

## Diachronic Changes of Chinese Phatic Communion and Its Change Tendency — Phatic Communion Used in Chinese TV Plays and Films

Hongping Chen<sup>1</sup> and Xiaoxiao Zhang<sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Professor in School of Foreign Language, North China Electric Power University, NO 689 Road, North District, Baoding, Hebei, China

<sup>2</sup>Graduate Student in School of Foreign Language, North China Electric Power University, NO 689 Road, North District, Baoding, Hebei, China

\*Corresponding author: Xiaoxiao Zhang

| Received: 12.03.2021 | Accepted: 16.04.2021 | Published: 24.04.2021 |

**Abstract:** Phatic communion is used to establish and maintain interpersonal relationships and social status, which aims to avoid embarrassment and release the stress of exchanging information. Different languages have different phatic communions, and the phatic communion also changes as time goes by. So this article tends to explore the changes of phatic communion in China by analyzing phatic communion used in Chinese TV plays and films at different times, and figures out the change tendency and reasons for these changes.

**Keywords:** Phatic communion; changes; change tendency.

### INTRODUCTION

In our daily life, phatic communions plays an important role in our talks. Many scholars have done researches on phatic communion. Current studies mainly pay attention to cross-cultural communication and the translation of phatic communion and some interdisciplinary studies. There are only a few diachronic studies at home and abroad, which should be enriched, so it gives us more space to do our researches. The concept of phatic communion is first put forward by a social anthropologist, Malinowski, in the 1920s [1]. He believed phatic communion is not for exchanging information but for establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships and social status, which aims to avoid embarrassment and release the stress of exchanging information and also benefit people to start real and essential talks. This article tends to explore the diachronic changes of phatic communions in China used in films in different times and figure out its change tendency and the reasons for these changes.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The study on phatic communion starts in the 1920s. From then on, many scholars home and abroad have done researches on phatic communion from different perspectives. They defined and evaluated phatic communion and described the function of phatic communion. The following is a brief introduction.

### FOREIGN LITERATURE

The first use of phatic communion appears in Malinowski's *The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Languages* (1923) in the 1920s. Until the 1970s, scholars' views were largely similar to Malinowski's. Some scholars evaluated phatic communion as follows: Abercrombie [3] regarded that the actual meaning of the words in the phatic communion was not important [1]. Leech [2] considered that the use of phatic communion violated the quantity criterion of Grice's cooperation principle. As to the definition of phatic communion, Lyons [4] thought that phatic communion was used to establish good social relations and maintain social unity. J.T. Irvine [2] investigated Wolof phatic and suggested that phatic communion was a means of maintaining social status and a strategy used by speakers to coordinate role structures in social interactions. Different scholars studied phatic communion from different perspectives. Laver [5] studied the pragmatic function of phatic communion. In 1992, Coupland and others conducted researches on phatic communion from the perspective of intercultural communication. In 1999, Zegarac and Clark, from the perspective of cognitive linguistics, took Sperber and Wilson's relevance theory as the framework to study phatic communion under the expressive-reasoning model.

<sup>1</sup> Heng W. A brief review of the research on "Phatic Communion"[J]. Academic Journal, 2010, (1): 40-41.

Quick Response Code



Journal homepage:

<https://crosscurrentpublisher.com>

**Copyright © 2021 The Author(s):** This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited.

**Citation:** Hongping Chen & Xiaoxiao Zhang (2021). Diachronic Changes of Chinese Phatic Communion and Its Change Tendency — Phatic Communion Used in Chinese TV Plays and Films. *Cross Current Int J Peer Reviewed J Human Soc Sci*, 7(3), 62-66.

## DOMESTIC LITERATURE

The first person to introduce the study of phatic communion into China should be Yao Junyuan [6], who expounded the decisive role of Japanese culture in phatic communion. Subsequently, some scholars carried out researches on Japanese greetings. Chen Songcen [7] is one of the earliest scholars who studied phatic communion in China. He researched phatic communion from the perspective of sociolinguistics. It is believed that phatic communion is mainly used to express the speaker's identification of the relationship between the two parts of communication. The first person to study phatic communion between China and Britain was Zhu Yongsheng [8]. In *Four Discussions on Phatic Communion*, he discussed different functions of phatic communion in discourse and elaborated the relationship between phatic communion and cultural tradition [9].

