

CONTENT AND SOCIOLINGUISTIC ASPECTS OF PHATIC SPEECH

(in English and Lithuanian)

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Phatic communion¹, which in terms of modern linguistics is usually referred to as the phatic function of speech², was cursorily mentioned for the first time (as well as the term was invented) by B. Malinowski³ in the thirties of the present century.

Phatic speech has remained a problem of interest to many a linguist⁴ dealing with sociolinguistic problems; it has also been directly or indirectly mentioned alongside purely linguistic problems by such outstanding linguists, as E. Sapir, W. N. Francis, Ch. C. Fries, and B. M. H. Strang⁵. The phatic function of speech, though, has not been consistently described yet. It appeared reasonable to begin with the study of the phatic function out of all the functions⁶ of speech, because it can be most readily recognized in discourse due to its specific non-informative character.

¹ Phatic communion is "a type of speech in which ties of union are created by a mere exchange of words". B. Malinowski, *The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Languages*, — *The Meaning of Meaning* by C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, London, 1936, p. 315.

² Phatic speech, i. e. speech at the moments of discourse when the phatic function is predominant, is speech devoid of information and merely serving to establish mutuality among people. See: O. С. Ахманова, *Словарь лингвистических терминов*, М., 1966, p. 508.

The terms 'phatic communion' and 'phatic speech' are used in the present paper indiscriminately.

³ B. Malinowski, *op. cit.*

⁴ See: J. R. Firth, *Papers in Linguistics (1934–1951)*, London, 1957, pp. 29–30; S. I. Hayakawa, *Language in Thought and Action*, N. Y., 1964, pp. 69–78; J. O. Herzler, *A Sociology of Language*, N. Y., 1965; Th. C. Pollock a.o., *Language Arts and Skills*, N. Y., 1955, pp. 220–224; F. Znaniecki, *Social Actions*, N. Y., 1936, pp. 526–527, and others.

⁵ E. Sapir, *Language*, — *The English Language*, vol. 2 (ed. by W. F. Bolton and D. Crystal), Cambridge (Mass.), 1966; W. N. Francis, *Language — Its Nature and Use*, — *The English Language in the School Program* (ed. by R. F. Hogan), N. Y., 1966, pp. 43–48; Ch. C. Fries, *The Structure of English*, N. Y., 1952, pp. 24–50; Barbara M. Strang, *Modern English Structure*, London, 1962, pp. 10–13.

⁶ The author of the present paper proceeds with the study of the functions of speech as they are outlined in R. Jakobson's scheme (see: *Style in Language* (ed. by Th. Sebeok), Cambridge (Mass.), 1966, pp. 353–357), because all other attempts to contribute to the theory of the functions of speech have ended in identifying the functions of speech with functional styles.

Strange though it may seem, the linguistic data concerning the realization of the phatic function of speech have so far been searched for in linguistic behaviour of primitive tribes (with reference to B. Malinowski⁷, as a rule) or in verbal activity of the British people⁸, as if phatic speech were a peculiarity of the English language and therefore an exclusive property of the British people.

Thus, it is but natural that the question of how the phatic function of speech is manifested in other languages, first and foremost in European languages, arises.

After a detailed linguistic analysis of the appropriate material had been carried out⁹, the content and sociolinguistic aspects of phatic speech had to be described, because the content of phatic speech had been misinterpreted for the simple reason of the absence of works based on the investigation of a wide scope of linguistic material, and consideration of the sociolinguistic aspect is essential in functional analysis of discourse in general.

It has been wrongly assumed that the content of phatic speech is close to nil and the range of topics is very narrow and select, i. e. it amounts to the topics of weather and health. The present investigation has shown, however, that, contrary to the above-mentioned assumption, the content of phatic speech, i. e. the subject-matter of speech when the phatic function is predominant in discourse, is very varied and the range of topics is very wide. Referring to the content of phatic speech it should always be borne in mind that the content in this case should never be understood as the informative content of speech in general, because the informative side in phatic speech is altogether absent, or, in other words, as soon as the informative element becomes prevailing in discourse, it loses its phatic character. Phatic speech may serve an introduction to the informative discourse, as, for example, in: (1) *'Fine morning', said Babbitt, lighting — illegally early — his second cigar of the day.*

'Yes, it's a mighty fine morning,' said Littlefield.

