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A comparative analysis of phatic expressions in Whatsapp Chats across Pakistani Culture in establishing social bonds and politeness

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Abstract
The present study means to explore phatic functions and the role of these phatic expressions in establishing social bonds and politeness in Pakistani culture with respect to the perspective of pragmatics. The research aims to analyze the use of phatic expressions in digital conversation especially with respect to maintaining social bonds and intimacy. It also focuses on the pragmatic functions of phatic expressions in maintaining politeness towards hearers' positive face. The study is qualitative in nature. The data for this research is conducted through online platforms such as WhatsApp and then analyzed using laver's theory of phatic expressions and Scheff's Bond theory in order to put social interaction. The data analyzed in accordance with the theoretical rationale and results show positive and possible answers that these small talk interactions place an important role in the establishment of social interaction and politeness in online conversations among different people with the use of emojis and other small talk words.

Key Terms
Digital conversations, Phatic Expressions, Politeness, Social interaction,

Background of the Study

Language is not only a tool of transmission of information or just to communicate, it is a basic resource upon which individuals create, sustain and bargain social relations (Woltran & Schwab, 2024). The language comes with so many other functions such as communicative, referential, performative (Wedananta & Juliari, 2022; Assadian & Sbardolini, 2023). In daily communication, we often use words and phrases that do not have much new factual content but are used to do significant interpersonal tasks. Language like Hello, how are you doing, compliments, caring, good-byes, and short-term conversations are some of the examples of language that assists individuals to start communication, sustain, reveal familiarity and also show social engagement (Holtgraves & Kashima, 2007; Svalberg, 2009). When language is serving as performative rather than only communicative, this kind of communication is usually known as phatic communication or phatic communion (Fadhil, 2022). This concept originated in Malinowski's notion of *Phatic Communion* and was further coined by Laver (1975).

The role of phatic tokens is great in human communication especially when it comes to creating social relations and bonds among people and putting a sense of politeness to others' faces (Bekar, 2022). Phatic expressions may seem linguistically and informationally trivial but they have a pragmatic worth in the nature of social relations they assist in setting and maintaining (Senft, 1996; Farzaliyeva, 2026). The use of this kind of phatic expressions or

phatic tokens seems less noticeable but it holds a considerable position and importance in daily conversation among people in so many digital and online communications and conversations (Farzaliyeva, 2026).

Some of the important things for the exact function and implication of these small talk interactions are the need of an interlocutor that will include an addressee along with an addresser on a particular or favorable place, time and event (Stenström & Jørgensen, 2015) . There are some kinds of correlations between the participants of phatic tokens and the communication of phatic expressions that will take place in particular arrangements of participants. The cooperation and special patterns of participants is necessary in order to maintain politeness throughout the act of conversation. The time and space environment is very important for this purpose.

Just like other cultures, in Pakistani culture the phatic tokens and small talk play an important role in social interactions. They help maintain rapport, show politeness strategies, and establish a friendly atmosphere. Phatic expressions that are often used as conversation starters or fillers to keep the conversation going. They don't carry much literal or dictionary meaning but serve as social lubricants for the conversation (Paronian, 2005; Rubab et al., 2019). On the other hand, the act of "Small Talk" involves casual and light-hearted conversation about general topics that may be the weather, hobbies, or some other current events. It helps break the ice, build and maintain connections, and find common ground with others. Small talk is a way with which we can show interest in the other person's talk or conversation and create a comfortable environment for further talk exchange or can complement (Khan & Rustam, 2017). In various cultures, including Pakistani culture, phatic tokens and small talk are commonly used to initiate conversations, show respect, and establish a friendly tone. They help create a sense of camaraderie and make interactions more enjoyable and interesting. Whether it's asking about someone's well-being, complimenting their appearance, or discussing shared interests, these conversational tools help foster positive social connections (Shahid et al., 2025).

The usage of phatic communication has been growing in digital communication, especially in instant-messaging platforms like WhatsApp. Digital communication cannot be face-to-face, and therefore the facial expressions, gestures, and other non-verbal cues are limited. Users' subsequent interactions are therefore short conversational codes and emoticons, and other digital means of conveying interpersonal meaning. Yus (2017) shows the importance of phatic effects in WhatsApp communication and Aull (2019) specifically proves that emojis can function as phatic, and thus can contribute to interpersonal communication.

The cultural context is also significant as the usage and the understanding of phatic expressions might differ from one community to another. Individuals' use of language to maintain social contact is shaped by both social relationships and cultural expectations, familiarity, respect and intimacy. Expressions of goodwill, enquiries about one's health, concern expressions, and other small talk aspects are very much considered as part of the interpersonal interaction in Pakistani culture. With the increasing use of WhatsApp, these practices have increasingly become part of digital communication. Thus, it is worth analysing the phatic expressions that occur in WhatsApp messages in Pakistan as it can give insight into the ways people connect socially and politeness in digital mediated communication.

Statement of the Problem

The use of phatic tokens or we can say the phatic expressions that are also called as small talk conversations in our daily life that we do digitally in online scenarios through social media platforms such as WhatsApp and so many others is increasing day by day. A variety of these phatic tokens is used by social media users everyday. The study shows that there is any role of these tokens in the maintenance of social or societal bones or especially with respect to the terms of politeness strategies.

Research Objectives

Here are the objectives for these research;

1. To describe the major phatic tokens used in Pakistani culture through Whatsapp in online conversations.
2. To describe the role of these phatic expressions in maintaining social bonds among people of Pakistan and establishing the essence of politeness.

Research Questions

Here are the research questions for the study;

1. What are the main Phatic Tokens or phatic expressions being used in Pakistani culture?
2. How do these Phatic Tokens or small talk expressions maintain social interactions, bonds and politeness strategies among Pakistani culture?

Significance of the Research

The significance of the research is describing the role of phatic tokens in maintaining social bonds and politeness. The study describes small talks as social cues that show respect, interest, and politeness in talks. By using phatic interactions, we can see the presence of others and create a friendly atmosphere.These tokens help establish rapport and build connections with others. They show that we value social interaction and are invested in maintaining a positive relationship.

