



“Let’s Chat!” Forms and Functions of Phatic Expressions in Young Iraqis’ Messenger Chat Interactions

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Abstract in English

While social media messaging platforms serve to exchange information, they are also used to maintain communication and create social connection. This study explores the forms and functions of phatic expressions used by young male and female Iraqi Arabic interlocutors in Facebook Messenger-mediated text chat interactions. Besides, it aims at examining similarities and differences between the two genders’ use of phatic expressions, and the type and frequency of their reference. The data involved 57 chats collected through documentation and snowball sampling technique from 46 participants. Drawing on Laver’s (1975) theory on this phenomenon, the study uses a descriptive qualitative approach. The study concludes that the participants employ various forms and functions in different interactional phases (opening, medial, closing) with the dominating use of the other-oriented phatic expressions. It also concludes that there are more similarities than differences between the two genders’ use of phatic expressions.

Paper Info

Keywords

phatic expressions, Iraqi Arabic, Messenger, text chat interactions, mediated communication, social media

1. Introduction

Human beings use language every day to generally achieve one of the various functions: sharing information with others, expressing feelings, and opinions, and influencing others’ attitudes. However, language has another function which aims at expressing and maintaining social connections between interlocutors. This social function is called *phatic*, and the term *phatic communion* is used to describe this function. It is realised not only in face-to-face interactions but also online in written exchanges on social media platforms (Hopkins, 2014: 3). Kulkarni (2014: 18) asserts

that as phatic communion has emphasised the social function of language, it has been observed in various interactional contexts, including internet-based media like instant-messaging.

There appears a link between phatic communion and exchanges on social network platforms in the sense that phatic messages keep the interlocutors in touch and sustain social connections, so keeping in touch seems to be sometimes more significant than the content in the mediated interaction (Licoppe and Smoreda, 2005: 321). It is the social connection or the mere act of communication established with one's interlocutor that matters, and the text messages become part of a phatically mediated sociability essential to maintain connected presence. Thus, phatic communion becomes a major source in managing continuously connected relationships. People may send short expressive messages, giving one's emotion or a reaction to an event, to build or maintain a social tie (Licoppe and Smoreda, 2005: 331). Wang et al. (2012: 84) argue that social media messaging platforms become phatic if their main use is to encourage users to establish, develop, and maintain social ties and interactions.

Due to the current widespread use of social media messaging platforms in our daily online interactions, there comes an urge to study phatic communion in the young Iraqi Arabic male-male and female-female text chat interactions on Facebook Messenger, which is an internet-based communication app and an instant messaging service, allowing people to instantaneously interact through the exchange of text messages. The study, limiting itself to analysing text messages without considering pictorial representations of a facial expression such as emoticons or emojis, aims at investigating the forms and functions of phatic expressions and their type and frequency of their reference. Bearing this in mind, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- Q1: What are the forms and functions of phatic expressions employed by young Iraqi Arabic interlocutors of both genders in Messenger-mediated text chat interactions?
- Q2: Are there similarities and differences in forms and functions of phatic expressions between text chat interactions made by males and those by females?
- Q3: Are personal phatic expressions generally more frequently employed than the neutral ones?

2. Literature Review

2.1 *The Nature of Phatic Communion*

The concept of phatic communion is very old. Originally coined by the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski, who used this term to described the daily language used in primitive societies, phatic communion is defined as “a type of speech in which ties of union are created by a mere exchange of words”, and the principal aim of this type of language is not primarily to convey meaning or thoughts, but to serve a social function – that is, to build the bonds of social connection between the interlocutors (Malinowski, 1923: 314, 315, 316). While Malinowski focuses on creating ties of union by phatic utterances, Jakobson (1960: 355) highlights that they help maintain contact, arguing that maintaining contact between the interlocutors is the main function. Phatic communion, as Miller (2015: 3; 2008: 393, 394) asserts, is not intended to impart any meaningful information or fact about the world for the receiver. Its main concern is only the process of communication in that it expresses sociability and connection with others in the form of shared feelings and goodwill, and maintains and strengthens existing relationships so as to facilitate further communication. For their turn, Wang et al. (2012: 85) observe that the purpose of phatic dialogue “could be linked

to the need for hearing the humming of a machine. The machine must be humming if we are not to think it has broken down.”

Maíz-Arévalo (2017: 2) and Radovanovic and Ragnedda (2020: 11) state that phatic communion has three functions: first, a social function, to help create and maintain social relationships; second, a communicative function, to show that the communication channel is open to others (i.e. opening up to other interlocutors); third, a validation and recognition function, to recognise interlocutors as potential communicative partners. In Jumanto's (2014: 2) perspective, there are twelve functions of phatic communication. They are (1) breaking the silence, (2) initiating a conversation, (3) making small talk, (4) and gossip, (5) keeping talking and chatting, (6) expressing solidarity, (7) empathy, (8) friendship, (9) respect (10) and politeness, and (11) creating harmony and (12) comfort.

Laver (1975: 222, 223) argues that the utterances used in phatic communion possess deictic reference. They refer either to factors specific to the place and time of the utterance, or to other factors which are personal and related to the interlocutors. Thus, he distinguishes two groups of phatic utterances: neutral (the first former group) and personal (the second latter group). Neutral utterances are used to refer, describe and predict, for example, utterances or comments made on the weather, as in saying 'It's so beautiful today', or other features of the prevailing situation in which the utterances occur, i.e. utterances referring to the context or general state of affairs, as in 'Lovely flowers'. On the other hand, Laver (1975: 223) sub-classifies the personal utterances into *self-oriented* and *other-oriented*. Self-oriented phatic utterances are expressions which are personal to the speaker or aim or refer to the speaker or add information about the speaker. Laver adds that these utterances are usually constituted linguistically by declarative statements, as in 'My legs weren't made for these hills'. Other-oriented phatic utterances are those which are personal or related to the hearer. Laver adds that these utterances very often take the form of questions, as in 'How do you like the sunshine?'

2.2 Linguistic Realisation and Placement of Phatic Communion

Various topics and genres of conversation can generally mark the occurrence of phatic communion speech. For instance, Senft (2009: 228) reveals that certain linguistically formulaic realisations and prototypical examples characterise phatic communion. Greeting and leave-taking formulae, descriptions and remarks about the weather, asking questions about somebody's health, and other information-free topics constitute the language of phatic communion. Similarly, for Laver (1981: 292), phatic communion is linguistically characterised by (1) general greetings and parting expressions such as "Good morning" and "Goodbye", respectively, (2) direct address greetings such as "Mr. Smith", and (3) small talk, as in "Nice day for the time of the year". For Cruz (2013: 8), phatic communion may linguistically include acts such as welcomes, well-wishes, complaints, compliments about obvious achievements or personal traits and accounts, and descriptions of the speaker's history and views, and comments about trivial, irrelevant happenings. Moreover, phatic communion may use small forms of small talk linguistically realised as questioning, self-asking, respect, praise, appreciation, gratitude, pranks, invitation, apology, prayer, and interrupting (Mohamad et al., 2023: 693). Other forms may be suggestions and advice, requests and appeals, promises and reminders to indirect threats and warnings (Al-Qinai, 2011: 25). Ernawati (2021: 112) observes that, at least in Palembang language, phatic utterances vary in their linguistic forms. They can be particles, words or phrases.

The sequential position of phatic communion is considered a major aspect, as Laver (1975: 218) points out. He states that the conversational structure of interactions where phatic communion appears is divided into three phases: opening, medial and closing. In the opening phase, the expression “breaking the ice” is used to describe this phase, in which the interlocutors smoothly run the transition from non-interaction to interaction, making the potentially embarrassing, discomfort tension of the interaction’s early moments less serious. Essentially, this phase starts up the interaction (by greeting). Additionally, Laver (1975: 220, 221) includes other functions in this phase:

1. Propitiatory: preventing potential hostility due to silence and thus making the interaction friendly and calm.
2. Exploratory: making participants feel their way towards the working consensus of their interaction, and serving as an initial identification between strangers.
3. Initiatory: helping participants cooperate in starting the interaction comfortably, by using “emotionally uncontroversial communicative material, and demonstrating their mutual acceptance of the possibility of an interaction taking place”.

