuals want to communicate with each other. It says, the channels of communication are open, let's talk.

Most often we think of phatic communion as verbal but it may also be communicated with nonverbal gestures (a warm handshake or a wave), facial expressions (a smile or a worrisome expression), and tone of voice.

One of the many skills of interpersonal communication is to recognize the importance of phatic communion, use it appropriately, and recognize the break point between phatic communion and the next stage in the conversation process. Without phatic communion, people would just begin with the "big" talk without even saying "hello" or "good seeing you again" which would clearly communicate that something is wrong, that, for some reason, the normal rules of conversation are not being followed.

The expression of phatic communication is not only using in greetings, but it can be something else that can make students (young learners) really understand for what the teachers want or ask to do.

The utterance of a phatic expression is a kind of speech act. In speech communication the term means "small talk". Phatic messages do communicate a useful function and that is to open the channels of communication, to say that normal communication rules operate here, and that someone wants to communicate. That is just the way to be friendly and to create harmony or maintain social relationship.

Linguists have different opinion about the function of small talk. Here are some

linguists' opinion about the function of small talk;

1. To give chit-chat (Leech 1983, Renkema 1994), for example: "it is cold in here, isn't it?"
2. To sustain the conversation (Leech 1983, Kridalaksana 1994), for example: "ehm.... all right, good!!!"
3. To show solidarity (Holmes 1992, Saville-Troike 2003), for example: "How's your school?"
4. To create comfortable feeling (Holmes 1992, Abercrombie 1998), for example: "Good Bye"
5. To express friendship (Renkema 1994, Schiffrin 1994), for example: "That's true"

In this research, the writer wants to answer the question about the use of Phatic Communication, especially in teaching young learners that emerges two questions; "Should Phatic Communication be ignored?" and "What are the function of phatic communication used in teaching Young Learners?"

## **D. RESEARCH METHOD**

### **1. Research Design**

This research uses qualitative method since it is reveal hidden, unsuspected issues, exploring attitudes, emotions, sensitive issues, opinions, conceptions, exploring context, relationships, and processes. This also uses descriptive method to describe systematically the facts and characteristics or functions, especially phatic communication in learning English for young learners.

### **2. Unit of Analysis**

The data that will be analyzed are related to the meaning behind using phatic communication in teaching and learning English for young learners and also the reason for the use of phatic communication that is seldom used in teaching and learning process.

### **3. Source of Data**

The data source of this research is primary research that is the data can be got from the teaching and learning process held in young learners' class, and then it will be recorded as well. Then it also uses secondary research that is the data can be got in books, articles and others.

### **4. Technique of Data Collection and Data Analysis**

After the data were collected, then, they are analyzed using the following steps:

- a. Identify the use of Phatic Communication used in a class.
- b. Classify the function of Phatic Communication used in a class.
- c. Interpreting the data.
- d. Drawing conclusion.

## **E. FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

The writer found some expressions of phatic communication in giving scaffolding in a class of young learners. It can be described as the following data using by teacher when teaching young learners;

1. Hello
2. Okay, before we start this lesson, let's pray together. Pray begin.
3. Alright, Good afternoon
4. How's your day?

5. How's your school?
6. Do you have any homework at school?
7. Okay, before we go on to the material, I'll ask something. "Do you like swimming?"
8. Then, "Do you like playing badminton?"
9. Yes, can you guess what we will talk about today? Well, we'll learn about SPORTS.
10. What sport do you like?
11. Okay, Good!
12. Now we're trying to make conversation with our partner talking about someone's favorite sport. I'll give you an example.
13. Well, any question?
14. Please do with your partner then.
15. Yes, well done!
16. And now let me give you some questions.
17. Hum, can you mention how many kind of sports? I mean; do you know boxing? And football?
18. Yes, where should the boxers do their sports? (In arena), so it can be said as an indoor sport or outdoor sport? (indoor sport)
19. Good! What about football? (outdoor sport)
20. Very good!
21. Okay you've already known about the difference of indoor and outdoor sports. Then mention some sports that be done indoor and outdoor! (the students can mention as the background knowledge they have and experience)
22. Yes, excellent!
23. Next, before we continue this, any question?
24. Alright, come on, guys! Let's try saying "what sports do you like?", "do you like cycling?", "what is your favorite sport?"
25. Excellent! Now please ask the three questions to your friend next to you and find their answers.
26. Are you finished?
27. Your job is to make your own sentences. I'll give you example; Sarah likes swimming, but her favorite sport is horse riding. She doesn't like cycling.
28. Okay now it's your turn to make those kinds of sentences.
29. Yes, Good job, guys!
30. Alright, we'll try guessing some gestures of sports. (Guessing games). Let me give you example.
31. Then, I'll start from you.
32. Hum, nice!
33. Okay, let's review our lesson today.
34. What have we talked about?
35. You're right. And how's the way we ask something about sport or favorite sport?
36. Excellent!
37. Yes, because time is over. We will end our lesson for today.
38. Before we go home, let's pray together. Pray begin.
39. Good afternoon
40. Have a nice day and see you on Saturday.

Based on my opinion, the function of phatic communication in teaching and learning process above can be explained as follows;

1. The function of saying "Hello", "Okay, before we start this lesson, let's pray together. Pray begin.", and "Alright, Good afternoon" is to open conversation that can sustain conversation between teacher and students, because when the teacher comes to the class, it will be impossible if she/he directly says the

material she/he wants to talk about without any kind of small talk asking and saying greeting.

