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Phatic interpretations and phatic communication[1]

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This paper considers how the notion of phatic communication can best be understood within the framework of Relevance Theory. To a large extent, we are exploring a terminological question: which things which occur during acts of verbal communication should the term 'phatic' apply to? The term is perhaps most frequently used in the phrase 'phatic communication', which has been thought of as an essentially social phenomenon and therefore beyond the scope of cognitive pragmatic theories. We suggest, instead, that the term should be applied to interpretations and that an adequate account of phatic interpretations requires an account of the cognitive processes involved in deriving them. Relevance Theory provides the basis for such an account. In section 1, we indicate the range of phenomena to be explored. In section 2, we outline the parts of Relevance Theory which are used in our account. In section 3, we argue that the term 'phatic' should be applied to interpretations, and we explore predictions about phatic interpretations which follow from the framework of Relevance Theory, including the claim that phatic interpretations should be derived only when non-phatic interpretations are not consistent with the Principle of Relevance. In section 4 we consider cases where cognitive effects similar to those caused by phatic interpretations are conveyed but not ostensively communicated.

1. Introduction

The following fictional exchanges show that people in general are aware of an informal distinction between 'chit-chat' and 'genuine' conversation:

(1) *Groundhog Day*

ML: I hope you enjoy the festivities.
PC: Oh I'm sure I'm going to *(pulls face)*.
ML: There's there's talk of a blizzard.
PC: Well, we may catch a break and that blizzard's gonna blow right by us. All of this moisture coming up outa the south by midday is probably gonna push on to the east of us and

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at high altitudes it's gonna crystallise and give us what we call snow. *(winks)* Probably be some accumulation. But here in Punxsutawney our high's gonna get up to about 30 today, teens tonight, chance of precipitation about 20 per cent today 20 per cent tomorrow. Did you wanna talk about the weather or were you just making chit-chat?

ML: *(shrugs and shakes head)* Chit-chat.
PC: OK. Right. See you later. B'bye.
ML: Oh em eh will you be checking out today Mr. Connors?
PC: Chance of departure today one hundred per cent.
Speakers: ML = Mrs. Lancaster; PC = Phil Connors.

(*Groundhog Day* 1993, dir. Harold Ramis, screenplay Danny Rubin and Harold Ramis)

(2) *Glengarry Glen Ross*

RR: How are you
GA: Fine (,,) you mean the board (,) you mean you mean you mean on the board
RR: I (,) yes (,) okay (,) the board
GA: I'm fucked on the board
Speakers: RR = Ricky Roma; GA = George Aaronow.

(*Glengarry Glen Ross* 1992, dir. Tony Foley, screenplay David Mamet)
Conventions: (,) = short pause; (,,) = long pause.
Contextual assumptions: Roma and Aaronow are real estate salesmen whose sales performance is being recorded on a board in their office. At the end of the week, all salesmen except the top two on the board are to be fired. Roma is generally the most successful salesman and is currently top on the board. Aaronow's sales performance is poor; a fact which he believes is mainly due to the fact that he has been given bad 'leads'.

Although these examples are from fiction, they are not perceived as particularly idiosyncratic or unusual. Rather, they are readily understood as representing types of exchange which do occur in real-life situations. Consequently, we ignore their fictitious character here. (A number of real-life exchanges which further illustrate the analysis of phatic communication developed here are considered in Žegarac 1998).

In (I), it seems that Mrs. Lancaster would like to have a relatively banal conversation about the weather. Phil Connors makes clear that he recognises this intention and blatantly refuses to comply. In (2), Aaronow at first gives a short, stereotypical answer. He then follows it with a question about the point of Roma's utterance.

These exchanges illustrate the sorts of phenomena to which the term 'phatic' might be applied. It might be said that Mrs. Lancaster attempts to start a phatic exchange and that Connors refuses. Another account might say

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that both Mrs. Lancaster's comment about the blizzard and Connors's lengthy response are phatic, the difference being that Mrs. Lancaster's phatic intentions are 'positive' while Connors's are 'negative'. An account of (2) might say that Aaronow first entertains the 'phatic meaning' of *How are you* and then considers an alternative interpretation.