Delimitation of the Research

The present study only focuses on the phatic tokens or phatic expressions that are being normalized in Pakistani culture and their role in maintaining societal bonds and social interactions among the individuals of Pakistan. The data for this research is only limited to the social media platform such as WhatsApp and it ignores all other cultures and their phatic expressions focusing only on the Pakistani one.

Definition of Key Terms

Phatic Expressions: Linguistic expressions which are used more to initiate, maintain or consolidate social contact than to carry factually informative value (Laver, 1975).

Phatic Communication: Communication that has interpersonal or relational functions such as keeping people in social contact or social interaction (Coupland et al., 1992).

Social Bond: The interpersonal bond between individuals that can be developed and enhanced through social interaction (Scheff, 2000).

Politeness: Linguistic behaviour that is used to deal with interpersonal relationships and take care of interlocutors' social needs (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Positive Face: When the person wants to be appreciated, accepted and have positive valuation from others (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Intimacy: The amount of closeness in interpersonal relationships and emotional connections between interlocutors.

Emoji: A pictograph or pictogram that is used to convey or clarify an emotion or aspect of an interaction in electronic communication.

WhatsApp Communication: Communications that take place digitally using the WhatsApp messaging platform.

Pragmatic Function: Communicative or interpersonal function of an expression in a specific context.

Literature Review

Phatic Communication

Phatic communication was first studied in the context of the anthropological and linguistic studies of the social roles of language. To explain the use of speech as a means of establishing and maintaining social contact Malinowski (1923) was the first to coin the term phatic communion when he noted that language is often utilized with the purpose of merely setting up and sustaining social relations, as opposed to conveying facts. The phatic communication tells about the social function of our daily life language in order to establish a social bond and

rapport along with the vaccines of politeness (Malinowski, 1923). In this sense, communication can be significant without the speaker trying to convey a lot of information to the listener.

Jakobson (1960) subsequently added the phatic role to his model of language functions, relating it to the creation, maintenance or verification of the communicative channel. He discusses these small talk exchanges in daily conversations and names the term "phatic function" that helps a central position when it comes to the establishment and maintenance of communication and positive bonds among people.

The concept was furthered by Laver (1975) who investigated the role of phatic communion in interpersonal communication and its communicative functions. His argument is that phatic expressions are significant in the management of social relations, more so on the start and end of interaction. The concept of small talk is very much significant and it is analyzed by so many other languages such as Laver and Holmes. Laver's analysis of small talk is basically related to the concept of pragmatic aspects or context of the talk in which it is being uttered (Laver, 1975). On the other hand, Holme's concept of small talk is a little different from the road. It is because he aims to analyze the face threatening acts in some cultures such as in American people's responses in terms of putting politeness strategies (Holmes, 2014; Murphy et al., 2006).

These expressions can assist interlocutors in creating a proper social relationship prior to beginning substantive conversation and enable them to end the interaction in a socially acceptable way. Therefore, phatic language cannot be considered as empty or meaningless talk. (Coupland et al., 1992; Gordon & Gordon, 2023).

Wierzbicka (1985, 1990, 1991) also underlines that communicative practices are intertwined with the culturally shared values and assumptions. Therefore, what might be viewed as a friendly, polite, or even good expression in one culture might be viewed as a pragmatic take on a similar expression in a different culture. Phatic expressions are directly linked with politeness and face management as well (Wierzbicka, 1985).

Brown and Levinson (1987) theorize politeness with respect to the notion of face, whereby positive face is the aspect that entails the need to be valued, liked and accepted by others whereas negative face is the aspect that entails the need to be free of imposition. Most of the phatic expressions may be interpreted as positive-politeness behavior since they show interest, attention, familiarity, approval, and social affiliation (Brown et al., 1987).

The concept of small talk is basically driven by Schneider (1997). He also talks about the developed concepts of Grammar that are especially related to the particular domains of small talk. The social-bond theory is another essential approach to the study of phatic communication offered by Scheff. Scheff (1997) develops a conceptualization of social relationships based on social bonds and highlights how social interaction is important to the preservation of solidarity or the generation of alienation experiences.

The correlation between phatic communication and politeness also can be interpreted in the context of the more general notion of rapport management. According to Spencer-Oatey (2002), interpersonal communication deals with the functioning of social relationships and interactional expectations (Spencer-Oatey, 2002).

The term Phatic expressions or phatic tokens is related to the acts of putting some extra words that are with little formally communicative purposes but they are a part of everyone's daily life conversations. People use these small talk interactions in their daily act of greetings, apologizing, gratitude, thanking turn taking and so many other respects (Coupland, 2003; Eslami et al., 2023). These phatic tokens are present in almost all the languages of the world with different communicative and interactive purposes and scenarios NTR diversity of values and belief and their variation differ from one language to another (Mapson & Major, 2021).

This perspective has remained in development by contemporary pragmatic research. An

example is Zegarac (1998), who considers the notion of phatic communication in the light of relevance-theoretic approach and shows that the notion of phatic communication should be understood more broadly than the mere contrast between informational and non-informational language. In the same manner, al-Qinai (2011) claims that phatic exchanges are significant since they create a social setting that facilitates communication and can serve as a polite strategy. His explanation of English-Arabic phatic expressions further illustrates that phatic conventions that are culturally different may pose problems when the pragmatic functions are misinterpreted.

Halomoan S, (2022) in his analysis of phatic expressions explores the importance of phatic expressions, their classification and their difference from interjections. The data for this study was collected among greetings that are common to use by English speakers. The study was descriptive in nature and a kind of preliminary survey was conducted without analyzing the depth of data. The results of this study concluded that these expressions or introductions play a vital role in the maintenance and social interactions among the people. These are important and can be used in different places such as beginning, middle or at the end of sentences.