Later domestic researches on phatic communion focus on the following aspects: From the perspective of cultural differences, Bi Jiwan [10] made a comparative analysis of Chinese and English phatic communion, revealing the differences in the meaning and content of phatic communion under different cultural backgrounds. From "Have you eaten?" in Chinese and "HELLO" in English, Cheng Ruilan [11, 19] found that there were significant differences in phatic communion between Chinese and English, which reflects the cultural differences between Chinese and English. Wang Shanzhen [12] discussed the translation of Chinese and English greetings.

From the perspective of pragmatic interpretation, Guo Hua [13] explains phatic communion. His research found that the research of phatic communion has a tendency from the definition to the connection with social culture and the explanation of the theory of language use.

In terms of the functions of phatic communion, Zhao Haiwei [14] briefly analyzed the three functions of greetings: creating a good atmosphere and eliminating embarrassing situations; Attract the attention of others, ensure smooth conversations and play as a social lubricant, maintain social relations. Thus, he illustrated the important social significance and function of phatic communion.

From the perspective of folklore, Cao Xianghong [15] analyzed the use of common strategies in the opening paragraph of contemporary private letters in Xinjiang. His research found that the opening paragraph of such a letter is composed of a series of small talk, which further confirms that small talks are important parts of human verbal communication.

Foreign literature developed earlier than that of the Chinese, and they studied phatic communion from

different perspectives and used different methods and tools. Besides, there are more quantitative researches than that in China. While domestic researches have more summary's introductions and comparisons of the phatic communion, but there are less quantitative researches and the studies are mainly from the micro perspective. What's more, the subjective is usually the whole nation but not some particular persons, that is, the subjective is not diverse enough. Besides, there are only a few diachronic studies, so this article is from a diachronic perspective.

Above all, most scholars studied phatic communion synchronically from the perspective of the differences and comparisons of phatic communion; function classification and interpretation of phatic communion; discourse characteristics of phatic communion. Only Chen Ruilan and Chen Songchen did diachronic researches, but they have just theoretically described the development of the studies on phatic communion in the past years as a review.

### Classification

According to the relationship between the two parts of the communication, Chen Songcen [7] divided phatic communion into four types: the communication type, greeting type, appellation type, and the accompanying with language type.

According to the styles of the phatic communion, Hu Mingyang [16] thought phatic communion can be divided into homely social and elegant styles.

According to the topic and content, Li Cuijuan [17] divided the phatic communion into something about "health" "weather" "eating" "your destination" and some widely known things.

While according to the sentence patterns, Long Youzhen [18] divided the phatic communion into call, question, and exclamation and statement type.

According to the situation phatic communion used, it can be divided into social engagement phatic communion, ceremony phatic communion and daily work and life phatic communion.

From the perspective of Discourse Mode, the phatic communion was divided into program and non-program by Zhang Yan [11].

Different scholars classified phatic communion from different perspectives, but they just do a classification briefly as a part of their article but no specific studies on the classification of phatic communion. There are not many types of research paying attention to the detailed category of phatic communion elaborately and widely accepted by the public.

According to the topic and content, the current research will study the diachronic change of Chinese phatic communion, its change tendency and the reasons for these changes, which is shown in the Chinese TV plays and films.

### Diachronic Changes of Chinese Phatic Communion and Its Tendency

In Chinese TV plays and films, there is much different phatic communion used in different periods. The following will show the different phatic communion used after the founding of PR China and used in recent years in TV plays and films so that we can find out the changes.

### Phatic Communion Used in the Period of New China

After the founding of the PRC, when people met each other, they always greeted each other "have you eaten?" such as the dialogue in the film, *To Live* (《活着》):

福贵: 村长, 吃了不?吃了再走吧。(Fugui: village head, have you eaten yet? Let's eat at my home.)