'Spring coming along fast now.'

'Yes, it's real spring now, all right,' said Littlefield.

⁷ M. M. Lewis, *Language in Society*, London, 1947, pp. 24–26; A. P. Rossiter, *Our Living Language*, London, 1953, pp. 38–39; B. M. Charleston, *Studies on the Emotional and Affective Means of Expression in Modern English*, Bern, 1960, pp. 43–44, 341–342; J. Condon, *Semantics and Communication*, N. Y., 1966, pp. 88–89; J. F. Wallwork, *Language and Linguistics*, London, 1969, pp. 4–7.

⁸ Ph. B. Ballard, *Thought and Language*, London, 1934, pp. 55–56; M. Pei, *All About Language*, London, 1956, p. 12; B. Sondel, *Power-Steering with Words*, Chicago, 1964, p. 50; P. S. Schievella, *Critical Analysis*, N. Y., 1968, pp. 58–61, and others.

⁹ М.-Л. А. Драздаускене, *Контактоустанавлюющая функция речи (the phatic function of speech)*, Канд. дис., М., 1970.

'Still cold nights, though. Had to have a couple of blankets, on the sleeping-porch last night.'

'Yes, it wasn't any too warm last night,' said Littlefield. 'But I don't anticipate we'll have any more real cold weather now.'

'No, but still, there was snow at Tiflis, Montana, yesterday...'

'Is that fact! Say, old man, what do you think about the Republican candidate?' (S. Lewis, 52–53).

(2) – *Sveiki, gerbiamas operatoriau...*

Keistokas būdas sveikintis tituluojant. Ar nesišaipa?...

– Labas, gerbiamas režisieriau. Kas jums nutiko?

– Man? O kaip jūsų sveikata?

Romualdas nekenčia kalbų apie sveikatą ir orą. Girdenis, Girdenienė... Brrrr!

– Jūs manimi nepatenkintas?

– Aš?

– Atleiskite. Vakar, rodos, neturėjote šito aparato?

– Pagaikštis varnom baidyti, – Romualdai topteli, kad režisierius gerinasi, ir jis kirste nukerta. – Jūs dėl reportažo? (M. Sluckis, 53–54).

Or it is a means of establishing contact among people and preserving it for an indefinite time, when the people involved aim at courtesy and mutual disposal of friendly feelings, as, for example, in:

(3) *'Why, Sarah,' she said, very loudly, 'how enchanting to see you, how very kind of you to come.'*

'How very kind of you to ask me,' I said.

'It must be months since I last saw you.'

'It is. It was September.'

'Oh yes, September. It was at my wedding, wasn't it?'

'That's right. At your wedding.'

'It seems a long time ago.'

'Yes, it does, doesn't it?'

We then paused a little to take breath in this scintillating exchange... (M. Drabble, 117).

The range of topics in phatic speech according to their recurrency is as follows:

I. Most recurrent topics in phatic speech:

- 1) health,
- 2) family members,
- 3) looks and apparel,
- 4) friends, colleagues, and acquaintances,
- 5) work and business,
- 6) weather.

II. Less recurrent topics in phatic speech:

- 1) literature and art,
- 2) trips,
- 3) festivities and holidays,
- 4) gifts,
- 5) meals, etc.

Any topic may practically serve a stimulus of phatic speech as long as it is used merely to keep the ball rolling. E. g.:

(4) *We sit without saying anything for a while, then the Old Man says, 'How you gettin' on at your work?'*

'Oh, okay.'

'Still liking it, are you?'

'Yes, I like it all right.' I know this isn't exactly the truth, somehow, but I let it go because it would be too hard to explain to the Old Feller when I can hardly reckon it up for myself (S. Barstow, 123).