Despite phatic communion being “an almost universal habit” in the interactional opening phases in English-speaking cultures, there are situations where it is avoided in this phase such as when the interlocutors have already met that day, or when their roles are already clearly defined, as in a university lecture (Laver, 1975: 218).

In the medial phase, Laver (1975: 218) maintains that participants break the ice in the initial phase to move to the medial phase, which he terms as “the medial business phase”, where the interaction’s main business is made. Despite Laver’s statement that no phatic communion appears in this phase, Cruz (2013: 137) stresses the point that “phatic discourse cannot be restricted to the margins of conversations... it also appears in the middle of the purely transactional phase as a way to ensure the achievement of interactive goals because of the friendly atmosphere it creates or maintains”. This means that the medial phase can also contain phatic speech, through which participants avoid immediate interactive conflict. Maíz-Arévalo (2017: 5) gives an example of a post to show how a participant, after the initial phase, thanks, compliments and comments revealing personal information: “*Thank you for your interesting comments, Anat! I really like your interpretation. By the way, I also prefer Mulan hehe [...]*”

Both Cruz (2013: 138) and Manzo (2014: 159) suggest some functions in this phase to create or maintain a good atmosphere:

1. Entertaining: passing the time, while interacting amicably and creating or maintaining good friendship.
2. Reinforcing: strengthening prior information, feelings, or attitudes about particular events produced in a previous interaction.
3. Influencing: affecting other interlocutors’ viewpoints by spreading ideas about specific affairs and situations.

Finally, in the closing phase, Laver (1975: 218) observes that this phase is the same as the opening phase in that it is transitional as it runs the transition from full interaction to non-interaction or departure - to bring the interaction to an end (e.g. farewell). He adds that the phatic function here is the interlocutors’ “need to establish a continuing consensus for future encounters”, but it also has a supporting function used “to consolidate the relationship experienced in the current interaction”. Laver (1975: 230, 231) suggests some other functions:

1. Mitigating: decreasing any possible feeling of rejection felt by an interlocuter when the closing phase is initiated by their fellow interlocuter. This mitigation secures

cooperation and establishes a consent in closing the interaction comfortably. Examples include “*I’m sorry, I have to go, I’m about to give a lecture*” or “*I’m afraid I must be off, I’ve a million things to do*”.

2. Consolidating: emphasising the existing relationship and the quality of the ongoing interaction which is drawing to a close. Examples may be “*It was nice seeing you,*” “*Hope your cold gets better soon,*” “*See you next week,*” and “*Say hello to Jeanie for me.*”

Phatic communion can also be avoided in the closing phase in situations such as when the interlocutors know they will encounter again shortly or when their roles are already defined by the situation, as in a lecture at university (Laver, 1975: 227).

2.3 Related Studies

A number of studies have linguistically touched the phatic communication phenomenon in Iraqi Arabic and Standard Arabic from various perspectives. For instance, Hamdoun’s (2024) research revealed uses and functions of phatic expressions, investigating native and non-native English speakers’ ways for opening and closing conversations at Saudi multilingual context, and exploring the influence of phatic communication among English native and non-native speaking. It also sought to identify the connection between phatic communication and linguistic politeness. For achieving the study aims quantitatively and qualitatively, a questionnaire was used and semi-structured interviews were conducted. Hamdoun found that phatic expressions and politeness are strongly related to each other in that both are concerned with social relationship aspects. Moreover, a considerable harmony exists among the phatic expressions employed by both native and non-native speakers, especially native English speakers who attempt to speak the non-native English speakers’ mother language, i.e. Arabic, for greeting or starting a conversation with each other.

A study carried out by Kadhim and Ahmed (2023) examined the language teacher’s identity and role in teaching speaking skills with using phatic expressions in Iraqi secondary schools, with identifying the most preferable type of phatic expressions. The population of the teachers were 23 males and 27 females, who were interviewed and given questionnaire and access to a survey through an internet study. The survey consisted of a 5-point Likert scale for rating the items ranging from ‘strongly agree’ to ‘strongly disagree’. Their study revealed that using phatic expressions in teaching speaking skills has a positive influence on the academic achievements of the student, and that verbal and non-verbal phatic expressions are the most preferred types.

Mohamad et al.’s (2023) study concerned with comparing phatic expression functions between the Arab and Malay communication according to three conversation phases: initial, medial and final. The comparison was made on the small talk data obtained from two dramas: a Lebanese Arabic drama ‘أوراق الشجر المر’ (Bitter Time Papers) and a Malay drama ‘Nur2’. The study used a descriptive qualitative method and relied upon the phatic communion theory by Malinowski (1923). The study showed similarities in phatic expression functions made use of in the middle communication phase. With regard to differences, while the Malay community rarely interrupts conversations using phatic expressions while conversating, the Arab community tends to interrupt conversations. Moreover, the study found that the Arab community showed a broader range of phatic expression functions than the Malay community.

In their study, Al-Ubaidy and Jebur (2016) explored phatic expressions used by labourers as a multilingual speech community working in Basra ports. It investigated

their sociolinguistic patterns and communicative characteristics and showing the relationship of these with phatic expressions and speech community's social factors. The data, comprised of three groups of native and non-native speakers, were collected by direct observation and analysed qualitatively and quantitatively. Al-Ubaidy and Jebur showed that the labourers' social context and status influence the use of phatic expressions, and that cultural specificity describes the features of this speech community's phatic expressions. They also found that the labourers' speaking strategies like code-switching going along with phatic expressions show their willingness to work in one solidary combination and that their linguistic behaviour enhances and intensifies their group membership.

Another study tackling phatic expressions is by Al-Qinai (2011). It examined the effect of misinterpretation or mistranslation of culturally divergent phatic communion formulae and their functions in an English-Arabic context. The study showed that there are similarities between Arabic and English with matters related to the variables of phatic expressions as well as there are differences, which manifested themselves with more complimentary phatic phrases in Arabic but more single words in English. Moreover, it was found that there is a need to have the reproduction of values within the pragmatic and semiotic constraints as well as the socio-cultural background of the interactants when translating phatic expressions.

Despite diversity in studies carried out to delve into phatic communion in Iraqi Arabic and Arabic, still there is insufficient research on phatic expressions in Iraqi Arabic. Phatic expressions are still not so widely examined in Iraqi Arabic, and no study, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, has ever attempted to shed light on phatic expressions used in social media platforms in general and Messenger chat interactions in particular. Hence, it is hoped that this study will fill this literature gap and will strengthen knowledge about the use of phatic expressions in Iraqi Arabic interactions.

2.4 Internet-Mediated Communication and Facebook Messenger

Internet-mediated communication involves the coding, decoding and processing of linguistic information and other symbolic systems via the medium of the global network, the internet, and through communication technologies like mobile phones, and media such as instant messaging and chatting systems, by an online interaction between a sender and a receiver (Bodomo, 2010: 6). It is a communication occurring between two specified individuals connected to each other online through the instrumentality of separate, networked computers or mobile phones (Stoerger, 2012: 31; Herring, 1996: 1).

This internet-mediated communication can be either synchronous, i.e., real-time or immediate communication, as in real-time chatting system, or asynchronous (delayed communication or at a later point in time), i.e., users leave their messages to their partners although these partners may be offline (Bodomo, 2010: 6; Herring, 1996: 1). Moreover, it can be one-to-one communication, requiring a simple mobile phone and involving a network instant messaging or chatting between two individuals or users (Bodomo, 2010: 11). One of the common private synchronous and one-to-one internet-based communication systems is the free network instant messaging service Messenger, which allows the users of the internet to exchange information via written words along with numbers and emotional icons. The users communicate through sending and receiving personalised text messages with family members, friends and colleagues (Bodomo, 2010: 6, 61, 62). Messenger, as a text-based instant synchronous messaging

and chatting service, is one of the features that Meta Facebook offers, and Facebook is now one of the most dominant social network sites and is emerging as a significant business communication method (Rees and Hopkins, 2009: 123, 124). This instant internet-mediated communication is now very popular among the youth in most countries and parts of the world (Bodomo, 2010: 60).

3. Methodology

3.1 Case Study and Research Design

The type of case study in the current research is disciplined-configurative. The researcher used the theory of phatic communion and applied it to Messenger chat interactions to provide an explanation for the general nature of phatic expressions used by young Iraqi males and females. Therefore, since the major goal in this study is describing a communication phenomenon, this study employed descriptive research design and used a qualitative approach through the data analysis process. Content analysis method, as an analytical tool, was used to capture phatic words, phrases and sentences in the data and to describe and interpret their meanings, forms and functions as well as to make conclusions.