村长: 吃了, 吃了, 你们赶紧吃吧。(I have already eaten, and please eat your meal.)

"Have you eaten yet?" is a piece of phatic that has a long history in China and has been widely used since ancient China. After the founding of the PRC, in that period, the phatic remained. When China's productivity was backward, there were more people and less food. Eating and clothing were the most concerned matter of people. So when meeting and greeting, people asked "Have you eaten yet?" to show concern for others.

In the film, *A Tree in House* (《没事偷着乐》), there are also many greetings involving their destination, Such as, 大民: 李婶, 您上哪儿去 (Damin: Aunt Li, where are you going?) 李婶: 买菜去, 你刚回来啊? (Aunt Li: I am going to buy some food, and you just get back?).

This kind of phatic communion has no real meaning when Da Min is just getting off his bike and walking into the gate, the phatic communion is just greeting or showing concern. Usually, people won't talk more with each other.

In the film, *To Live* (《活着》), there is also some phatic communion that involves in weather, such as 家珍 (凤霞妈妈): 凤霞回来了, 冷不?咋不多穿点? (Jiazhen, Fengxia's mother: Fengxia, you came back. Are you cold and why not wear more clothes?)

凤霞: (由于凤霞是哑巴, 所以未给出明确的文字表达) (Fengxia: Due to Fengxia is mute, there are no oral answers).

When Feng Xia came back, Feng Xia's mother asked whether Feng Xia was cold or not. It is not phatic like that native English speakers say. It is a concern for Feng Xia's feelings and health, for that in China, the weather changes sharply and greatly when the season changes. And in the past, the living condition was bad, so the winter was difficult for people to live and survive, and people always concerned whether you were cold or not to ensure that you were fine.

In these films, the addresses for others are also with distinctive Chinese characteristics such as "大娘"(grandma) "大爷"(grandpa) "李婶"(Aunt Li) "凤霞妈"(Fengxia's mother) (by calling children's name and their relationship).

### Phatic Communion in Recent Years

In the TV play, *In the Name of People* (《人民的名义》), the phatic communion has changed, which has nothing to do with meals. People in the TV play just greet each other as follows.

(1) 沙瑞金: 达康同志。(Sha Ruijin: Comrade Dakang)

李达康: 沙书记啊, 你好。(Li Dakang: Hello, Secretary Sha)

(2) 侯亮平: 您好, 沙书记。(Hou Liangping: Hello, Secretary Sha)

沙瑞金: 辛苦了, 亮平同志。(Sha Ruijin: You have had a long day,

Comrade Liangping.)

(3) 季昌明: 侯局长吧? (Ji Changming: Are you Director Hou?)

侯亮平: 早啊, 季检察长。(Hou Liangping: Good morning, Procurator Ji)

The phatic communion is not the kinds of those in the period of new China. They just greet each by calling their name or title, and people seldom ask something about eating and just greet each other using "hello" "hi" "good morning" "good night" which is like the phatic communion used by native English people. What's more, their address is without too many Chinese characteristics. They call each as their name if they are peers or one is elder than the other. And they also call each other their title as listed above if they are peers or are younger than the other. Recently, phatic communion does not involve detailed knowledge about your privacy.

Such as in the TV play, *To Our Warm and Sweet Time* (《致我们暖暖的小时光》) as follows

司徒末妈妈：小顾，出去啊？(Situ Mo's mother: Xiao Gu, are you going out?)

顾未易：嗯，阿姨早，我去学校。(Gu Weiye: Yes. Good morning, aunt. I am going to school.)

Though it also involves the destination, Situ Mo's mother does not intend to ask Gu Weiye where he goes but just as a greeting. There is no detailed and specific information about his destination. It is also like the native English people who will not ask questions or greet each other for their privacy.

At present, the content and manner are also changing. There is not so much phatic communion as “哪里，哪里”(Where, where, translated literally) “给您添麻烦了”(sorry to trouble you), just as the dialogue in the TV play, *The First Half of My Life* (《我的前半生》) in the following ways.