(5) ... – *Jau pragydai? – užsipuolė jį mama. – Valgyk.*

... – *Kokie skanūs kopūstai! – nevykusiai pakeičiau kalbą ir, matydama, kad to per maža, pridėjau:*

– Ir bulvės.

– Prie kopūstų ir senas kaliošas mėsa pasidaro, – nenusileido tėvas... (Vyt. Petkevičius, 429).

A predilection to some of the topics appears to be present, though. It refers to the topics "Health" and "Looks and Apparel" in the first place, as the phatic treatment of them amounts to exchange of highly general qualificative statements and compliments, as, for example, in:

(6) *'Hello,' I said, 'How are you these days? I haven't seen you for ages.'*

'I'm all right,' said Julian, 'I suppose...' (M. Drabble, 134).

(7) – *Kaip jaučiatės? – pasiteiravau aš.*

– Puikiai. O jūs?

– Pakenčiamai. Ar Jurgio sesuo jūsų draugė? (R. Lankauskas, 25).

(8) *'Well, Loulou, you are looking very beautiful.'*

'Am I?' she said. 'You look very pretty yourself. You've got your hair different.'

'Not very. It's only up, not down.' (M. Drabble, 119).

(9) – *Kas tau pasiuvo kostiumą? Liuks kostiumas! – vos neužspringau tuo „liuksu“.*

Kelio atgal nebuvo: nei į komandą, nei į giedrą, jaukią bičiulybę.

– Pirkau gatavą. Jugoslaviškas.

– Na, kaip tau paroda? (M. Sluckis, 136–139).

The topic "Health" is recurrent in verbal activity of modern British as well as Lithuanian societies to such an extent that perfunctory 'How are you?' and 'Kaip sekasi?', 'Kaip laikais?' tend to substitute greetings. Contrariwise, the classical British topic "Weather" – "that great blessing of society" (Thackeray) – which is recurrent in Lithuanian as well, has ceased to be among the most popular items in establishing of verbal contact. Though cursory remarks about the weather (as, for example: *Hello, Mum! Good afternoon, Mrs Howard! It's a lovely day, isn't it? Well, the Rovers won, Mum...*)¹⁰ are recurrent in discourse, a prolonged discussion of the weather is nearly always assumed, by the people involved, as linguistic performance, i. e. phatic speech proper, and is being consciously and intentionally made use of, as, for example (cf. ex. (1) above), in:

(10) *We're both quiet now and I'm thinking. This is it, what I've been waiting for. I'm talking to her. What can I say? 'Dear Ingrid, I've been mad about you for months (well, one month, anyway). How do you feel about me? Will you make me the happiest bloke in Cressley and come to the pictures with me tonight?'*

'Not a bad morning, is it?' I say.

'No, not bad at all, to say.'

To say what? That it's winter, I suppose. 'I wonder if we shall have some more snow soon.'

'I shouldn't wonder. It's cold enough for it.'

And who the heck cares? I can love her in snow or sunshine. If I only knew what she thinks of me (S. Barstow, 40).

A definite extralinguistic situation may happen to disclose a purely phatic character of conversations about health, too, as, for example (cf. ex. (2) above), in:

(11) *Besikraunant paskutinius šovinius, mane iššaukė apskrities viršininkas.*

– Teismą atidedam, – pradžiugino jis mane..., išsipasakojo pusę savo biografijos, pasiteiravo sveikatos. Pajutau, kad jam kažko iš manęs reikia. Neapsirikau. Gal po pusvalandžio jis labai miglotai paaiškino... (Vyt. Petkevičius, 480).

The investigation has proved that phatic speech is no less spread in Lithuanian than it is in English. Contrariwise to the wrong assumption that phatic speech finds the utmost expression in verbal communication of representatives of the upper classes of the British society, we conclude that phatic speech manifests itself in discourse irrespective of the national and social status, education and breeding of the speakers. Phatic speech is a property of a social being as much as speech in general is, because it is a single constituent part (or: aspect) of human verbal behaviour.