This raises a number of questions. How does Connors recognise Mrs. Lancaster's phatic intention? How does he decide how much to say about the weather? Is Roma's utterance ambiguous between a phatic and a non-phatic meaning? Why does Aaronow first choose the interpretation on which Roma's utterance is a mere greeting? Why does he then reinterpret Roma's utterance? On what grounds does Aaronow decide how much information about his welfare he should give to Roma? Comparing Connors's response with Aaronow's, why does Connors's over-informativeness communicate something different (his attitude towards Mrs. Connors's chit-chat) from Aaronow's over-informativeness (perhaps just that he has misunderstood, perhaps that he wishes to change the topic)? More fundamentally, what does the term 'phatic' mean and to what range of phenomena should it apply?

In this paper we adopt the framework of Relevance Theory and consider to which phenomena within that theory it would be most useful to apply the term 'phatic'. We believe both that Relevance Theory sheds light on these phenomena and that these phenomena pose interesting questions for Relevance Theory. In the next section we introduce the features of Relevance Theory which are used in our account.

2. Relevance theory

The Relevance Theory account of verbal communication is based on a particular definition of OSTENSIVE-INFERENTIAL COMMUNICATION. Our account of phatic phenomena depends particularly on the definition of OSTENSIVE COMMUNICATION which is outlined in the first part of this section. The second part of this section presents technical terms within Relevance Theory which refer more specifically to the sorts of things that can be communicated by an act of ostensive communication.

2.1 *Ostensive communication*

All human behaviour is informative in the sense that it provides evidence for inferences. Some informative behaviour is intentionally informative, and some intentionally informative behaviour is evidently intentionally informative. Within Relevance Theory, this last type of informative behaviour is termed 'ostensive-inferential communication' ('ostensive' in that communicators make manifest an intention to communicate, 'inferential' in that understanding it involves inferring the communicator's intention). Ostensive-inferential communication involves two intentions:

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(a) a communicative intention to make mutually manifest:
(b) an informative intention to make manifest or more manifest a set of assumptions.

Consider, for example, a speaker who begins a conversation in English, then suddenly, and without apparent reason, switches to another language, say French. This change of language code provides evidence for (i.e. makes (more) manifest to the audience) a range of assumptions. Some of these assumptions may be conveyed regardless of whether the speaker intended to convey them (e.g. 'The speaker can speak French'). But there are others which will not be conveyed unless the change of the language code is invested with a communicative intention (e.g. 'The speaker wants some people in the audience to leave'). That is to say, hearers will not recover these assumptions unless they think that the reason for the code-switching is an intention to communicate something.

The notions of MANIFESTNESS and MUTUAL MANIFESTNESS are important for the relevance-theoretic account of ostensive communication in general, and of verbal communication in particular, so it is worth making clear how these terms are understood within Relevance Theory. An assumption is manifest to an individual 'if the environment provides sufficient evidence for its adoption' Sperber & Wilson (1986: 39). There is an important difference between the Relevance Theory notion of manifestness and everyday uses of this term (and of close equivalents such as 'evident' or 'salient'). In everyday use, to say that something is 'manifest' may imply that it is actually mentally represented. It is important to note that the technical notion of manifestness introduced here does not entail actual mental representation, because an assumption may be manifest without being entertained. For example, the fact that somebody has spoken provides evidence that they are alive, but this assumption need not be mentally represented. In other words, manifestness is not a notion of an intrinsically mental state or property. Rather, it refers to a psychological disposition which depends partly on aspects of the environment.

Another important notion is that of MUTUALITY. All assumptions which are manifest to an individual make up that individual's COGNITIVE ENVIRONMENT. The set of all assumptions that are manifest to two individuals is their SHARED COGNITIVE ENVIRONMENT. But an assumption may be manifest to a number of people, without the fact that it is manifest to all of them being itself manifest. In other words, assumptions may be MANIFEST without being MUTUALLY MANIFEST.

It follows from what we have said about the (mutual) manifestness of assumptions, that cognitive environments may be shared without being mutual. A shared cognitive environment in which it is manifest which people share it is what Sperber and Wilson (1986: 41) call a MUTUAL COGNITIVE ENVIRONMENT.

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The notion of mutual manifestness provides the basis for the relevance-theoretic explanation of our ability to interpret utterances along the communicator's intended lines (cf. Sperber and Wilson 1986: 15–21 & 38–46). Sperber and Wilson do not propose that to inform somebody of something is to cause that person to entertain specific thoughts. Rather, Relevance Theory describes the informative intention as 'an intention to modify directly not the thoughts but the cognitive environment of the audience' (Sperber & Wilson 1986: 58).