2. “How’s your day?”, “How’s your school?”, and “Do you have any homework at school?” have the function to show solidarity that we care about the students and also it can make the teacher and students be friendly.
3. “Okay, before we go on to the material, I’ll ask something. (“Do you like swimming?”), “Then, (“Do you like playing badminton?”), “Yes, can you guess what we will talk about today? Well, we’ll learn about SPORTS” and “What sport do you like?” can be functioned as giving chit-chat that is also to open the material by asking the some students.
4. The function of saying “Okay, Good!” is to sustain conversation, to create comfortable feeling and it also can express friendship. Teacher knows that students, especially young learners really like to have compliment given by teacher.
5. Then “Now we’re trying to make conversation with our partner talking about someone’s favorite sport. I’ll give you an example.” Has the function as giving chit-chat that is to make them clear about what the teacher asks to do.
6. The function of “Well, any question?” is to create comfortable feeling and also sustain conversation about teacher and students so that there will be no gap.
7. While the function of saying “Please do with your partner then.” is to show solidarity in order to they can work with their partner well.
8. “Yes, well done!” has the function as sustaining conversation, creating comfortable feeling and expressing friendship.
9. “And now let me give you some questions.”, “Hum, can you mention how many kind of sports? I mean; do you know boxing? And football?”, “Yes, where should the boxers do their sports? (In arena), so it can be said as an indoor sport or outdoor sport? (Indoor sport)” have the function as giving chit-chat that is to open the other talk.
10. “Good! What about football? (Outdoor sport)” and “Very good!” are to sustain conversation and also express friendship.
11. “Okay you’ve already known about the difference of indoor and outdoor sports. Then mention some sports that be done indoor and outdoor! (The students can mention as the background knowledge they have and experience)” has function as giving chit-chat in the first sentence and then students gave their opinion to answer the teacher’s questions.
12. “Yes, excellent!” and “Next, before we continue this, any question?” are having function as sustaining conversation, creating comfortable feeling and also expressing friendship.
13. “Alright, come on, guys! Let’s try saying (“what sports do you like?”, “do you like cycling?”, “what is your favorite sport?”)” is included as showing solidarity and expressing friendship.
14. Then “Excellent! Now please ask the three questions to your friend next to you and find their answers.” is taken in sustaining conversation and expressing friendship.
15. The function of saying “Are you finished?” is to create comfortable feeling to the students.
16. “Your job is to make your own sentences. I’ll give you example; Sarah likes swimming, but her favorite sport is horse riding. She doesn’t like cycling.” And “Okay now it’s your turn to make those kinds of sentences.” are as giving chit-chat by giving example to make them understand to do their work.
17. The utterance “Yes, Good job, guys!” is as sustaining conversation; create comfortable feeling and expressing friendship.
18. “Alright, we’ll try guessing some gestures of sports. (Guessing games). Let me give you example.” And “Then, I’ll start from you.” are having function as giving chit-chat and sustaining conversation.

19. The utterance “Hum, nice!” is as sustaining conversation; create comfortable feeling and expressing friendship.
20. “Okay, let’s review our lesson today.”, “What have we talked about?” and “You’re right. And how’s the way we ask something about sport or favorite sport?” are having function as giving chit-chat, sustaining conversation, creating comfortable feeling and also being able to be classified as expressing friendship.
21. The function of saying “Excellent!” is to sustain conversation and express friendship between teacher and students.
22. The utterance “Yes, because time is over. We will end our lesson for today.” and “Before we go home, let’s pray together. Pray begin.” are the way how the teacher ends the lesson that function as creating comfortable feeling.
23. Saying “Good afternoon” and “Have a nice day and see you on Saturday.” are having function to close the teaching and learning process or it can be said to sustain conversation between teacher and students.

## F. CONCLUSION

Phatic communion or communication/small talk is a bonding ritual and a strategy for managing interpersonal distance. It serves many functions in helping to define the relationships between friends, work colleagues, and new acquaintances. In particular, it helps new acquaintances to explore and categorize each other's social position. Small talk is closely related to the need for people to maintain positive face — to feel approved-of by those who are listening to them.

In teaching and learning process to young learners, phatic communication should not be ignored since it can develop their knowledge through any kind of scaffolding the teachers use in a class in order to make it easier for the young learners to undertake a task successfully and extends what is possible for young learner to perform and expands the ZPD.

The related concepts of ZPD and Phatic Communication provide teachers of foreign languages to children with a framework for understanding important processes in children’s learning, enhancing their self awareness and professional development and improving their everyday classroom practice and the quality of children’s learning.

From the data above we can see that the motivation of young learners is strong and they are active. How can we know? Yes, when the teacher gave the instruction, the students paid attention to much then they all could do and understand what the teacher asked. Furthermore, the use of phatic communication in giving scaffolding to young learners can be an effective way to encourage young learners to learn.

The function of phatic communication found in the data above can be stated as **to give chit-chat, sustain the conversation, show solidarity, create comfortable feeling, and express friendship**, occur in teaching-learning process. Those functions are the most used functions that change the class atmosphere.

Therefore, the researcher concludes that phatic communication is an important feature that should not being neglected in teaching process, especially to young learners, because by using phatic communication learners retain attention from teachers or in an addition, learners will not feel neglected. Then it is also recommended that teachers should be able to use phatic communication in teaching young learners to make teaching-learning process run smoothly and encourage them.



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