Social Relationships, Politeness, and Phatic Expressions

In regard to the relational aspect of phatic communication, it is relevant to **Scheff's theory of the social bond.** Social bonds are basic interpersonal relations, and according to Scheff (2000), they are closely related to emotional processes. They serve to maintain or disrupt those bonds. His framework brings a helpful theoretical framework to understand the ways in which repeated interpersonal interaction can reinforce social connectedness.

In a similar vein, the study of Facebook communication by Sarjanoja, Isomursu and Häkkilä revealed that the phatic function was often used for everyday and repetitive communication to ensure relationships and social cohesion (Sarjanoja et al., 2013) . This line of reasoning is carried over to the modern Internet by Yus (2019) who speaks of the “phatic Internet”, characterized by an Internet environment in which the informative content of a message may not be as relevant as the desire to establish feelings of connection, sociability, group membership, and mutual awareness. The empirical research is in favour of the relationality of phatic communication.

Similarly, Manzo (2014) conducted research in order to explore the discursive mechanism of Phatic communication in the maintenance of social bonds. The theoretical basis of this research was Scheff's sociological bond theory. The study focuses on the phaticity in conversation such as social media in order to build and balance social bones and interactions. The data collected for this research was secondary in nature that is taken from digital social media platforms. The result of the study shows the formal and structural characters of phatic communications and interactions.

Moreover, Fadil (2022) works on the function of Phatic communication in the English language in order to know whether this communication only informs or builds some kind of social bonds. The research focuses mainly on the communicative situations of phatic tokens and their functions along with education of the relationship between Phatic communication and politeness. The results of the research indicates that generally these phatic expressions are vital to maintain social bonds and humorous environments between the speakers. They are in fact a kind of societal or socially acceptable lubricants and serve not only for information but also make communication interactions more strong.

In studying Javanese women's communication, Widiana et al. (2020) revealed that phatic communication would be used to start the conversation, deepen bonds, entertain others, show joy, and console. Their major conclusion was that phatic communication is therefore used to maintain social rapport. More importantly, they also showed that appropriate phatic communication varies from one culture to another, which makes phatic communication pertinent to cross-cultural pragmatics.

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JALT

Moreover, the concept of phatic communication is closely related to **politeness**, as it is often said that protecting and increasing interpersonal face is one of the elements of maintaining one's social contact. Based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, a positive face denotes the wish to be appreciated, approved of and accepted. Positive politeness resources can then be used for greetings, compliments, expressions of concern and friendly small talk. One piece of its direct evidence has been provided by Stenström and Jørgensen (2008) where they show that phatic communication serves as a politeness device and has a strong bonding effect both in English and Spanish teenage interaction. Febrianto D, (2019) describes a pragmatic analysis of strategies of politeness in the use of humorous phatic expressions in order to analyze and investigate politeness strategies along with phatic functions in communication. Each of the phatic utterances is analyzed using solidarity and deference politeness strategies as given by Yule (1996). The research was descriptive qualitative in nature and data was collected from sitcoms. The analysis took place using andanalyzing the context or pragmatic aspects and also the analysis of every datum present in phatic expressions. This is important in the context of the current study as it shows that digital phatic communication is not independent of cultural norms.

In Pakistan, the role of phatic communication is significant as the socialization of everyday interaction is culturally rooted in socially embedded practices of respect, solidarity, religious expressions, multilingualism and interpersonal concern. One of the most directly relevant studies is conducted by Khan, Rubab and Kamran (2019) who study phatic tokens in WhatsApp conversations between ten participants from Pakistan. Based on Laver's (1975) theory of phatic tokens and the Social Bond Theory proposed by Scheff, they conclude that the phatic expressions in digital communication among the Pakistanis play a role in establishing intimacy, social interaction, avoiding conflict and sustaining harmony and social relationship. Likewise, Khan's (2019) study of Pakistani greetings revealed that Pakistani speakers use multiple greetings, phatic questions, phatic phrases, address terms, and situation-specific greetings and there were significant differences in the greetings of the Urdu speakers and the English speakers.

Recent studies have shown that there are pragmatic practices which are multilingual and culturally determined in Pakistani digital discourse. Through the study of Pakistani English discourse, Mahmood, Tahir and Farid (2025) find that Pakistani English is highly affected by both Urdu and regional languages, with code switching being common and politeness norms being context sensitive and that the Pakistani users make linguistic choices based on their relationships and communicative situations. Although, phatic tokens are significant in other cultures too such as studies on translation of phatic expressions explored in various cultures such as English and Arabic and analysis of Indonesian pragmatic function (Alqinai, 2010; Rahardi, 2019).

In the study on WhatsApp users, Nasir and Akram (2025) observed that users of WhatsApp use positive politeness, compliments, praise, blessing, emotional support and bilingualism to establish solidarity, negotiate social distance and social hierarchy. In addition, Saghir and Bhatti (2026) investigated how digital interactions in the Pakistani context are manifested on the platforms WhatsApp, Facebook, and TikTok, revealing that the choice of the platform has a significant impact on the sociopragmatic aspect of communication, especially when it comes to WhatsApp which had the highest level of intimacy, solidarity, and relationship-oriented politeness. These studies together suggest that Pakistani digital communication is not only transactional, but also highly relational, as they use greetings, inquires about wellbeing, terms of address, code switching, expressions of courtesy, expressions of religious sentiments and emojis as resources to preserve interpersonal relations and politeness.

However, there is not much specific research available on the interaction of Laver's (1957) categories of phatic token with positive-politeness strategies and social-bond maintenance in

Pakistani WhatsApp speakers' conversations with different kinds of conversational partners. The present study is therefore an extension of the previous studies conducted in Pakistan that deals with phatic expressions in naturally occurring WhatsApp interactions and analyses the functions of phatic expressions using Laver's (1975) framework, with the help of Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory and Scheff's (2000) social-bond perspective.

Phatic Communication in Digital Age

In **digital communication**, the link between phaticism and intimacy is also explored. Studies reveal that new environments for phatic interaction have come about with the development of social media and instant messaging. According to Yus (2012), cyberpragmatics can be considered as a study of Internet-mediated communication from the pragmatic point of view which highlights contextual interpretation in the digitally mediated communication.