This characterisation provides a natural explanation for the intuition that there are degrees of communication, that information is communicated with greater or lesser strength. Weak communication involves a small increase in the degree of manifestness of a particular set of assumptions. When the particular set of communicated assumptions is made highly manifest by the act of ostension, they are strongly communicated, and are mentally represented. For example, the utterance "I am allergic to fish", as a response to an offer of fish and chips, would strongly communicate that the speaker doesn't want to eat fish, while weakly communicating other assumptions, perhaps raising questions about other possible allergies, previous eating experiences, and so on.

An important property of ostensive communication, which is of great social importance, is that the act of ostension alters not only the cognitive environment of the audience, but the mutual cognitive environment of the communicator and audience. As Sperber & Wilson (1986: 61–62) point out: 'A change in the mutual cognitive environment of two people is a change in their possibilities of interaction (and, in particular, in their possibilities of further communication).' In successful (and sincere) ostensive communication the communicated set of assumptions is made not merely manifest or more manifest to the audience, but MUTUALLY manifest to the communicator and audience. For instance, the social significance of establishing a mutual cognitive environment explains why addressees often take the trouble to communicate their acceptance of a particular set of assumptions. In Sperber & Wilson's words:

> … ostensive communication could be described as an attempt to create a genuinely mutual cognitive environment between social personae. When the communicator is sincere (and so is the audience in manifesting its acceptance of the information communicated), then the actual individuals and their social personae coincide, and otherwise they don't. (Sperber & Wilson 1986: 258, fn. 32)

In all ostensive communication, the act of ostension directs the audience's attention in a particular way, causing the audience to access some set of assumptions which constitute the initial context in which the ostensive stimulus is processed. If the interpretation of the stimulus in the initial context does not give rise to enough effects, the context is enlarged to include

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new assumptions, until an adequate interpretation is arrived at. This inferential process of interpreting an utterance in context is guided by considerations of relevance. More precisely, it is constrained by the PRINCIPLE OF RELEVANCE (in a more recent formulation (Sperber & Wilson 1995), this is termed the 'Second Principle of Relevance' or the 'Communicative Principle of Relevance').

> *The* (*Communicative*) *Principle of Relevance*
> Every act of ostensive communication communicates the presumption of its own optimal relevance.
>
> *Presumption of Optimal Relevance*
> (a) The ostensive stimulus is relevant enough for it to be worth the addressee's effort to process it.
> (b) The ostensive stimulus is the most relevant one compatible with the communicator's abilities and preferences.
>
> (Sperber & Wilson 1995: 260–270)

In a nutshell, relevance is a positive function of contextual effects and a negative function of the processing effort required for deriving those effects. The interpretation of an ostensive stimulus is adequate when the contextual effects achieved offset the processing effort required for deriving them. Consequently, the appropriate context for the interpretation is the one which includes the minimal number of assumptions required for arriving at an interpretation consistent with the Principle of Relevance.

2.2 *What can be ostensively communicated*

According to Relevance Theory, the list of things that can be communicated by an act of ostensive communication includes: logical forms (less than propositional, linguistically-decoded meanings), propositions expressed (fully propositional representations derived by inferentially enriching logical forms), explicatures (propositional forms which the speaker mutually manifestly intends to convey, some of which may be embedded within each other), implications (propositions which logically follow from the union of propositional forms conveyed and contextual assumptions, whether or not the speaker intends to convey them) and implicatures (implications which the speaker mutually manifestly intends to convey). Note that we are making no claims about the order in which any of these might be derived during actual processing (for example, we are not claiming that hearers cannot recognise an implicature before fully working out the proposition(s) expressed). For a more detailed account of all of these terms, see Sperber & Wilson 1986. For an account of the explicit-implicit distinction in particular, see Carston 1988. For reasons of space, we simply illustrate these terms by suggesting some things which might be conveyed by the utterance in (3) given certain

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contextual assumptions (obviously, the following discussion simplifies greatly).

(3) This beer is flat.