3.2 Data Collection

The data of the current study involved a total of 57 Facebook Messenger text chats, 27 of which were exchanged by 18 males and 30 by 28 females. For the purpose of collecting the data, a purposive sampling technique was used. Messenger text chats were provided electronically to the researcher as screenshots by young Iraqi Messenger users, who were asked by the researcher to provide such data. The researcher also used the snowball sampling technique to further expand the process of data collection. He asked some target participants, whom he thought they are adequate and trustworthy targets, to ask other participants they knew to provide the same kind of data.

3.4 Participants

The participants in this study were young Iraqis of both genders from the north of Iraq. They were aged between 18-30 and belonged to different Iraqi ethnic groups: Arabs, Shabaks, Turkmens, Assyrians (Christians), and Yezidis. The Messenger chats were obtained from a variety of participants: university students, teachers, workers, friends, relatives, and some other common people. The written language in most of the participants' Messenger chats was the Mesopotamian Arabic, which is considered the standard dialect of Iraqi Arabic society. Despite the wide use and mutual intelligibility of this dialect, some participants tended to use their own dialect such as the Mosuli dialect in their chat interactions. Although some other Iraqi dialects such as Baghdadi and Basrawi were not considered for analysis due to the unavailability of chats from these dialects, they are thought to involve phatic language with different vocabulary; they tend to have similar forms and functions of phatic expressions but with different morphological and syntactic constructions, which do not provide any significance to data analysis and are out of scope. Thus, it is assumed that all the participants from northern Iraq largely represented the wide spectrum of Iraqi society with reference to the written language and phatic expressions used in the chats.

3.5 Analytical Procedures

The researcher followed a particular analytical procedure in data analysis. First, text chats were extracted from screenshots and typed manually in their native language,

then translated into English. It is noteworthy to mention that in translating Arabic text chats into English, some (cultural) challenges had risen. Some terms and phrases did not have a direct and exact equivalent in English. They had social and cultural connotations and norms, thus they were rather translated and interpreted based on context, culture and communicative meaning. Second, for the purpose of proper organisation, text chats were classified into their own phases: initial, medial and final, where chats, for instance, at the beginning of the interaction were allocated in the initial phase section, and chats in the middle and final stages were slotted in their own phases, respectively. The researcher then identified the text chats that were thought to be phatic and identified their linguistic forms and functions. The text chats were analysed with respect to their forms and functions as well as to the type of deictic reference of phatic expressions, i.e. neutral or personal, proposed by Laver (1975). It is significant to note that each new turn-taking of the Messenger text chat producers was labelled as (S) when it was the message sender's – or addresser's – turn, or as (R) when it was the message recipient's – or addressee's – turn.

3.6 Ethical Issues

This study has some ethical considerations. The researcher ensures that the participants had provided informed consent to send and share their Messenger chats with the researcher to be used for the purpose of this study only. The researcher also ensures that the privacy and confidentiality of these Messenger chats were protected, and that the chats were anonymised in line with ethical principles.

4. Data Analysis

The data of the current study are going to be analysed, exploring their linguistic forms and functions, and their type of reference. The data are categorised into two main parts. Part one includes male-male text chat interactions, and part two includes female-female ones. Each part is further classified into three phases, initial, medial and final, and each phase in each part contains five excerpts. That means each part offers a discussion for fifteen excerpts. Mention must be made of the young Iraqi Arabic interlocutors' typing style or written language in Messenger text chat interactions. It lacks several essential punctuation marks, namely full stop, comma, and question and exclamatory marks. There are no punctuation marks to separate units of grammar such as words, phrases and sentences from each other. Nevertheless, looking at the linguistic context of the situation, the researcher knows, as far as he could, where the separation of grammatical units is, what type of sentence it is and how the sentence must have been constructed. These unpunctuated text chat interactions are better illustrated through the English translation. It makes clear how the written language of these unpunctuated text chats must have been. Note that the text chats which the researcher identified as phatic are typed in bold font.

4.1 Male-Male Text Chat Interactions

4.1.1 Initial Phase

Excerpt 1:

S: مرحباً شلونك شخبارك (Hello, how are you? What's your news?)

R: هلا بالغالي الحمد لله (Hi, dear. Thank God.)

انت شلونك (How are you?)

S: الحمد لله زين (Thank God. I'm fine.)

والله مشتاقين (I do miss you.)

R: والله هم اني مشتاق (I do miss you too.)

S: يا هلا ابراهيم (Welcome, Ibrahim.)

(I saw an advertisement in front of your stores.) شفت اعلان كدام محلات مالكم

In this excerpt of a chat interaction between two young neighbours, who are friends too, the message sender (S) opens the conversation with other-oriented phatic expressions. Opening with 'مرحباً' (Hello) used as an other-oriented routine greeting word, he employs other-oriented phatic routine greeting expressions. 'شلونك' (How are you?) and 'شخبارك' (What's your news?) take the form of interrogative words that directly refer to the recipient's health and general life affairs, but are used to greet the recipient and open the interaction politely. In response to these expressions, the message recipient (R) uses an other-oriented informal phatic greeting word 'هلا' (Hi) and an other-oriented phatic address term of endearment 'الغالي' (dear), as well as a neutral phatic declarative sentence الحمد لله (Thank God). The first two expressions are made use of to greet the sender back and break the silence. Moreover, an other-oriented phatic greeting interrogative sentence 'انت شلونك' (How are you?) is utilised for the purpose of greeting the sender. Thus, he constructs an initial good contact with the sender. The sender's response to the recipient's question is the same as being phatic too. Besides, a phatic expression taking the form of an other-oriented declarative sentence 'والله مشتاقين' (I do miss you) serves to express friendship and intimacy, hence creating comfort and a peaceful atmosphere. Likewise, the recipient replies with the same phatic declarative sentence. The final phatic expression before the interlocutors jump to the medial business phase is the other-oriented phatic declarative sentence 'يا هلا ابراهيم' (Welcome, Ibrahim), taking the form of a welcome. Welcoming the recipient, it conveys respect to him and makes him feel accepted and at ease. No useful information is exchanged between the interlocutors. Now the transition from this initial phase (or let's call it the warming-up phase), which carries several routine phatic expressions, to the business phase is made by the sender's statement about seeing an advertisement, which obviously imparts information to the recipient.

Excerpt 2:

S: الغالي (Dear)

(I came by to the shop, but I didn't see you) مرينك على المحل ما شفتك

R: هلا اخوي (Hello, my dear.)

(I was at college.) كنت بالدوام

The first message producer, i.e. the addresser, in this excerpt makes use of an other-oriented phatic adjective in the form of an endearment term 'الغالي' (Dear) as an affectionate and friendly way to directly address and greet his conversational partner. Moreover, this direct informal form of address, put into service as a greeting and addressing form, functions as phatic since it not only greets and addresses the recipient but also opens the interaction smoothly and helps create an initial comfortable contact with him, who in turn responds with a phatic greeting declarative sentence, containing the other-oriented phatic greeting address form 'اخوي' (my dear) used as a single perfect linguistic element in making the contact friendly and getting his addresser closer to him.

Excerpt 3:

S: يولد (Hey, bro)

R: اني ادري واحد اكل السلام عليكم مرحبا مو يولد. شنو شايفني بالشارع (I know that one says peace be upon you or hello, not hey bro. Do you think I'm a strange coming from streets?)

In a chat interaction between two very close friends, the message sender opens up the conversation by using an other-oriented phatic informal greeting word 'يولد' (Hey, bro). This word is usually used informally for addressing strange boys and youth. However, it has been used by an interlocutor to grab the attention of his recipient. It denotes familiar friendship with his recipient, with whom he has a very close and personal relationship that permits him to address his recipient in such a way. It is not impolite to open the conversation with such a word since there exists a friendly and familiar bond between the two friends, who appear to be making a small talk and joking in their chatting interaction. This small talk or joke making is particularly reflected by the recipient's complaint or criticising. His sentences taking the form of complaint or criticising are phatic as they make a trivial small talk, and therefore create a warm, pleasant atmosphere for the interaction. As they kept on chatting, they further engaged in exchanging several phatic expressions like these with the same function of making a small talk. Later, this small talk chatting ceased to talk about the main topic.