Miller (2017) also suggests that digital communication does have a significant phatic function, as communication on social media is often not only for the purpose of information exchange, it also helps to maintain relationships and social harmony. This is extended to professional digital communication, as Porter (2017) suggests that the phatic function may be employed to create communication channels and maintain relationships in online communication.

However, the inter-personal messaging and the private nature of WhatsApp is of particular relevance as it integrates textual, audio, visual and multimodal resources. In the case of Spanish-language WhatsApp interactions, Flores-Salgado and Castineira-Benitez (2018) reported that the interactions had systematic politeness practices and that opening and closing sequences were found throughout the interaction. Even greetings were preferred to deferential forms of address.

Similarly, Aull (2019) offers the most direct link between WhatsApp, phatic communication and Laver's framework. She looked at the WhatsApp interaction that actually occurs in the wild and determined that emojis had the potential to be used as phatic tokens. The study also revealed that there are differences in the use of phatic emoji depending on the relationship structure, such as status-differential and solidary relationships.

Moreover, ver, Khan, Rubab, and Kamran (2019) studied the use of phatic tokens in the social-media communication of Pakistan with the help of Laver's phatic-token framework and Scheff's Bond Theory. They conducted a qualitative/mixed-method study which relied on WhatsApp interactions of ten participants, and found that phatic tokens might help in avoiding conflict and promote harmony and social bonding. This study is significant for the current study as it highlights the relevance of both the theories in a Pakistani WhatsApp setting.

Emoji as Phatic Tokens

Emojis have come under increasing scrutiny as pragmatic resources, rather than simply decorative symbols. Based on the emoji sequences on Sina Weibo, Ge and Herring (2018) observed that emoji sequences can pragmatically serve as verbal utterances and they can form the relationship with the preceding or following texts. They also found that the usage of emoji is not uniform across all cultures or platforms, but is instead culturally and platform dependent.

Ge-Stadnyk (2021) also found that emoji sequences serve multiple pragmatic functions, stance, action and self presentation while comparing Weibo and Twitter with differences between platform and user groups. More recently Morsi (2026), who analysed 4,000 student-generated posts on Facebook, Twitter/X, and Reddit, concluded that emojis can serve as pragmatic tools for politeness, solidarity and sarcasm.

But one thing is notable that phatic communication is not homogenous in terms of culture. Stenström and Jørgensen (2008) revealed differences between the practices of teens in London and in Madrid, and Widiana et al. (2020) revealed that the phatic practices of the Javanese are influenced by culturally specific expectations related to solidarity and interpersonal involvement. In addition, Widiana (2021) also showed that the cultural politeness norms still exist in WhatsApp interaction. In the same way, studies on Arabic of Saudi Arabia reveal

culturally specific types of phatic expressions that are greeting, politeness, well-being, blessing, small talk, acknowledgement, farewells, and appreciation. The results reinforce the claim that even communicative forms might be different in their pragmatic function in different cultures. The results reinforce the claim that even communicative forms might be different in their pragmatic function in different cultures.

Theoretical Framework

The study finds roots in **Laver's theory of "Phatic Tokens" (1975).** This theory is the basis of this research in order to make a better understanding of the discursive mechanisms of discursive communications or talk exchange and to identify/classification of phatic tokens. Along with Laver's Theory, a blend of **Brown & Levinson (1987) and Scheff's (2000) Theoretical models** are used as sub to analyze politeness/positive face and for the relevant interpretation of social bonding. The study focuses on the social function of language and how phatic tokens are used to establish and maintain social bonds rather than convey specific information. It emphasizes the importance of small talk in creating and sustaining social relationships. These theories shed light on the significance of phatic tokens and how they contribute to our everyday interactions.

Methods and Materials

The researcher aims to collect data for this research to the secondary sources of Data Collection such as social media platforms. The researcher selected WhatsApp as the main source of Data collection and data from the chats of Total number of 10 people is taken. The data is analyzed accordingly using the theoretical frame as described above. The research is totally qualitative in nature and uses the descriptive analysis method to analyze the data.

Analysis

This chapter presents the qualitative, interpretive analysis of ten conversational extracts collected from Pakistani Whatsapp interactions. The analysis is done in three stages in line with the theoretical framework. In the first stage, the phatic tokens are identified in each turn using Laver's (1975) typology (neutral, self-oriented, other-oriented, structuring) and by their occurrence in opening, medial, or closing phase and their function (propitiatory, exploratory, initiatory, mitigating, consolidating). In the second stage, the same tokens and the transactional speech acts which accompany these tokens are analyzed according to Brown and Levinson's (1987) strategy categories to see face-work performed by each exchange. At the third stage, the overall exchange is evaluated using Scheff's (2000) theory to decide whether the social bond is strengthened, sustained, mended or damaged, and what emotions of attunement, pride, shame or alienation are present. All ten extracts are described using this layered procedure, to ensure uniform description and cross-cultural/cross-relational comparison in the discussion chapter is possible.

4.3 Analysis of the Extracts

The following section describes the analysis of the extracts.

4.3.1 Excerpt 1: Two Close Friends, Greeting and Availability Check

F1: Jani,,,, Kider hey tu □□???

F2: Hn Jani.. Mein Class mein hoon free hokar Tumhe reply Karti.. ❤

Translation (Sweetheart, where are you?, F2: Yes sweetheart, I am in class, I will answer you later when I am free)

Analysis

The word Jani, which means 'dear one' in the language is an other-oriented token that, before any transactional content is introduced, immediately asserts a claim of intimate high-solidarity. The two token interrogatives Kider hey tu (where are you) with double emoji cluster □□, are exploratory tokens; they send indexical information concerning the availability of F1 and enable F1 to find F2 within the working consensus of their relationship.

F2's response embraces three moves: the solidarity claim Jani, the self-oriented disclosure mein

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class mein hoon (literally I am in class) and the ending promise, free hokar tumhe reply karti (literally I will reply when free). The addition of a red heart (❤) marks the apology as being a gesture of positive politeness, thus neutralising the slight face threat that may arise from the fact that the person was unavailable.