Contextual assumptions:	The speaker is Arthur. Arthur is in his local pub. The hearer is Grant. Grant is the landlord. Arthur is holding a pint of Churchill's bitter which he has just bought from Grant.
Logical form1:	
——— is flat1 ———	
(referent of *this beer*)	(at or under X where X is a time or set of conditions)
Logical form2:	
——— is flat2 ———	
(referent of *this beer*)	(at or under X where X is a time or set of conditions)

(flat1 = 'not fizzy', flat2 = 'level')

Proposition expressed:	The beer Arthur is holding is flat1.
Explicature1:	Arthur believes that the beer Arthur is holding is flat1.
Explicature2:	Arthur is communicating to Grant that the beer Arthur is holding is flat1.
Explicature3:	Arthur is intending to communicate to Grant that the beer Arthur is holding is flat1.
Implication1:	Arthur does not want to drink the beer he is holding.
Implication2:	Arthur expects a refund or a new pint of beer.
Implication3:	Grant is responsible for the flat beer.
Implication4:	Grant should make sure that he does not serve flat beer in the future.
Implication5:	Arthur has spoken to Grant.
Implication6:	Arthur is alive.
Implicature1:	Arthur does not want to drink the beer he is holding.
Implicature2:	Arthur expects a refund or a new pint of beer.
Implicature3:	Grant is responsible for the flat beer.

This is far from a complete account of what might happen if Arthur produced (3) given the suggested contextual assumptions. In particular, notice that we have not attempted to give an exhaustive list of possible logical forms, propositions expressed, etc. However, there are some important

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points which this illustrates and which will be used in our account of phatic interpretations. First, notice that the utterance implies many assumptions which are not intentionally communicated and therefore not implicated, i.e. implications which are not implicatures (e.g. *implication6*). Second, some of the assumptions conveyed contain other assumptions conveyed as sub-parts (e.g. *explicature3* contains *explicature2* which contains *explicature1*). The distinction between implications and implicatures, and the fact that assumptions conveyed can be embedded within each other, will be important in our account of phatic interpretations.

3. Phatic interpretations

While there is a considerable literature which, in one way or another, looks at social aspects of verbal communication (for a survey of such work, see Schiffrin 1994), the cognitive effects of such phenomena have not been studied in much detail. We agree with Sperber's (1983, 1985) view that any account of how social factors affect behaviour must include an account of how such behaviour is cognitively mediated. Therefore, we have decided to adopt a cognitive theory and explore what this theory tells us about the phenomena we are interested in. In this section, we spell out the intuitions about phaticness that we hope to capture, propose our relevance-theoretic account and explore some of its implications.

3.1 *Intuitions*

Malinowski (1923) considered PHATIC COMMUNION in his discussion of the distinction between language as 'an instrument of reflection' and language as 'a mode of action', and made a number of interesting observations, including the following which are frequently referred to in more recent literature:

1. In Phatic Communion language is used as a mode of action, rather than for the transmission of thoughts.
2. The various types of Phatic Communion (greetings, gossip, and the like) have something in common: the whole situation in which the exchange takes place consists in, and is largely created by, 'what happens linguistically'.
3. In Phatic Communion the mere meaning of the words is almost irrelevant. Rather, the linguistic expressions used fulfil a social function.
4. This social function may be to 'overcome the strange, unpleasant tension caused by silence' and/or to establish an atmosphere of sociability and personal communion between people.

Jakobson (1960) characterised the PHATIC FUNCTION as the use of language to focus on the channel of communication itself, rather than on the information conveyed by the language code. He pointed out that prolonged

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phatic exchanges sometimes occur precisely when the communication process is threatened (for instance, by the insecurity of the interlocutors).

Laver (1974) also takes up Malinowski's views and describes in some detail the connection between the relative social status of the interlocutors and the appropriate choice of linguistic expression in a phatic exchange. He suggests that the fundamental social function of phatic communication is 'the detailed management of interpersonal relationships during the psychologically crucial margins of the interaction' (p. 217).