Excerpt 4:

S: مساء الخير استاذ شلونك (Good afternoon, mister. How are you?)

ذاك اليوم استاذ نهند كلي راح ادلك ملف عن نظريات ادبية فهو اخذ رقمي ولي هسه ما داز ممكن تذكره بالموضوع بلا زحمة (That day, Mr. Muhannad told me that he would send me files of literary theory. So, he got my number, but he has not sent any yet. Could you remind him, please?)

R: مساء النور، استاذ دلوفان. (Good afternoon, Mr. Dlovan.)

(All right, no problem. I'll tell me.) تمام مو مشكلة. راح أبلغه.

This is a chat interaction between two teachers. They seem to be interacting formally as they are using formal address terms like the title of respect 'استاذ' (mister). The interaction is initiated politely and formally by the text message sender, Mr. Dlovan, using an other-oriented phatic greeting noun phrase 'مساء الخير' (Good afternoon) together with an other-oriented formal greeting address form 'استاذ' (mister), and an other-oriented phatic greeting question word to literally ask for the recipient's health state. These expressions provide no useful information, so they are phatic; they serve to greet the recipient and open the interaction formally and politely, therefore respect is implicitly conveyed to the recipient's self-image and high social status. Likewise, the text message recipient replies with similar phatic expressions like 'مساء الخير' (Good afternoon) and a formal greeting address form with the title plus name 'استاذ دلوفان' (Mr. Dlovan). The phatic function of the recipient's declarative sentence is to greet the sender back formally and politely and express respect feelings to him and his high social status.

Excerpt 5:

S: لازم نتابعها (We have to watch it.) (Sent a football match photo before this sentence.)

R: ومباراة قوية (And it is a strong match.)

In this excerpt, the conversation is opened without any phatic expression. Sending a photo about an upcoming football match between two European teams, the sender immediately sends a message about the need to watch this match. The text message recipient implicitly uncovers his approval, writing that this is a strong match. What governs the fact that there is no phatic text expression produced by the sender to open the interaction politely is the familiar relationship he has with his interlocutor. When the conversation partners hold a close friendship and chat very frequently, there appears

no need to open their text interaction with greetings or any other phatic expressions. Mention needs to be made of the recipient's response, which is phatic in this context. He compliments his interlocutor's choice of watching this football match by writing that this is a strong match. Since it is strong, it implies that it should be watched. However, it might not be important that the match is strong; rather, what is written is to compliment the other's choice. This becomes phatic as it expresses solidarity.

4.1.2 Medial Phase

Excerpt 1:

S: على هالجدول للأسف ما نكدر ننزل حتى بالعيد (Unfortunately, we can't go on holiday even in Eid according to this schedule.)

R: حرامات والله (Alas, I swear to God!)

In this excerpt, the text message sender is in a text chat interaction with his classmate. He is condemning the decision taken against a group of students who are from a certain ethnic group. The situation he is talking about is that they can't leave college and go home and enjoy Eid because the exams start in the same period of the Eid. The response from the recipient, who is a student from a different ethnic group and who can do the exams at any time, is 'حرامات والله' (Alas, I swear to God!), where 'حرامات' means 'alas' while 'والله' figuratively means 'I swear to God', emphasising the misfortune or sadness and the seriousness of the situation. The response is undoubtedly phatic since it provides no information but conveys sympathy and solidarity he feels towards his classmate's difficult situation. It is an other-oriented phatic exclamatory sentence that expresses sympathy, solidarity, understanding and care for the other. As a result, the relationship between them is reinforced, and a more personal closeness is created, and the contact might be further enhanced for the continuation of the current online interaction.

Excerpt 2:

S: الغالي (Dear)

مررتك على المحل ما شفتك (I came by to the shop, but I didn't see you)

R: هلا اخوي (Hello, my dear.)

كنت بالدوام (I was at college.)

اخبارك امورك مشتاقين (What's your news? What are things going with you? I miss you.)

S: اني أكثر مشتاقلك يا طيب (I miss you even more, good guy)

That interaction in excerpt 2 in the initial phase above continues immediately by extra expressions by the recipient, adding three other-oriented phatic greeting words semantically used as questions and a declarative sentence. The two interrogative words 'اخبارك امورك' (What's your news? What are things going with you?) are put to use not to ask about the addresser's health or to get any piece of information but merely to interrupt and change the topic of the conversation, keep chatting, and soften the conversation. Even the word 'مشتاقين' (I miss you), employed as a declarative sentence, is phatic because it reveals that the recipient cares about his addresser, hence strengthening their relationship. The sender takes the turn in reply to the recipient's phatic expressions and uses the same phatic expression about missing, with the addition of 'يا طيب' (good guy), which conveys a friendly closeness.

Excerpt 3:

S: Edxbrk mglq sl bali ymk (I'm calling you, but you are offline. I'm worried about you.)

R: alhmd llh edaxd al'elaj (Thank God, I'm taking the medicine.)

S: In shaa llh ma 'ndak ala al'afiyeh (God willing, you'll have nothing but wellness.)

R: ahsn alhmdllh an shaa llh yrooh bal'elaj (Better, thank God. God willing, it'll disappear by medicine.)

S: Amāne ash tchtaaj āni akhok (Honestly, whatever you need, tell me as I'm like your brother.)

Phatic expressions in the medial phase might be resorted to by the interlocutors not only for the purpose of maintaining the interaction but also for expressing solidarity and comfort. This is manifested by the text message sender's other-oriented phatic declarative sentence 'إن شاء الله ما عندك إلا العافية' (God willing, you'll have nothing but wellness), taking the form of a well-wish. It serves to create goodwill and functions as an emotional support towards his interlocutor whom he wishes to get better and healthy again. Another phatic expression by the same interlocutor which performs the function of establishing solidarity, support and trust is the other-oriented phatic declarative sentence 'أمانة أش تحتاج أني أخوك', put in the form of an encouragement.

Excerpt 4:

S: Aslam alaykum ashonok shkbarak (Peace be upon you. How are you? What's your news?)

axويا 'ndak hale wfaa, allh yرحمه ويجاوز عنه (Dear, you have a death case. **May Allah have mercy on him and forgive him.**)

shayrblak bal'azbap (What's exactly your relation to him?)

R: Aslam alaykum al'salam (Peace be upon you.)

An other-oriented phatic subjunctive sentence in the form of a condolence such as 'اللّٰه يرحمه ويجاوز عنه', which the text message sender employs after greeting his interlocutor phatically and after stating a death case, is put to use in order to not only console his interlocutor but also to create feelings of solidarity and a calm atmosphere, in addition to setting a pleasant social mood. In doing so, he acts politely and shows respect since in Iraqi culture people should pray for the dead and give condolences to their relatives and friends.

Excerpt 5:

S: aljuma'at naltqi an shaa llh (We'll meet on Friday, God willing.)

R: Omar is asking about you. (sent with a laughing emoji)

S: jayyoo ma'ak lilm'ehd (Bring him with you to the institute.)

In this excerpt, the message sender is saying that they will hopefully meet on Friday. In the middle of the interaction, the message receiver shifts the topic of the conversation to the fact that someone (Omar) is asking about the other interlocutor, i.e., sender, with a companying laughing emoji. This other-oriented statement is phatic in the sense that it makes a small talk and gossip. It is about a description of a covert person's daily life accounts, and it serves to keep talking. In this way, consequently, it motivates the other interlocutor to keep chatting and brings pleasure and comfort.

4.1.3 Closing Phase

Excerpt 1:

S:خلي ارووح (Let me go.)

R: allh ma'ak khalay aruuh anam wakad min wakt blaki adrslay shuyeh (God be with you. I'll go to sleep and wake up early to study some.)

S: دير بالك عالعراق (Take care of Iraq) (with a laughing emoji)

R: تنجاز بي انت اني رايع انام طز بكلشي (You deal with it yourself. I'm going to sleep. **Piss off to everything.**)

S: ههههه باي (hhhhh bye.)

R: كل الهلا (You're most welcome.)