There is no feeling of insecurity about the social bond between these interactants; both show signs of warmth, not embarrassed or deferring to the other, which meets Scheff's criteria of attunement and mutual pride. The exchange demonstrates how phatic tokens are "double-takes" in the sense that they serve two purposes when the interlocutors are equals:

(1) to maintain the connection, and (2) to justify the delay in an environment in which the delay is evident to the public.

4.3.2 Excerpt 2: Student and Teacher, Request for Academic Guidance

Student: Assalam Alaikum mam. mam, I want to ask how are you? What about the implication of the models in my research? Can I use Entailment / Preposition this topic?

Teacher: yes

Student: Okie ma'am. So now I'm stuck having to switch the topic and apply the model?

Teacher: yep

Analysis

The first formula 'Assalam Alaikum [peace be upon you] is a ritualised, culturally prescribed other-oriented token; the next formula 'How are you?', under Laver's schema, is a second neutral type of phatic token, and it is obligatory in Pakistani Muslim etiquette in both media. These tokens work together to eliminate the inherent threat to the superior's face that it poses for the student to use the superior's time, and the initiatory function, smoothing the passage from a transactional request. The student's use of address terms mam and ma'am suggest that the student is continuously re-performing deference, as these minimal acknowledgements are deferential, other-oriented tokens which index the asymmetrical power relation and are repeated in turns.

These politeness devices prepare the request during the process of saying it, and thus increase the student's negative face only slightly, while reducing the danger to the teacher's negative face: Can I implement entailment or preposition. Indeed, the teacher's yes and yep are not impolite or phatically empty: in the status-asymmetric situation the superior can equitably fail to make an elaborated phatic return because the inferior has already made the deference which keeps the balance. Scheff's model is correct: the student's Okie ma'am is proud to have been corrected, and there is no shame performed by either party. The extract reveals how phatic tokens and their density are unequally spread out along status asymmetry. It also highlights the ritual burden borne by the junior partner.

4.3.3 Excerpt 3: Responses to a WhatsApp Status Video, Compliments Across a Contact Network

Person 2: MashaAllllaaaahhhhhhh 5-6 kiss emojis Person 1: Sabse pyari — [the most lovely of all] Person 3: An original heart emoji and a red heart emoji

Person 4: A sticker with a heart on it with the Islamic word Mashallah written on it surrounded by 3 red roses

Person 5: "Aisi pyari pics meri bhi click karne wale friends mujhe bhi chahiye" with a sad emoji (I want such lovely friends to click the pictures of me too).

Analysis

Five phatic styles interact in the one status update, each expressing a different configuration of solidarity. Person 1's extended invocation MashaAllllaaaahhhhhhh combines an Islamic apotropaic formula with a compliment and paralinguistically reinforces it with kiss emojis, which are both other-oriented and tokens of admiration, and at the same time, a signal of high affective involvement, due to the deliberate typographical over extension. Lexically, Person 2's superlative compliment sabse pyari does the same job of positive politeness as Person 1's

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JALT
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compliment. The paired hearts of person 3 indicate the least that can be said in the phatic medium, a token whose illocutionary force (the endorsement of the bond) is entirely nonverbal.

The sticker of Person 4 is analytically rich as it puts the religious formula Mashallah in a prefabricated visual token or artefact decorated with roses, and by doing so, outsourcing the articulation of admiration in a community to a reusable multimodal form. The response from person 5 changes from compliment to self-focused banter: aisi pyari pics meri bhi chahiye with a sad face is a shift of focus from the other person to themselves.

This is a bond-testing gesture, one that can only be read by equals: a person will be held to have been given to understand that the sender is inviting the receiver to turn a complaint flavoured with shame into laughter, thus strengthening the bond. The extract shows that phaticity is manifested in different registers in a single cultural ecology, namely the religious, the lexical, the graphic and the ironic, and these registers are chosen on the basis of the proximity the different senders are claiming.

Excerpt 4.3.4: Teacher and Student, Unsolicited Contact and Deferential Receipt

Teacher: Hey (name of student).. U there? Student: Salam mam.. Khairiyat mam?

Student: "Assalaam-Alaikum Ma'am. 'Are you all right, ma'am?

Analysis

The teacher opens with Hey and the student's name and reduced orthography U there? (informal availability token). According to Laver's explanation of status-indexical tokens, the language of solidarity-register is unmarked and may be used by the superior at no cost, because her status is not under threat. The analytically significant turn is in the response of student. Instead of responding "available" in the first question, the student starts the whole ritual Assalamu Alaikum and Khairiyat mam? It is used to ask about someone's health, and is followed by two deferential tokens and the transactional floor, before any content is provided.

This is exactly the sequence that Brown and Levinson used for a high power differential token. The student's positive-politeness ritual both acts as a respect of the teacher's face and reinstates the deference token which was absent in the opening conversation by the teacher.However, the bond is not broken under Scheff's guidance as the teacher's informal overture and the student's formal receipt are complementary to each other. Both of them served the deference expected of his or her role, as a result, attunement is preserved.

4.3.5 Excerpt 5: Two Friends, Informational Request Under Emotional Distress

Girl 1: Assalamualaikum Jnb CTI job k leay apply KRny ka method batao... Person 2: Ws Mein theik hu Tum tei ho?

Girl 2: Ye to bta yr Tension mn hon Theik hu.

(Girl 1: 'Peace be upon you, honored one'. Person 1: 'How can I apply for a CTI job'; Person 2: 'Wa alaikum assalam, I'm okay. "How are you?" asked Girl 1, "Tell me that first, friend, I am in tension.")