There are three common intuitions about phaticness which we aim to capture. First, people have an intuition that the main point of some utterances depends on the fact that the speaker has said something to the hearer more than on exactly what has been said. For example, the main point of an utterance of the string *nice weather* directed at a stranger at the bus-stop seems to be to convey something like sociability rather than to start a discussion of the weather. Furthermore, uttering a string with quite different linguistic content, such as *the bus is late again*, would have had a similar effect. Second, there are degrees of phaticness. For example, a string like *how do you know Michael*? seems 'less phatic' than a string like *how are you*? when uttered in the same situation (e.g. to someone you've just met at a party). The phaticness of *how are you*? may even have become standardised. (For a more detailed discussion of standardisation and conventionalisation see Žegarac 1998, Nicolle & Clark 1998. Our main aim here is to characterise and define phatic communication. Since this type of language use is, in principle, independent of standardisation and conventionalisation, we do not discuss them more fully here.) Third, phatic interpretations seem more likely when the social relationship between interlocutors is in doubt. Suppose, for example, that two partners in a long-term relationship have had an argument and then not spoken for a few days. This would make it more likely that anything either of them says to the other would be understood as phatic (the fact that they have spoken is more important than exactly what they say). This latter possibility is discussed in more detail below.

3.2 *Interpretations*

We propose to capture these intuitions by suggesting: first, that the things which can be phatic or not are interpretations as a whole; second, that what makes an interpretation phatic or not is the extent to which it contains implicatures of a particular type. We begin this section by explaining what type of implicature we have in mind.

Recall that, as mentioned above, ostensive-inferential communication involves two intentions:

(a) a communicative intention to make mutually manifest:
(b) an informative intention to make manifest or more manifest a set of assumptions.

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This means that the speaker of any utterance will make mutually manifest assumptions which contain other assumptions as sub-parts.

(4) It's ten o'clock.

The speaker of (4), for example will convey all of the assumptions in (5):

(5) (a) It's ten o'clock.
(b) The speaker intends to make manifest that it's ten o'clock.
(c) The speaker intends to make manifest the speaker's intention to make manifest that it's ten o'clock.

(5a) is the PROPOSITION EXPRESSED. (5b) is the speaker's INFORMATIVE INTENTION. (5c) is the speaker's COMMUNICATIVE INTENTION.

Now, some implications of an utterance will depend on the proposition expressed. In this case, these might include:

(6) The film the hearer wants to watch begins in 10 minutes.

Other implications might depend on the speaker's informative intention. In this case, these might include:

(7) The speaker intends to inform the hearer that the film the hearer wants to watch begins in ten minutes.

Still other implications might depend on the speaker's communicative intention. In this case, these might include:

(8) The speaker wants the hearer to think that the speaker cares about whether the hearer sees the film or not.

Notice that the hearer can derive (6) from (5a) alone, while (7) depends upon deriving (5b) and (8) depends upon deriving (5c). There are other implications of this utterance which depend on the speaker's communicative intention (5c) but not upon linguistically-encoded meanings, for example (9).

(9) The speaker is willing to communicate with the hearer.

In the discussion which follows, we will use the phrase 'depends on' in a technical sense. DEPENDS ON X means 'results from an inferential process which takes X as a premise', where X may be: the proposition expressed by the utterance, the informative intention or the communicative intention.

(9) seems to correspond to what people have in mind when they talk about phaticness. We suggest that interpretations are phatic to the extent that they IMPLICATE (i.e do not merely IMPLY) such propositions. In other words, an interpretation is phatic to the extent that its main relevance lies with implicatures like (9). There are two important characteristics of phatic implicatures. First, Relevance Theory distinguishes between IMPLICATED PREMISES and IMPLICATED CONCLUSIONS:

(10) Pauline: Do you want to go to the cinema?
Arthur: There's only violent films on tonight.

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Implicated premise: Arthur does not want to see a violent film.
Implicated conclusion: Arthur does not want to go to the cinema.

Implicated premises depend on the communicative intention and are normally not implied, not even contextually, by the explicit content of the utterance. It is the fact that Arthur can be seen as having the communicative intention of answering Pauline's question that licenses the implicated premise, which in turn licenses the implicated conclusion. But it is the implicated conclusion which meets Pauline's expectation of relevance. In this sense, the main relevance of Arthur's utterance can be said to depend on the implicated conclusion rather than on the implicated premise. So, we are suggesting that interpretations are phatic to the extent that they contain implicated conclusions which depend on the communicative intention.

Second, by definition, all implicatures depend on the fact that a presumption of relevance is being communicated. What distinguishes phatic implicatures is that they depend to a greater extent on the communicative intention than on the proposition expressed by the utterance. We are now in a position to give a definition of phatic interpretations.

> *Phatic interpretation*
> An interpretation is phatic to the extent that it contains implicated conclusions which do not depend on the explicit content of the utterance.