After the completion of the information exchange, interlocutors sometimes come to an interactional state where they have nothing else to chat about, so they close their conversation with the employment of various phatic expressions, in spite of the fact that they sometimes do not close it, especially when the interlocutors hold a close relationship, as it will be observed in excerpt (5) below. In this excerpt, the interlocutors, two intimate colleagues, have nothing more to chat about, so they close their conversation. This is initiated by the text message sender saying that he will leave, using a self-oriented phatic mitigating imperative sentence 'خلي اروح' (Let me go) in the form of a farewell, with which he informs his message recipient of leaving. This is an explicit, informal way of leaving the conversation. The message recipient also leaves with informing his interlocutor of leaving. Rather than actually closing the conversation, they start making a small talk and making fun or talking about trivial things. They use the other-oriented advice form 'دير بالك عالعراق' (Take care of Iraq), the other-oriented request form 'تنجاز بي انت' (You deal with it yourself), and the neutral mocking form 'طز بكلشي' (Piss off to everything), although the middle self-oriented phatic declarative sentence 'اني رايع انام' (I'm going to sleep) with the function of mitigating and in the form of a farewell, works for leaving, in which they both agree to close the conversation comfortably. These small talk and fun-making expressions carrying an entertaining function, except the last one, soften the conversation and create laughter between the interlocutors. Moreover, 'ههههه باي' (hhhhh bye) is an other-oriented routine phatic leaving-taking word with the typographical laughter, which serves to end the conversation on the part of the message sender. In response, the message recipient uses a welcoming form constructed in an other-oriented phatic declarative sentence 'كل الهلا' (You're most welcome) in an attempt to finally close their conversational interaction phatically. So, the welcome form here becomes a phatic means to terminate their interaction.

Excerpt 2:

S: بس حنا كلنا علمود الايزيدية بلجدول ماراح نخلي متحانات بعيدهم (But we agreed that due to the Yezidi's Eid, we won't have exams during their Eid.)

R: شكرا ما تقصرون (Thanks a lot.)

S: قلبي (You're welcome.)

R: حبيبي برهوم (My dear, Barhoom.)

The same conversational interaction in Excerpt (1) in the medial phase above comes to an end when the message recipient thanks his interlocutor for considering Yezidi's Eid holiday and not setting exams in their Eid. The other-oriented phatic casual declarative sentence, in the form of thanking, starts closing the interaction. It is taken as a token of appreciation or gratitude for his interlocutor being considerate and also as a way to begin closing the interaction. By and large, the thanking expression acts as a substitute for a leave-taking or parting expression such as 'bye' or 'goodbye'. Moreover, the routine phatic endearment terms 'قلبي' (communicatively meaning 'you're welcome', but literally meaning 'my heart') and 'حبيبي' (My dear, Barhoom) (literally meaning 'my lover') are exchanged by the interlocutors as other-oriented phatic tools to establish a comfortable and friendly atmosphere or a pleasant social

mood, and to implicitly close the interaction. Consequently, their relationship is sustained for any future online interaction.

Excerpt 3:

S: اليوم اجي عليك بالليل (I will come to see you tonight.)

R: كل الهلا بيك اخوي (You are most welcome, my dear.)

The text message sender in an online conversational interaction with this mate informs him that he will pay him a visit to see him. This is done after talking about general affairs between them and about the possibility of meeting again since they have not met for a long time. The recipient of the message responds with an other-oriented phatic declarative sentence in the form of a welcome that brings the interaction to an end. 'كل الهلا بيك اخوي' (communicatively meaning 'you are most welcome, my dear') is phatic as it gives no propositional information, but serves to end the interaction in a comfortable and friendly way by welcoming the other interlocutor. Additionally, the phatic vocative form 'اخوي' (my dear) (literally meaning 'my brother') is employed for addressing the other interlocutor in a friendly way. Therefore, the recipient further strengthens friendship and the feeling of intimacy with his interlocutor.

Excerpt 4:

S: جان عندي وجع واحس اكو شي هسة ماكو (I had pain and was feeling there is something.)

R: ان شاء الله اجر وعافيه (God willing, reward and wellness will be yours.)

الحمد لله الله يشافيك (Thank God. May God heal you.)

In this excerpt of an interaction between two friends, for the message recipient to close the conversation with his sender, he utilises an other-oriented phatic declarative sentences that take the form of wishing and goodwill. Expressing comfort, solidarity and tranquillity towards the other interlocutor, they bring the interaction to an end. This becomes a new way of closing interactions, besides routine farewells, thanking, and welcoming.

Excerpt 5:

S: ها كملت الموحدة مالتكم (Hey, have you completed the registration of the National Identity Card?)

R: لا والله للأحد (No, I swear to God, until Sunday.)

S: ليش شعجب (Why?)

R: السجل ماواضح (The record is unclear/unreadable).

S: أي مثل سالفة امي. إذا تحتاج الموحدة مال امي موجودة (Just like my mother's case. You can take my mother's card if you want it.)

R: لا والله السجل مشوه خاصة مال يوسف (No, I swear to God that the record is distorted, especially Yousif's).

Interlocutors with a very close and familiar relation, who know each other very well and who interact frequently, might often engage in a conversational interaction without exchanging phatic expressions of various kinds, especially in the initial and closing phases. This is what this excerpt reveals. The sender of the message opens the conversation with no phatic expression, except the attention-getting marker 'ها' (Hey). Likewise, in the final phase, no routine phatic leave-taking expressions are used. The interlocutors leave the conversation open with no phatic expression that signals the end of the conversation, or without taking each other's leave using 'goodbye', for instance. It is left open because there must be a shared knowledge between the interlocutors that they would meet later, either online or face-to-face. Moreover, very intimate

interlocutors like these, who chat routinely, might consider phatic expressions unimportant and unnecessary. Therefore, they choose to avoid employing them.

4.2 Female-Female Text Chat Interactions

4.2.1 Initial Phase

Excerpt 1:

S: هلوو اشونكي اخباركي (Hello, how are you? What's your news?)

(I'm Lubna, graduated from Female Teachers Institute.)

قليلي انتي تدرسين كلية اهليه (I want to ask you if you are studying in a private college.)

اما اذا درست كليه اهليه تتضاف الشهادة (If you study in a private college, will the certificate be added?)

R: هلو حياتي (Hello, my dear.)

S: (send a thumb-up emoji)

In the initial phase of the conversation above between two young females who don't know each other, the message sender opens the text chatting with her recipient by drawing upon three phatic expressions successively: هلو (Hello), اشونكي (how are you?), and اخباركي (What's your news?). The first takes the form of an other-oriented phatic greeting word, and the other two take the form of other-oriented phatic interrogative words, both functioning as greetings and conversational interaction triggers. They are other-oriented phatic expressions in the sense that they refer personally to the addressee. What confirms that these expressions are phatic is the recipient's reply, which is also phatic. She doesn't respond to the addresser's greeting question words by giving information about her health or what she has been up to. Instead, she immediately uses an other-oriented greeting word هلو (Hello) and an other-oriented endearment term حياتي (my dear) (literally meaning 'my life'), as if she is saying "you are my dear". It is adopted so as to and greet and address her interlocutor in a lovely manner and to express affection, indicating that the addressee is dearly appreciated, and therefore by which she builds a strong comfortable relationship with her. In this excerpt, as in some others, the first interlocutor opens the formal conversation with phatic expressions and the second facilitates the starting of the conversation by using phatic expressions, too.

Excerpt 2:

S: الوووو (Hellooooo.)

صباح الخير (Good morning.)

اشونكي ان شاء الله بخير (How are you? God willing, you're fine.)

طمينيني عنك (Want to make sure you're fine.)

R: مساء النور (Good afternoon.)

الحمد لله انا بخير انت اشونج (Thank God. I'm fine. How are you?)

S: انا بخير الحمد لله (I'm fine. Thank God.)

واخيرا رديتي علي (Finally, you have replied to me.)