Analysis

The ritual greeting Assalamualaikum, the honorific Jnb (janab, respected sir or madam) to address the other, followed immediately by a transactional request is the opening of Girl 1. Her emoji sequence combines supplication, embarrassment, and buoyancy; it's an emoji that is self-oriented and pre-mitigates the imposition of a request. Person 2's response is pragmatically interesting since, having received a minimal return greeting Ws, she performs the full health-inquiry routine Mein theik hu, Tum Kaisi ho (I am fine, how are you) before going on to respond to the request, thus enforcing the interactional routine even when the addresser has indicated urgency. This is the exploratory and initiatory work of phatic communion being done

ISSN E: 2709-8273
ISSN P:2709-8265
JOURNAL OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS AND TESOL
JALT

on purpose, thus corroborating Laver's statement that no ritual in the marginal phase can be avoided without interactional repercussions.

The tease with the self-disclosure in the comic counterpoint □□ and the intimate address term yr (yaar, friend or mate) in Girl 1's second turn Ye to bta yr Tension mn hon is not a challenge, but the affiliative banter. The entire sequence would be read as positive politeness by Brown and Levinson between status equals protecting each other's face. The emotional engine is only as clear in Scheff's frame: Girl 1 transforms her anxiety about the application for her job into shared, undeniable emotion and Person 2's emphasis on ritual first is actually healing the bond by reasserting that relationship should take precedence over transaction. The friction helps to keep the bond and makes it stronger.

4.3.6 Excerpt 6: Two Persons, Emoji-Only Exchange

P1: □/ P2: □/ P1: □/ P2: □/ P1: □□/ P2: □□/ P1: ❤□/ P2: □

Analysis

This extract is a complete opening sequence, greeting, availability check, affective negotiation and closing warmth performed without any lexical material. The mirrored □ tokens are purely phatic opening symbols, which are completely conventional and are exchanged solely for the purpose of initiating contact. The next set of expressive faces do what Laver would deem exploratory work; both sides checking out and reacting to each others' expressive face: P1's □, P2's skeptical □, P1's mock flirtatious □□, P2's dramatic
□□, P1's affectionate ❤□, P2's mock offended □, etc. The sequence is a well-rehearsed push and pull, in which the content is the relationship itself.

Theoretically, the extract shows the migration of Laver's verbal taxonomy to graphicons: emojis are not just decoration, they structure and consolidate tokens, and their conventionalisation makes it possible for them to make indexical claims, to intimate or tease, or to mock distance, that otherwise would need full utterances. The teasing face is an off-record positive politeness (Brown and Levinson); the testing and confirming of closeness while simultaneously allowing rejection and reconciliation to be denied/detoured. Strictly speaking, it is a rehearsal of bond play, low cost, with the certifying effect of rehearsing and thereby confirming the solidarity of the pair. The extract is a limit case in that it indicates that phaticity is not based on words at all.

4.3.7 Excerpt 7: University Friends, Request for Assignment Help

Person 1: What is it? (employee). Person 2: Yeah! What’s up
Person 1: ASAP needs person 1's help with the assignment Person 2: Gotcha working on it rn
Person 1: I'm in the mood for some noodles.
Person 2: I’ll send person 2 bets □

Analysis

The opening Hey, got a sec? is a classic availability-token that takes the propitiatory role prior to the naming of the imposition, and employee is a mock-formal address which signals solidarity of peer history, being an other-oriented token. Person 2’s Yeah! What’s up
□ reciprocates the register exactly. The bald on record transactional core, Need the assignment help ASAP, is presented baldly because the distance between the participants is minimal – in fact, this is predicted by Brown and Levinson's model: if the power and distance factors are low, the bald on record is the unmarked strategy, and its bluntness is a display of solidarity itself.

The Gotcha working on it rn, by Person 2, is a sort of encapsulating of the thumbs-up in the affiliative mode, and the Lowkey need it before lunch □ is the conventionalized hyperbole of the skull emoji, which, humorously, represents urgency as a mortal crisis. Person 2's Bet □ I'll send closes with a slang pledge, a consolidating token par excellence, which assures the future

service while styling the pledge as peer coolness. The whole exchange is a bonding process, efficient working together is the emotional evidence of attunement and revealing the shift of politeness from linguistic mitigation to emoji-mediated talk management.

4.3.8 Excerpt 8: Two Persons, Mixed-Language Chat With Emoji Responses

P1: Hello!! / P2: □□□ / P1: How are you? / P2: / P1: Coffee peeny chly AJ? [Shall we go for coffee today?] / P2: □/ P1: Perfect!! See you there! / P2: □

Analysis

This extract presents a systematic division of semiotic labour: that P1 provides the lexical phatic frame: Hello!!, How are you? and the invitation and confirmation, but P2 only responds to each of P1's turns with graphicons. P2's triple □□□returns the greeting,
responds to the health question with an affirmative response, and a cheerful smile,
□ accepts the offer of coffee and signals appetite and playfulness, and the final sentiment of □ turns a simple agreement into a declaration of love. Every one of P2's emoji strings is a complete phatic token, in Laver's meaning: it keeps the contact going, it expresses stances, it stakes solidarity—without a single word.

Hello, health inquiry, invitation, confirmation is the canonical phatic scaffolding of an arrangement talk that shows that phatic communion structures even transactional exchanges by segmentation with structuring tokens. Brown and Levinson's explanations suggest that the exclamation marks make P1's invitation less threatening, and that P1's whole attitude is positive-politeness oriented, and P2's emojis counterbalance any remaining threat with maximal warmth. “Attunement” is basically unmatched, P2's □ is an obvious sign of pride in the relationship, and the relationship is not just upheld, it's openly praised. The extract demonstrates the hybridisation of Urdu-English chat conventions, in which the graphicons are a parallel phatic channel which runs alongside or in place of verbal ritual.

4.3.9 Excerpt 9: Male and Female Friends, Cross-Gender Solidarity and Reciprocal Care

Girl: Usman I'm so Hungry Wanna eat something at this time dude.
Boy: Ok Darwaza kholo mein pastry or tuck biscuits laya [Ok open the door, I have brought pastries and tuck biscuits]
Girl: Awwwww thankQ □❤ Boy: ❤Kesi ho. [How are you]
Girl: boht pyari□[very lovely, sad face]

Analysis

The girl's opening is a self-focused declaration of need, I'm so Hungry, which uses the direct first name and the false-casual dude to assert the peer relationship transgresses the gender boundary and to permit the blunt request Wanna eat something at this time. The boy's response, Ok Darwaza kholo mein pastry or tuck biscuits laya, is the response of a transactional exchange, where the specificity of its answer makes it warm: the boy has already got the food, turning an exchange of requests for a denial into a done favour.