薇薇安：能见到你，真的很开心。这儿的风景依然是这么美。(Vivian: nice to meet you. The scenery here is still beautiful.)

同事：哟，薇薇安，今天更漂亮了啊。(Colleague: Wow, Vivian is more beautiful today.)

This dialogue is almost the native expression of the native English speakers. It does not involve any private information. They just express their feelings and their praise for the other or the environment or just refer to the objective surroundings.

There are also some phatic communions that is about the weather but involves nothing about the worries about other persons' health but mere phatic communion in the film, to our warm and sweet time 《致我们暖暖的小时光》) as the following way

司徒末：今天天气真好啊。(Situ Mo: It is nice today)

顾未易：嗯，你要出去吗？(Gu Weiye: em, will you go out?)

In this dialogue, they just talk about the nice day, there is nothing about the concern whether the speaker is fine or not. It is just a phatic that they use to greet each other and it works as a start of a talk, which is much like talking about by native English speakers.

There is also some phatic communion involving weather but not aiming to express their concern for whether the partner is fine or not, but just pure greeting topics which are different from the phatic

communion in the past that there are worries about whether the partner can survive from the bad weather in bad living conditions. The talks about weather are just a start of other topics and a phatic to establish a social mutual relationship.

### Phatic Communion's Change Tendency

From the dialogues above, we can find that in the past the Chinese phatic topics were mainly about eating, destination, weather and so on. And Chinese people used to call for each other in using the relationship between their own children or partners' children. But in recent years the Chinese phatic communions have changed. Chinese people seldom greet each other by “have you eaten yet?”, but greet each other like the native English speakers by using “hello”, “hi” or talk about weather and so on. They may also say “出门啊？”(Are you going out?) “回来了”(come back), but it is not like what they did in the past. What they ask in the past involves the privacy of others. The phatic communion in recent years is just a phatic to maintain their social relationship or to show politeness. And the addresses people used are Miss or Mr. plus family name or call them for their nickname, or they call their titles. There are also some addresses involving the relationship between them but they are different from the “李婶”(Aunt Li) “大爷”(grandpa) “大娘”(grandma) in the past. They may call “阿姨”(Aunt), “grandpa”(爷爷), “grandma”(奶奶).

### Reasons for These Changes

The changes which have been specified above are influenced by many reasons and factors. The reasons include economic reasons, cultural and educational reasons, the change of job and political reasons as follows, which have affected some aspects of the changes of phatic communion.

### Economic Reasons

With the development of the economic development of China, the productivity and people's living conditions have been improved a lot, and the materials are also enriched. So Chinese people do not worry about whether they will suffer from hunger and bad living conditions, and they no longer pay much attention to the details of others' eating and wearing. The physical materials are enriched, and they pay more attention to other aspects such as their looks, their grace, the environment the mental or they just greet each other by talking about weather. So few people mention meals and clothes when they greet each other.

### Cultural and Educational Reasons

With the development of culture and education, more and more receive more education and culture of foreign countries, and more and more foreign culture are flooding into our country, people receive more culture of western countries, which has a great influence on the consciousness and their phatic views.



They change their consciousness and their habits of phatic communion. Therefore, they do not talk so much about other persons' privacy. They just greet each other as native English speakers, which do not refer to people's real information and privacy.

### Social Changes

After the founding of the Republic of China, people's work has changed and enriched, so there are not so many people working as farmers in the countryside. Besides the technology has also progressed, the weather forecast has benefited people a lot. What's more, the masses' living and health conditions and living standards have improved so much that there is no need to pay too much attention to the weather. People can eat well and wear warm clothes, and they can also have access to the weather forecast easily through TV or on the Internet, so they gradually do not merely rely on weather as much as in the past.

### Political Reasons

After the reform and opening-up, not only foreign culture is flooding into our country, but also Chinese people can go abroad, they learn the foreign culture, custom and habits and change their actions, consciousness and habits, which all lead to the change of Chinese phatic communion. People seldom greet each other referring to personal privacy such as people's destination, age, salary and so on, and they greet each other in the way like western people, which does not involve personal specific information. And the phatic communion has changed with the change of national policies.