The excerpt above is an interaction between two friends. The text message sender exploits a neutral phatic greeting word الوووو (Hellooooo) so as to initiate the conversation. As an other-oriented polite routine expression, she employs the phatic greeting noun phrase صباح الخير (Good morning), by which she not only further greets the recipient but also creates a pleasant atmosphere. She then turns to make use of another other-oriented phatic interrogative word 'اشونكي', followed by an other-oriented phatic declarative sentence, in the form of a well-wish or hope, asking about her addressee's health and hoping she is fine, thus acknowledging her addressee's presence. The fourth sentence tends not to be phatic as she is checking if her addressee is really

fine since she had not replied to her for many hours. The first three expressions are identified as phatic since they give no information, and are adopted as greetings and open the conversation pleasantly and friendly. Their role is to establishing initial good contact. Replying with a similar greeting noun phrase مساء الخير (Good afternoon) as she replied to her addresser in the afternoon time, the addressee helps make the conversation even more comfortable, and she enhances this good contact at the beginning by using (1) a neutral phatic declarative sentence الحمد لله (Thank God) which expresses general relief and gratitude, (2) a self-oriented phatic declarative sentence انا بخير (I'm fine) as a common everyday reply to the addresser's question, and (3) an other-oriented phatic interrogative sentence انت اشونج (How are you?) to show interest and care in her addresser. Lastly, the addresser's response in the form of the self-oriented declarative sentence انا بخير (I'm fine) and neutral declarative sentence 'الحمد لله' (Thank God) is also similarly phatic in its nature.

Excerpt 3:

S: علا (Ula.)

دحقي (Listen.)

R: دحقتو (I'm listening.)

S: منو من طلاب الرابع عندج مراسله معاهم (Which of the fourth-grade students do you have contact with?)

In this excerpt, the text sender initiates the conversation as if by knocking on the recipient's door. This is made by direct addressing though the use of the recipient's first name علا (Ula) and the verb دحقي (listen), for the purpose of identifying the addressee and attracting her attention to a question or something important coming shortly. These two one-word phatic expressions are other-oriented in their reference. The self-oriented phatic response of the recipient, in turn, includes a similar verb, which functions as understanding and indicates that she is ready for chatting and for what is to be chatted shortly.

Excerpt 4:

S: هلو بيريفان (Hello, Berivan.)

شلونج (How are you?)

وصيتوا من شي ان لو بعد (Have you ordered from Shein or not yet?)

R: هلو (Hello)

الحمد لله (Thank God.)

اي حرام وصيت (Yes, I have.)

Not quite different from the previous excerpts, this one between two young ladies involves initial phatic expressions which include an other-oriented routine greeting word (هلو) and an addressing in the form of a first name (بيريفان), followed by another other-oriented phatic greeting word, all with the function of greeting and starting the interaction politely. In her turn, the addressee responds with the same greeting word and a neutral declarative sentence in reply to the health inquiry. The phatic purpose is to be polite before she can answer the question about ordering. That is, impoliteness, or disrespect, is avoided through the addressee's use of such phatic expressions.

Excerpt 5:

S: تجين معاي (Are you coming with me?)

R: وين (Where?)

It is generally believed that it is through the use of a greeting that one interlocuter opens up a chatting conversation, inviting another one to it. However, it sometimes happens that a text greeting of various forms can be omitted and that the interlocutor immediately begins the topic, with no need to identify their identity. This is what excerpt 5 demonstrates, in which the text message sender starts asking a direct question, with no routine greeting or addressing. Here, it gives no surprise that there is no greeting in the initial or opening phase because the interlocutors, who chat very often, know each other very well and are close friends; they share a close relationship. Consequently, it becomes unnecessary, or even boring, to go through a routine greeting text conversational interaction. This suggests that there exists a continuous interaction between the interlocutors.

4.2.2 Medial Phase

Excerpt 1:

S: انقبلتو صباحي (I applied to join the morning study, but I was not admitted.)

R: ايي (Yeahh.)

حاليا انتي اهلي اداومي كليه أهليه؟؟ (Are you currently studying in a private college??)

In this excerpt, the addressee responds with a neutral phatic word 'اي' (yeahh) to the addresser's statement that she was not admitted in the morning study. The use of the neutral single-word phatic response, i.e. the back-channel device 'اي' (yeahh), in the medial phase of the interaction has the function of indicating that the recipient is attending to the conversation and that what has been stated by the message sender is observed and comprehended. It does not refer to any agreement on any kind of information or question and even no new information is given, too. If the phatic response was not given, the sender might not know whether the recipient has attended the particular statement or not.

Excerpt 2:

S: الشعر والرواية خرااa

R: لا انت واصله مرحله كلش (You are in a very bad and poor state!)

S: كلشششش (veryyy!)

R: وين ما وين؟؟ (Where are you and where are you going??)

شفتج ناشره مسافرين؟ (I saw that you have posted you travelled?)

S: اتصل فيديو دقايق نكمل هنا. تعاي اشوفج وين اني
Come to show you where I'm.)

The sole neutral phatic degree adverb 'كلشششش' (veryyy) produced by the addresser is a minimal response to the addressee's previous other-oriented phatic exclamatory sentence. It is employed as an expressive or an interjection to express agreement and strengthen the viewpoint in the previous sentence. It also implies that the addresser is attending the conversation. Accordingly, this expression reinforces the contact between them and maintains their familiar relation. The addressee's turn after this phatic word is made in the form of an other-oriented phatic interrogative sentence 'وين ما وين؟؟' (Where are you and where are you going??), asking about a description or personal account of the addresser's life. This small talk provides no information, but has the phatic purpose of developing and maintaining the text chat communication, and of changing the topic of the conversation. Almost in the same fashion, the conversation continues and the contact is enhanced by the initiation of an other-oriented phatic

interrogative construction ‘شفتج ناشرة مسافرين’, by which the addressee displays her interest in the addresser and her personal life.

Excerpt 3:

S: تعالوا يمنا اليوم. (Visit us today.)

R: تعرفين دوام ما تخلص الواجبات (You know there is school and the homework never finishes.)

S: أها نشوف فد يوم يكون عدنا مجال (Aha we'll see a day when you've a free time.)

R: اي من يكون عدكم مجال تعالو انتو (Yes, when you have a free time, come.)

The second turn-taking of the message sender contains an initial self-oriented phatic expressive interjection ‘أها’ (Aha). It is of course phatic in the sense that it provides no information, but serves to express the feeling of wonder and disbelief. The recipient agrees with the sender's self-oriented statement that they will visit them when they have a free time. He repeats most of the sender's statement and converts it into other-oriented. In doing so, an affirmation for the statement is made by the recipient. This affirmation is also made by the addition of the neutral phatic word ‘اي’ (yes) that carries no propositional content, but that makes the point that the recipient has comprehended the statement meaning. So, the other-oriented reference sentence here in the middle of the conversation is phatic since it affirms and emphasises information in the previous statement and keeps pace with the sender's opinion. Thus, the interaction is kept going by such a phatic sentence.

Excerpt 4:

S: هلو الطلاب عدهم امتحان (Hello, the students have an exam.)

R: (no reply)

S: هسة لا تردين علّية. طلابج عندهم امتحان (don't reply to me. Your students have an exam.)

R: انتي اشبيج انتي. ولي نايمه. (Hi, my dear. I'm sleeping. What's wrong with you?).

S: 3 أيام نايمه (You have been sleeping for 3 days!)

R: وي عدا اخذ علاج قوي مال شقيقة (I'm taking strong medicine for migraine.)

S: على اساس اعمل عملية مال شقيقه بالعطلة الربيعية (So I'm considering to have a medical operation in spring break after mid-term exams.)

(This is my situation during the rest of my time). (she sends a photo to show she is studying)

S: سلامات أجر وعافيه (May you have reward and wellness.)

(I have no problem, but the students are nagging.)

R: حقهم خطية (They have the right, poor students!)

S: اليوم تكدرين تجين (Can you come today?)

R: اليوم جمعة (Today is Friday.)

S: احسن (Better.)

R: مستحيل في داري اكو طلعة يوم جمعة (It's impossible in my home to go around on Friday.)

S: ممم (mmmm!)

R: hehehehehehehehe (hehehehehehehehe.)