The girl's Awwwww thankQ □❤ is a thick other-oriented token of gratitude: it is long on the vowel, and the double affection emoji is like paying her in emotion as well. The boy then performs a phatic pivot. He repeated the heart and immediately reopened the relational channel with the health inquiry. Thus the boy prevented the exchange from being finalized on the transaction.

The end is the girl's boht pyari□ meaning ‘very lovely,' a wry smile that seems to be a

ISSN E: 2709-8273
ISSN P:2709-8265
JOURNAL OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS AND TESOL
JALT

compliment to him or a self-description of her mood: pride in feeling cared for is undercut by an wistful/longing/vulnerable undertone. In a cultural context of cross-gender friendship phatic tokens regulate the intimate and the proper: the affection is mutual and elaborated, but it is presented in conventionalised, deniable ways; emojis, care services, compliments that approach, but do not explicitly name, the affection.

4.3.10 Excerpt 10: Siblings, Late-Night Intimacy and Ritual Closure Brother: Hi / Sister: Hi / Brother: Can't sleep □/ Sister: Can □. Have a good □ **Analysis**

The exchange of bare Hi between siblings demonstrates the minimum phatic opening which is adequate between intimates as the bond does not need to be re-affirmed through complex tokens. The brother's I can't sleep □ is something he offers to himself, it's not a request for sympathy; the sister uses the same smiley face, so Scheff would call it 'attunement' – her is reflecting exactly the same face, he is saying: “My situation is noted and shared, don't pity me.” She teases in a way that she's not totally even by bringing up I can □ before she drops the final Have a good □.

The sleep emoji is a closing token: a miniaturised well-wishing ritual, marking the end of the contact and promising the continuation of contact. Brown and Levinson would say that the sister's tease is positive politeness of the highest level, since it's only affectionate to tease someone about the other person's predicament when they are very close. This exchange is an example of keeping a safe bond. It also reveals vulnerability and attunement. It seals off separation with a blessing not just a sign-off. The extract ends with a demonstration of the most condensed form of phatic communion that of siblings, where maximal solidarity is matched by minimal tokens.

Discussions and Findings

The 4 classes of tokens that form Laver's typology are not evenly, but systematically distributed across the 10 extracts. The openings of all exchanges feature neutral tokens, ritual greetings, health enquiry and availability check, which, as Laver had said, constitute the primary habitat of phatic communion. The peer extracts, Excerpts 1 and 3, contain disclosures of hunger, sleeplessness, tension and desire as bids for attunement that are largely self-oriented, while in the status-asymmetric extracts, Excerpts 2 and 4, self-orientation is mostly restricted to the junior partner, who presents neutral and minimal tokens, while the superior is more inclined toward acceptance.

The other-oriented tokens (endearments, honorifics, compliments, affection emojis) are found throughout all the extracts but their density reflects both solidarity and deference: they certify intimacy between equals and hierarchy between unequals. Structuring and consolidation of tokens organize closings across the dataset, while pledge formulae, well wishes and heart emojis carry out the mitigating and consolidating functions that Laver attributes to the closing phase (Table 4.1). Analysis of these tokens is more obvious through following tables

Excerpt	**Neutral Tokens**	**Self-Oriente d Tokens**	**Other-Orien ted Tokens**	**Structuring or Consolidating Tokens**	**Laverian Functions Served**

ISSN E: 2709-8273
ISSN P:2709-8265
JOURNAL OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS AND TESOL
JALT

Excerpt 1	Availability check	Account for delay (class)	Jani (endearment) , red heart	Pledge to reply later	Propitiatory, exploratory, consolidatin g
Excerpt 2	Assalam Alaikum, How are you?	Request framed from own topic	mam, ma'am (honorifics)	Okie ma'am (acknowledgm ent)	Propitiatory, initiatory
Excerpt 3	n/a	Person 5's self-directed wish	Mashallah compliments , hearts,	Sticker as packaged token	Exploratory, consolidatin g

ISSN E: 2709-8273
ISSN P:2709-8265
JOURNAL OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS AND TESOL
JALT

			roses sticker, Sabse pyari		
Excerpt 4	U there?	n/a	Assalamu Alaikum, Khairiyat mam?	n/a	Propitiatory, initiatory
Excerpt 5	Assalamualai kum, Ws, health inquiry	Tension mn hon (distress)	Jnb (honorific), yr (intimate)	Theik hu (reciprocal receipt)	Propitiatory, exploratory, initiatory
Excerpt 6	Mirrored wave emojis	Mock-tease faces	Heart with playful tongue face	Cold face as mock closing	Initiatory, exploratory, consolidatin g
Excerpt 7	Hey, got a sec?	Lowkey urgency claim	employee (in-joke), Bet (pledge)	Gotcha plus thumbs up	Propitiatory, initiatory, consolidatin g
Excerpt 8	Hello!!, How are you?	n/a	Affection emojis	Perfect!! See you there	Initiatory, structuring, consolidatin g
Excerpt 9	Kesi ho (health inquiry)	I'm so hungry (need claim)	Awwwww thankQ, hearts, boht pyari	Food offer as care token	Exploratory, initiatory, consolidatin g
Excerpt 10	Mirrored Hi	I can't sleep	Shared emoji mirroring	Have a good sleep emoji	Initiatory, mitigating,