### CONCLUSION

Chinese phatic communion has changed more like that in western countries which involve less information of eating, wearing and personal privacy. Greetings like "good morning, hello" are used more in recent years. The change of Chinese people's phatic communion is not a mere change of linguistic forms but also an implication of social phenomenon. The changes are influenced by many reasons and factors. Languages are communication tools whose changes show the changes of society. It also shows that the economic, cultural and educational, job and political changes and it is influenced by these changes. What's more, it also shows the change of people's consciousness and the improvement of people's living conditions. So the changes of phatic communion can also show the changes of people and our society and also our country. Studying these changes and recording them can not only benefit studies in other fields, such as the translation of Chinese, English teaching and Chinese teaching but also help us in cross-cultural communication and improve our abilities of communication. Therefore, in the process of

communication, we should choose appropriate greetings according to different situations. And more attention should be paid to these changes.

### REFERENCE

1. Zhuanglin, H.U. (2017). "A Course in Linguistics" (Fourth Edition) [M]. Beijing: Peking University Press, 11-12.
2. Leech, R. W., & Kohnen, P. (1974). Subependymal and intraventricular hemorrhages in the newborn. *The American journal of pathology*, 77(3), 465.
3. Abercrombie, M., Flint, M. H., & James, D. W. (1956). Wound contraction in relation to collagen formation in scorbutic guinea-pigs. *Development*, 4(2), 167-175.
4. Lyons, J. (1968). *Introduction to theoretical linguistics* (Vol. 510). Cambridge university press.
5. Laver, J. (1975). Communicative functions of phatic communion. *Organization of behavior in face-to-face interaction*, 215, 238.
6. Junyuan, Y. Daily Phatic communion and "さようなら" [J]. *Japanese Language Studies*, 1987 (01): 96-97.
7. Songcen, C. (1988). Social Distribution and Development Trend of Chinese Greetings [J]. *Language Planning*, Beijing, 4, 25-27.
8. Yongsheng, T. (1989). A review of middle and late Eocene mammalian faunas from China. *Acta Palaeontologia Sinica*, 28, 663-682.
9. Xiaofeng, L.V. (2011). A Summary of the Research on Greetings at Home and Abroad in the Past 40 Years [J]. *Journal of Harbin Vocational and Technical College*, 5: 99-100
10. Jiwan, B.I. (1997). Differences between Chinese and English Greetings [J]. *Language Planning*, 2, 15-17.
11. Ruilan, C. (2006). A Comparative Study of Chinese and English Greetings [J]. *Journal of Luoyang Normal University*, 3, 129-131.
12. Shanzhen, W. (2006). Comparison and Translation of English and Chinese Greetings [J]. *Journal of Hunan Institute of Industry and Technology*, 3, 97-99.
13. Hua, G. (2007). Useful Nonsense -- A Pragmatic Approach to "Phatic communion" [J]. *Journal of Mudanjiang College of Education*, 5.
14. Haiwei, Z. (2006). Analysis of Social Functions of Social Speech [J]. *Journal of Zhangjiakou Vocational College of Technology*, 2, 42-43.
15. Xianghong, C. (2007). An Analysis of the Function of Small Blossom in the Opening Paragraph of Chinese Letter [J]. *Journal of Xinjiang Normal University*, 4.
16. Mingyang, H.U. (1987). The cultural and psychological background of greetings [J]. *Chinese Teaching in the World*, 2: 30-33.
17. Cuijuan, L.I. (2004). The greeting functions of language [J]. *Journal of Zhengzhou Technical College*, 20(1): 58-59.
18. Youzhen, L. (2009). Phatic Communion System of Modern Chinese [J]. *Yangtze River Academic*, 03, 1-14.
19. Heng, W. (2010). A brief review of the research on "Phatic Communion"[J]. *Academic Management*, 1; 40-41.