In this long excerpt, several phatic utterances appear. In an interaction between two close female teachers who might have probably begun their conversation almost normally with exchanging phatic greetings, they keep the conversation going on with phatic wordings, phrasings and sentences in the middle of the conversation. In line 5, in the sender's turn, she uses an other-oriented phatic exclamatory sentence to express

doubt and disbelief around the situation that her addressee has been off for 3 days, as the addressee has given no reply for 3 days. In the recipient's turn (in line 6), she provides a self-oriented phatic statement that acts as a justification for being off for 3 days. Moreover, the topic of the conversation is further maintained when the recipient produces the self-oriented phatic statement about the operation she will have. These two sentences serve to provide a personal account or information on the recipient, thus making a small talk. The sender returns with an other-oriented phatic routine declarative sentence, in the form of a wish, which expresses her interest in the recipient and her concern about her recipient's general health state. An extra other-oriented phatic expression is made by the recipient in response to the sender's statement that the students are complaining about their upcoming exam. Using 'حقهم خطية' (They have the right, poor students!), where no new information is provided, she is displaying sympathy and solidarity for the students and also showing her interest in the information viewed and given negatively by the message sender. Responding this way, she connects to her addresser and enhances their relation. Even the statement 'مستحيل في داري اكو طلعة' 'يوم جمعة' is phatic as it gives the sense of a small talk conveyed in the form of an everyday activity description. Additionally, a self-oriented phatic exclamatory interjection ممم (mmmm), which is in response to the addressee's comment on the impossibility of going around on Friday, is utilised to express understanding together with the purpose of passing the time of the interaction and of filling an awkward silence. In response to this phatic interjection, the addressee responds with a phatic typographical laughter with which she expresses pleasure in the chatting interaction.

Excerpt 5:

S: خلي محاكم وكل مايجي استدعاء اروح وين المشكلة هو راح يبزع (There is a court, and when there is a call, I go. There is no problem with that. He will get fed up.

R: الله كريم ان شاء الله تفض الج بخير وعافيه يا رب (Hopefully. God willing, the case ends well and with wellness for you.)

In excerpt 5, the addressee does not comment or give any useful information on her addresser's court case and the seemingly marital trouble between the addresser and her husband; rather, she responds with an other-oriented phatic declarative sentence, in the form of a hope or well-wish, that probably triggers a sense of hope for the addresser and expresses the feelings of care, interest and solidarity she feels towards her. As a result, the phatic sentence brings about comfort and reinforces the contact between them and keeps their relationship harmonious. Carrying a positive psychological support and comfort, the sentence positively influences the addresser's viewpoint about her case.

4.2.3 Closing Phase

Excerpt 1:

S: دروح انشر ستوري. راح اعمللكي تاك بالستوري. (I'll go to post a story. I'll tag you in the story.)

R: اي اي (Yes, yes) (with two kiss emojis)

S: دروح أدرس دراما (I will go to study drama.)

R: اي بالتوفيق (Yes, good luck.)

انا هم دروح ادرس لغة (I'll also go to study linguistics.)

S: تمام (All right.)

باي (Bye.) (with a heart emoji)

R: باي حبيبي (bye, my dear.) (with two kiss emojis)

S: (sent a heart and a hug emoji)

In this excerpt, the interlocutors engage in exchanging phatic expressions that indicate the closing of the conversation. The sender says that she will go to post a story on Facebook and that she will tag her friend. Her recipient understands this abrupt temporary leaving, expresses her consent, and denotes that she is still engaged in the conversation, using the neutral phatic approval words 'اي اي' (Yes, yes). After some time in a non-interaction state after the story post, the sender returns back chatting and starts the closing phase in an implicit way by using a self-oriented phatic declarative sentence 'دروح أدرس دراما', taking the form of a daily activity description, and indicating that she should leave in order to study drama. Instead of abruptly leaving with the phatic 'bye', the sender initiates the closing of the conversation by employing a linguistic expression in the form of a pretext that mitigates discomfort and rejection, possibly to be felt by the recipient. She gives a pre-closing pretext for leaving, through which she informs her recipient that she is leaving. In response, the recipient expresses her consent for ending the conversation. This is done by wishing good luck for her sender with the use of the other-oriented phatic wishing phrase 'اي بالتوفيق' (Yes, good luck), and by replying or giving the same pre-closing pretext that she will leave too for studying. The sender, then, displays her explicit leaving using the neutral phatic routine word 'تمام' (All right) and the other-oriented parting word 'باي' (Bye). The recipient's other-oriented phatic word 'باي' (Bye) terminates the conversation, and the other-oriented phatic addressing word 'حبييتي' (my dear) makes the closing more comfortable on the part of the sender. So, at the end of the conversation, the interlocutors have explicitly closed, or agreed to close, the contact between them with exchanging the parting word 'باي' (bye).

Excerpt 2:

S: ؟d3 هم استمر علي هذا (Shall I continue taking this D3 vitamin?)

R: اي اني اقول استمري لحد ما ترجع، علي اثنينهم قصدي (Yes, I recommend that you continue taking it till it gets back, I mean both.)

S: تمام اوكي راح استمر عليهم (All right, okay, I'll continue taking them.)

شكراً ميري (Thank you, Merry!)

R: ما سويت شي حبييتي (I didn't do anything, my dear.)

It was observed that young Iraqi Arabic females can terminate the chatting contact not only by routine formulaic farewells but also by expressing thanks. This excerpt exhibits that the message sender thanks her addressee for providing medical advice. The other-oriented phatic thanking word 'شكراً' (Thank you), addressed to her recipient Merry, serves to terminate the contact. The thanking expression is a substitute for closing or parting routine expressions. Such an expression maintains the existing relation, and shows respect and creates comfort between the interlocutors. It has to be noted that the use and repetition of 'تمام اوكي راح استمر عليهم' 'All right, okay, I'll continue taking them' serves as phatic since by repeating it indicates agreement, and hence in this situation, it helps the interaction move to a closing phase. In response to the phatic thanking expression, the addressee terminates the contact by employing a self-oriented phatic declarative sentence. The addressee replies as if she says 'you are welcome, my dear' or 'not at all, my dear'. Here, this implicitly becomes an other-oriented phatic sentence. The response, having a consolidating function, shows respect and politeness and maintains their bonding for a future interaction.

Excerpt 3:

S: يا قسم؟ (Which department are you in?)

رياضيات انتي يمكن انكليزي (You're in math department? I think you're in English department.)

S: يي انكليزي (Yeahh, English.)

R: ابي (Yeahh.)

S: بالتوفيق يا رب حياتي (May God bring you good luck, my dear.)

R: امين للجميع (Amen to all.)

After a chat interaction and questions about the college departments the interlocutors are studying in, with phatic answers and comments, the interlocutors close the conversation with different phatic expressions other than completely routine ones. In this excerpt between two young strange females, the sender, probably having nothing else left to discuss in the interaction, chooses to end the conversation politely and comfortably with other-oriented phatic consolidating expressions in the form of a wish and an endearment term. In particular, the other-oriented phatic subjunctive sentence 'بالتوفيق يا رب' (May God bring you good luck) functions as a good wish and shows care for the other. In turn, the addressee replies with a neutral phatic good-wishing. Both phatic examples in the parting phase emphasise the good contact between them throughout their whole text chat interaction.

Excerpt 4:

S: والله معرف اش اقلج. الله يسهل عليك. (I certainly don't know what to say. God help you.)

R: تسلميلي ارتاحي هسة مع السلامة (Thank you. **Have a rest now. Good bye.**)

S: نتراسل بالليل ان شاء الله (We'll chat tonight, God willing.)

In this excerpt, the message receiver starts bringing the conversation to an end by using an other-oriented phatic imperative sentence, taking the form of a suggestion or advice, which expresses comfort. This is accompanied by an other-oriented phatic parting phrase 'مع السلامة' (Good bye). The message sender closes the conversation saying that they'll hopefully meet again later at night. She creates a consent for a future meeting or encounter. This indicates that their relationship and contact are familiar and continuous.

Excerpt 5:

S: دزيت الاسئلة عند ست نغم. (I send the questions with Mrs. Nagham.)

A: ابعتيلي هي بالواتساب دستنسخهم. (Send them via WhatsApp to copy them.)

S: عندج تلي لن ماعرف بالواتساب؟ (Do you have telegram? Because I don't know how to use WhatsApp)

A: ##### تلغرام (##### telegram) (sent a phone number.)

S: اوك دزيتهم (Okay, I sent them.)