ISSN E: 2709-8273
ISSN P:2709-8265
JOURNAL OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS AND TESOL
JALT

					consolidating

Table 4.1 ***Classification of Phatic Tokens Across the Dataset (Laver, 1975)***

According to the data (table 4.2), reading through Brown and Levinson, one can see that there are two politeness economies. Peer exchanges (excerpts 1, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10) are dominated by positive politeness – the use of in-group address terms, teasing, banter and emoji warmth are all common ground, while mitigation is done paralinguistically and not syntactically.
Negative politeness and deference prevail in the asymmetric exchanges Excerpts 2 and 4, namely through the ritual greeting and the use of honorific mam and ma'am, as well as an enquiry about the addressee's health before any imposition. Most importantly, in both economies the politeness is carried out more through the strategic use of ritual openings, graphicons and address forms than through grammatical indirection; this is how the participants do face-work. *The* following table reveals politeness strategies

Excerpt	**Face-Threatening Act**	**Politeness Strategies Deployed**	**Bond Status (Scheff)**
Excerpt 1	Imposing after silence	Positive politeness: endearment reciprocity, heart emoji	Maintained
Excerpt 2	Student request on superior's time	Negative politeness: ritual greeting, honorifics; minimal teacher responses as status privilege	Maintained
Excerpt 3	Self-presentation under evaluation	Positive politeness: compliments, religious blessing, affection emojis; ironic self-oriented banter	Built and maintained
Excerpt 4	Unsolicited teacher contact	Deferential receipt: ritual greeting and honorifics by junior party	Maintained
Excerpt 5	Urgent informational request	Positive politeness: supplication emojis, yaar, comic self-disclosure of tension	Maintained, intensified after friction
Excerpt 6	None; relationship play	Off-record positive politeness: teasing emoji choreography	Maintained (bond play)

ISSN E: 2709-8273
ISSN P:2709-8265
JOURNAL OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS AND TESOL
JALT

Excerpt 7	Bald request for urgent help	Positive politeness with low mitigation: in-joke, emojis, slang pledge	Built
Excerpt 8	Invitation (minor imposition)	Positive politeness: warm exclamation, emoji enthusiasm, affection closing	Maintained, celebrated
Excerpt 9	Late-night request and favour	Positive politeness: gratitude amplification, reciprocal hearts, care service	Maintained
Excerpt 10	None; vulnerability disclosure	Positive politeness: mirroring, affectionate tease, well-wishing close	Maintained

Table 4.2 ***Politeness Strategies and Social Bond Outcomes (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Scheff, 2000)***

Scheff's model provides an interpretive endpoint for the analysis, in nine of the ten extracts the social bond is constructed and/or sustained, while in the tenth (Excerpt 5), the social bond is temporarily unsettled, but remediated with heightened solidarity. The same three emotional Phatic Expressions are found in repeat. Attunement is first evident in mirroring, the Emoji-answer symphony of Excerpt 8, the matched register of Excerpt 7. Second, pride appears when ritual is fluent: in Excerpt 4 the student's perfect deference.

It is also seen in Excerpt 7, where the friends' minimal cost cooperation creates the quiet pride that Scheff characterizes as the effective signature for secure bonds. Third, shame is conspicuously absent or redirected: the forlorn emoji from Excerpt 3, the contemplating □ emoji from Excerpt 9, and the comic tension in Excerpt 5, all serve to neutralize potentially shaming disclosures into one that is rather safe, shareable affect, as Scheff frames well managed bonds.

Conclusions

The above analysis aimed to interpret ten extracts of digitally embedded culturally embedded phatic tokenisations; tokens with which the participants of the textual extracts produce social relations and enact politeness. Based on Laver's (1975) theory, supplemented by Brown's and Levinson's (1987) politeness model and Scheff's (2000) theory about the social bond, recurrent patterns were identified across the data set: ritualised neutral tokens initiated exchanges and discharged the propitiatory and initiatory functions; exploratory tokens sent indexical information about status, availability and affect; other-oriented and self-oriented tokens negotiated solidarity and deference in relation to the social distance between and power of the participants; and structuring and consolidating tokens ended exchanges with pledges, well-wishes and displays of affection. Each type of the relationships was found to be associated with a different polite economy: peers' politeness economy was more positive politeness, and

hierarchical pairs' polite economy was unequal, with ritual economy on the side of the junior party and deferential economy on the side of the senior. Finally, the Scheffian reading showed that the phatic machinery does not exist to be present as a decoration, but rather as the very mechanism of attunement, and in the enactment of pride, and the transfiguration of potential shame into a bond-strengthening effect. The chapter findings directly address the research questions put forth in Chapter 1 and are the empirical basis for discussion in Chapter 5.

To conclude, The role of phatic expressions and phatic tokens in maintaining social bonds is noteworthy. Phatic expressions in maintaining social introductions among individuals of a society or we can say Pakistani society suggests we have discussed major phatic expressions that are commonly used in the communications or conversation between the Pakistani people in an important position. People use these small talk interactions in their daily life in order to put a positive politeness strategy towards the next person's face. As a result the conflict is avoided and the essence of social stability is being established and maintained through the use of these tokens.

These little linguistic tools are like the secret ingredients that make our relationships extra special. When we use phatic expressions, such as greetings and small talk, we're not just exchanging pleasantries - we're actually building a connection. By acknowledging someone's presence and showing interest in their day with a simple "Hey, how's it going?" or "What's up?", we create an initial bond that sets the stage for further interaction. It's like a social handshake. They also help us make rapport and create a positive impression such as politeness to others' faces. When we give compliments or use polite phrases, we're showing others that we appreciate and value them.

The polite gestures of kindness and respect go a long way in strengthening our social bonds and making others feel good about themselves. These are able to express empathy and support. When we offer well-wishes or express gratitude, we're showing that we genuinely care about others' well-being and appreciate their actions.These little acts of kindness and gratitude create a sense of warmth and connection, making our relationships even stronger. Do not forget that phatic expressions also play a role in facilitating communication. By using these tokens, we create a friendly and welcoming environment that encourages open and meaningful conversations. It's like setting the stage for a great chat with a friend. When we start with a warm greeting or a kind phrase, it makes it easier for us to express our thoughts and feelings, knowing that we're in a safe and supportive space.

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