It is worth mentioning, though, that phatic speech tends to be coarser or is being interrupted altogether in discourse of the younger generation and unedu-

¹⁰ English by Radio, Meet the Parkers, recorded by the BBC, Lesson 3.

cated people, irrespective of their age, due to the attempts on the part of the speakers to show they are not intentionally gaining or are artificially indulging in the conventional linguistic activity, as, for example (cf. ex. (5) above), in:

(12) *Mrs Jackson (very friendly): Excuse me: it's Mrs Sawney, isn't it? The rent collector give me your name, he said you were coming to live here, so I thought, well, I'd just pop round the door and have a word — like, it's your first day here, and why not be neighbourly, I thought, and give them a call? Eh, isn't it a lovely day?*

Rachel: Who are you?

Mrs Jackson: I live next door, you see, so I thought why not be neighbourly; like, it's such a lovely day.

Rachel: Oh go to the hell... (J. Arden, 112–113).

(13)– *Sveikas, seni, — tarė Jurgis. — Kaip laikais?*

— *Nagi pusė velnio. O tu kaip?*

— *Šiaip sau. Galva baisiai skauda. Vakar su Markizu per daug visokių skysčių sumaišėm.*

— *Prisilakėt lyg kiaulės?*

— *Atsiprašau, — tarė Jurgis. — Kuo tamsta mus laikai?*

Aš nusijuokiau (R. Lankauskas, 7).

Besides, the investigation has shown that phatic speech in English is much more emotive and abounds in superlatives as well as in evaluative vocabulary, whereas in Lithuanian it is more calm and moderate.

The illustrative material of the present paper should by no means lead to the conclusion that phatic speech is exceptionally a form of hypocrisy and sophistication. The simplest forms of phatic speech, such as greetings and other formulae, is an intrinsic quality of the social behaviour of every human being; more elaborate forms of phatic speech is often a necessity in contacting strangers, getting acquainted, reassuming sociability after having made *faux pas*, and in similar extralinguistic situations. As phatic speech does not convey information and discloses, first and foremost, kind disposition and friendly feelings of the people involved, or at least their intention to communicate, it is very important to skilfully manage this particular type of linguistic behaviour. As far as foreign language teaching is concerned, the ability to make oneself naturally pleasant and agreeable by means of a foreign language should considerably be developed alongside other aspects of the use of a foreign language, within the limits of the linguistic tradition of a particular nation, because the lack of habits and skills to use language phatically makes a foreigner too often an outcast of the community of native speakers into which he happens to enter.

List of quoted fiction:

1. J. Arden, Penguin Plays, Harmondsworth, 1967.
2. S. Barstow, A Kind of Loving, Harmondsworth, 1968.
3. M. Drabble, A Summer Bird-Cage, Harmondsworth, 1967.
4. R. Lankauskas, Džiazo vežimas, – „Pergalė“, Nr. 9, 1970.
5. S. Lewis, Babbitt, Moscow, 1962.
6. Vyt. Petkevičius, Apie duoną, meilę ir šautuvą, Vilnius, 1967.
7. M. Sluckis, Uostas mano neramus, Vilnius, 1968.

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Įteikta
1973 m. rugsėjo mėn.

FATINĖS (KONTAKTO UŽMEZGIMO) KALBOS TURINYS IR SOCIOLINGVISTINIAI YPATUMAI ANGLŲ IR LIETUVIŲ KALBOSE

Reziumė

Fatinė kalbos funkcija, pastebėta antropologų ir sociolingvistų prieš keletą dešimtmečių, dar mažai tyrinėta. Straipsnio tikslas – palyginti fatinės kalbos, kaip vieno kalbinio proceso aspekto, apraiškas anglų ir lietuvių kalbose turinio ir kurių-ne-kurių sociolingvistinių momentų požiūriu.

Darbe parodyta, kad fatinės kalbos turinys, priešingai vyravusiai nuomonei, yra labai įvairus ir kad ši kalbos funkcija nėra nei socialinė, nei nacionalinė, o bendražmogiška kalbinio proceso ypatybė, nors kalbančiųjų socialumo išraiškos priemonės šiek tiek varijuoja anglų ir lietuvių kalbose bei skirtingo amžiaus ar išsilavinimo žmonių grupėse.