In a text chat interaction between two female participants who enjoy a close relationship with each other, the closing phase does not exist. Even though the interlocutors are chatting normally and attending to the conversation till the end, they choose not to close it. Of course, this is not considered a failure or impoliteness; rather, it is normal to avoid closing a conversation among interlocutors who hold a close relationship and who chat regularly. The reason that there is no closing phase might be that the interlocutors know they are going to interact or encounter soon once again whether online or face-to-face in an actual physical space.

5. Discussion

The data analysis has revealed that male-male and female-female text chat interactions in all phases contain phatic expressions of various forms and functions. In

the opening phase, males interacting with their male peers, use phatic routine words, phrases and sentences, both declarative and interrogative. These take the form of greetings, attention-getting markers, welcomes, and sometimes addressing titles and endearments, and these perform various functions. The main ones are opening the conversational interaction, greeting the interlocutor politely, identifying and addressing the other interlocutor, and attracting his attention. Sometimes, they even make a small talk and chat about trivial things in the opening phase. This occurs when the interlocutors are very close and familiar friends, who are used to chatting daily. Accordingly, closeness or familiarity may lead to situations where males sometimes choose to start chatting without exchanging any phatic expressions. In the same fashion, females interacting with females in the opening phase employ other-oriented phatic words, phrases and declarative and interrogative sentences, put in the form of greetings, wishes and addressing, all with the same functions found in male-male text chat interactions. Additionally, females also sometimes start their text chat interactions without employing any phatic language.

The medial phase of both male-male and female-female text chat interactions also engages in the employment of phatic language, in contrast to Laver's perspective about the absence of phatic language in this phase. Male text chat users interacting with males draw upon phatic words and declarative, interrogative and exclamatory sentences as well as subjunctive sentences. Taking the form of questions, wishes, encouragements, condolences, mocking, and everyday activity descriptions, phatic expressions have the following functions: maintaining the conversational interaction and keeping it going, breaking the silence, changing the topic of the conversation, softening the conversation, strengthening the relationship, expressing sympathy, solidarity, comfort, affirmation, understanding, and social closeness, and setting up a pleasant social atmosphere. Likewise, female text chat users interacting with females employ the same forms and functions used by males, but they additionally draw upon some forms such as interjections, evaluations and back-channels, and some additional functions such as expressing agreement, doubt, and disbelief, making a small talk, and attending the conversation.

Finally, the phatic language utilised by both males and females in the closing phase is characterised by the employment of routine words, phrases, and declarative and imperative sentences, and address and endearment forms. The forms that these phatic words, phrases and sentences have are leaving or farewells, welcoming, wishing, thanking, suggesting, repeating, and mitigating. Most of these forms perform the main function of leaving or closing (or pre-closing) the conversation politely, comfortably or routinely. That means, interlocutors terminate the interaction by welcoming, thanking, wishing, etc., not only by occasionally saying 'bye'. Moreover, sometimes, the interlocutors leave the conversation in the absence of phatic expressions, in the same way and for the same reason phatic expressions are absent in the opening phase.

The research has spotted that there are far more similarities than differences between phatic expressions exchanged by males and those by females. No remarkable differences are found between forms and functions used by males and those used by females. This indicates that phatic expressions do not undergo major changes in their forms and functions in spite of gender difference among users in Iraqi Arabic Messenger chat interactions; they are not influenced by gender differences. It has to be noted that although few forms and functions tackled in data analysis are seen to be used only by one gender (e.g. males), or they seem slightly different from those used by the other counterpart gender (e.g. females), they are also likely to be found in the latter's

(i.e. females) chat interactions, and vice versa. The occurrence of few forms and functions used exclusively by a specific gender originates from their demand in a certain interactional context and the interlocutors' relationship. For instance, joking, with the function of making a small talk, may not be used with strangers. Therefore, forms and functions of Iraqi Arabic phatic expressions are not typical indicators of the users' gender, except that the gender is indicated by the grammatical gender system, i.e., by verb, noun and adjective endings. They are not allocated for a specific user's gender.

It has been noticed that personal phatic expressions in all phases, whether used by males to males or females to females, are used more often than neutral ones, and that within personal reference, other-oriented phatic expressions are far more frequently used than self-oriented ones. This fact points out that young Iraqi Arabic interlocutors take into consideration their addressees' feelings and self-images and make them feel wanted, respected and appreciated. In doing so, they work to include or count their chat conversational partners as part of their topics and cause them to share their thoughts, opinions or viewpoints. They make them more inclusive in whatever they are chatting about. Consequently, positive feelings are established, and the interaction is therefore reinforced. This contributes to the strengthening of the relationship among the interlocutors. In contrast, self-oriented phatic expressions are very rarely employed. They are used as declarative statements only when giving answers to routine health questions in initial phases, and in a few leave-takings in closing phases, as well as when justifying one's individual attitudes or responses, and when expressing social presence. This indicates that the interlocutors prefer not chatting a lot about themselves or disclosing their personal information, only when necessary. Similarly, neutral phatic expressions are not commonly used. They are used only when expressing general gratitude, or commenting to general life affairs, or agreeing with previous statements. The interlocutors scarcely interact using neutral phatic expressions that refer to weather or natural phenomena or some general state of affairs. These are not likely to be topics permitted as phatic communion, or not likely to be preferable conversation-fillers or starters. Therefore, this denotes that Iraqi Arabic interlocutors resort to chatting around personal events or affairs that refer directly to the individual interlocutor. Iraqi culture which is famous of hospitality, generosity and care towards others seems to be reflected in its interlocutors' language and in their use of phatic expressions, in particular.

Furthermore, it has been noted that the phatic language employed by both genders may contain multiple expressions together. Some single phatic expressions of various forms and functions can occur successively one after another, and many turns, immediately exchanged one after another between the interlocutors, contain complete phatic language with no useful information intervening. This fact marks the feeling that Iraqi Arabic chatters have towards the importance of using phatic language. It marks the importance and usefulness of using phatic language in Messenger-mediated interactions by Iraqi Arabic chatters.

6. Conclusion

This research examined the forms and functions of phatic expressions and their type of reference in young Iraqis' Messenger chat interactions. The research showed that young male and female Messenger users employ various forms with diverse functions in all three phases in their text chat interactions, and that gender difference in the use of phatic expressions does not yield major differences in their forms and functions; males' phatic language is similar to females'. The research also showed that

young Iraqi Arabic interlocutors tend to be more inclusive and make their interlocutors feel wanted by using more personal phatic expressions than neutral ones and more other-oriented personal phatic expressions than self-oriented personal ones. Moreover, it has been noticed that the forms and functions of phatic expressions, and even their absence, vary according to the phase and topic of the conversation, relationship, and social distance and status between the interlocutors.

7. Suggestions for Future Research

1. Further research is needed to include emojis, voice notes, and other multimodal elements in analysis.
2. Future studies could expand sampling to include southern and central Iraqi dialects.
3. Further research is required to investigate cross-gender interactions (male-female), which may reveal different phatic dynamics.
4. This study lays the groundwork for future research into the use of computational linguistics tools to analyse larger datasets quantitatively.
5. It is suggested to compare phatic norms across different platforms (e.g., WhatsApp vs. Messenger).

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المستخلص

بينما تُستخدم منصات المراسلة على وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي لتبادل المعلومات، فإنها تُستخدم أيضاً لاستدامة التواصل وخلق رابط اجتماعي. تبحث هذه الدراسة عن صيغ ووظائف تعابير الود الاجتماعي التي يستخدمها المحاورون العراقيون الشباب والشابات العرب في تفاعلات الدردشة النصية عبر ماسنجر الفيسبوك. كما تهدف إلى دراسة أوجه التشابه والاختلاف بين استخدام الجنسين لتعابير الود الاجتماعي، ونوع وتكرار مرجعيتها. تضمنت البيانات 57 محادثة تم جمعها من خلال التوثيق وتقنية أخذ العينات المتتالية من 46 مشاركاً. واستناداً إلى نظرية لافر (1975) حول هذه الظاهرة، تستخدم الدراسة نهجاً وصفيًا نوعيًا. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن

المشاركين يستخدمون أشكالاً ووظائف مختلفة في مراحل تفاعلية مختلفة (الافتتاح، والوسط، والختام) مع الاستخدام السائد للتعبير الموجهة نحو الآخر. كما تخلص إلى أن هناك أوجه تشابه أكثر من الاختلاف بين استخدام الجنسين لتعبير الود الاجتماعي.