Note that on this definition phatic interpretations are not wholly independent of linguistically-encoded meanings, but they do not follow directly from them: the explicit content of the utterance still provides evidence for some implicated premises which, jointly with other contextual assumptions, license a particular phatic interpretation.

While we suggest that the term 'phatic' is most useful as a technical term defined in this way and applied to interpretations as a whole, we will also use it derivatively in the following ways:

(i) A PHATIC UTTERANCE is one which gives rise to, or is intended to give rise to, phatic interpretations.
(ii) PHATIC COMMUNICATION refers to acts of ostensive communication which give rise to, or are intended to give rise to, phatic interpretations.

To illustrate more fully, let us consider how the following string might be interpreted given three different sets of contextual assumptions:

(11) Pauline: There's a red gas bill.

Contextual assumptions (1):
(i) Pauline and Arthur are having breakfast.
(ii) They have been running through a list of things that have to be done today.

When Pauline uses (11) given these contextual assumptions, will Arthur

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interpret her utterance as phatic or as non-phatic? Intuitively, the interpretation may go either way (or both ways). Arthur may well assume that Pauline has mentioned the bill, not because she assumes he does not know about it or will forget to pay it, but because she wants to let him know that she would like to continue the conversation. In this case, Pauline's utterance is relatively phatic. Alternatively, Arthur may think that Pauline has mentioned the red gas bill simply because it happens to be one of the things that need to be done during the day. In this case, Pauline's utterance is relatively unphatic. But Arthur may think that it is highly manifest to both of them, and mutually manifest, that the bill needs to be paid and that he had mentioned on some previous occasion that he would pay it. In this case, Arthur may still think that Pauline has mentioned the red bill because she is running through the list very thoroughly, but he may also assume that she wants to convey her desire to continue the conversation with him. In this case, the utterance is both phatic and non-phatic. But, in this context neither the phatic nor the non-phatic interpretation is likely to be very salient.

In our terms, the first interpretation involves a number of implications derived by exploiting evidence for assumptions such as (12),

(12) Pauline has spoken to me.

which arise because Arthur has recognised that Pauline is talking to him (i.e. ostensively communicating with him); the second interpretation involves a number of implications derived by exploiting evidence for assumptions such as (13a–b),

(13) (a) There is a red gas bill which has arrived at our house.
(b) Red gas bills arrive when the gas will be turned off if we don't pay within seven days.

which arise because Arthur has contextually enriched a logical form of the utterance and worked out some of its implications; and the third interpretation involves a number of each type of implication. In other words, the assumption in (12) depends upon the communicative intention rather than linguistically-encoded meanings, while the assumptions in (13) exploit the linguistically-encoded meanings.

Contextual assumptions (2):

(i) Pauline and Arthur are having breakfast.
(ii) Following a major row, Pauline and Arthur haven't spoken for three days.

Given these assumptions, the very fact that Pauline has spoken is so relevant that Arthur is unlikely to pay much attention to the linguistically-derived content of the utterance. He will probably derive implications such as: 'Pauline wishes to communicate with me', 'Pauline wishes to make up with me', 'Pauline still loves me', 'Pauline might go on a trip with me', etc. What all these assumptions have in common is that they are implicatures derivable

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from the act of ostension itself, i.e. from the fact that Pauline has spoken to Arthur.

Contextual assumptions (3):
(i) Pauline and Arthur are having breakfast.
(ii) Pauline and Arthur have no money, are in serious debt and have no means of raising money.

The linguistically-derived content of Pauline's utterance is highly relevant in this context and may give rise to implicatures like the following: 'Pauline and Arthur's gas will be cut off if they don't pay soon', 'Pauline and Arthur might need to find another way to heat the house', 'Pauline and Arthur's lives might become more difficult', 'specific aspects of Pauline and Arthur's lifestyles are under threat', and others. In this context, the act of ostension, the fact that Pauline has spoken, is probably not relevant enough to give rise to any implicatures, either phatic or non-phatic. This is because of the existence of other, more salient and more relevant implicatures. Arthur may derive some phatic implicatures (derivable from the act of ostension alone), but Relevance Theory predicts that these can not be taken to be what Pauline intended to constitute the main relevance of her utterance. This suggests that, other things being equal, phatic interpretations are derived only if non-phatic interpretations are not consistent with the Principle of Relevance; a point explored in more detail below.

Notice that the type of implicature used in our definition of phatic interpretations does not necessarily have all of the features usually attributed to phatic communication. For example, as mentioned above, one assumption made manifest by any utterance or other act of ostensive communication is that the communicator is alive. In a context where this is relevant, Arthur may decide that Pauline's utterance is intended to communicate this assumption. In such a case, 'Pauline is alive' is an implicature derived from the act of ostension itself; but it has none of the social features usually claimed to be typical of phatic communication.

How does this account for the intuitions about phaticness mentioned above? The first intuition was that some interpretations depend on the fact that something has been said rather than on exactly what has been said. Our account handles this intuition in terms of a slightly different, and theoretical, distinction between the fact that something has been COMMUNICATED and the fact that something has been LINGUISTICALLY ENCODED. One consequence of this is that our account extends naturally to non-verbal communication. For example, we can distinguish a relatively phatic from a relatively non-phatic interpretation of a nod of the communicator's head. The relatively phatic interpretation is one where most of the implicatures depend on the fact that the nod conveyed a communicative intention. The less phatic interpretation is one where there are more implicatures which depend on the fact that the nod signifies agreement.

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The second intuition was that there are degrees of phaticness. Our definition both captures the notion of degrees of phaticness and accounts for the vagueness of this intuition. It may be possible in certain cases to characterise a particular interpretation as extremely phatic (e.g. if all its implicatures depend upon the communicative intention but not on what is linguistically encoded). In other cases, it may be possible to characterise an interpretation as not phatic at all (e.g. if all its implicatures depend upon what is linguistically encoded). However, it will not always be possible to rank a pair of interpretations in terms of their degree of phaticness.

The third intuition was that phatic interpretations become more likely when the social relationship between the interlocutors is in doubt. This intuition has been partly accounted for by our discussion of (11) given the second set of contextual assumptions above (where Pauline and Arthur have had a row and not spoken for three days). Our account presupposed that these contextual assumptions made phatic interpretations more relevant (and non-phatic assumptions less relevant) than they would otherwise have been. In fact, Relevance Theory makes a more precise prediction, namely that purely phatic interpretations should arise only when non-phatic interpretations are not consistent with the Principle of Relevance. This prediction is explained in the next section.

3.3 *Predictions*

According to the criterion of consistency with the Principle of Relevance, the speaker communicates the presumption that the utterance she has used is the best one she could have chosen in order to communicate the particular set of assumptions that she intends to communicate. Consequently, the normal way for the hearer to proceed is to try to derive the intended effects by exploiting the linguistic meaning of the utterance. Essentially, this is because processing linguistic forms involves the expenditure of effort, and the second part of the presumption of optimal relevance rules out the possibility that the speaker is putting the hearer to gratuitous effort.

Under what circumstances should the hearer go beyond linguistically-derived meanings of the utterance? Relevance Theory predicts that this should happen only if linguistically-derived meanings manifestly fail to yield enough effects for the criterion of consistency with the Principle of Relevance to be satisfied. An utterance of (11) (Pauline's 'There's a red gas bill') in context 2 (following a major row, where the interlocutors have not spoken for three days) illustrates the extreme situation in which, regardless of any linguistically-encoded meanings, the fact that the speaker has spoken is far more relevant than what is actually said. While linguistically-derived meanings do not have many contextual effects in the immediate context, the act of ostension does. In this case the speaker does not need to take great care to choose an utterance which makes evident what type of evidence should be

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exploited. This is so because it is mutually manifest to Pauline and Arthur that it is highly manifest to each of them that they have quarrelled and have not spoken for three days. Given Pauline and Arthur's mutual cognitive environment, almost any utterance produced by either of them will make it mutually manifest that most of its contextual effects are intended to follow from the act of ostension, and not from any linguistically-encoded meaning of the words used.

But what about phatics in less biased settings? For example, what would Pauline have to say in context 1 (where Pauline and Arthur are having breakfast and running through a list of things to do) in order to indicate that the main relevance of her utterance lies with the act of speaking itself? Relevance Theory clearly predicts that Pauline should use an utterance which makes it highly manifest to Arthur that it is relevant in that particular way. Otherwise, Arthur will be misled and will expend considerable processing effort exploiting the meaning of the words used. Consequently, the phatic interpretation will be too effortful to be worth considering. So what makes an utterance likely to give rise to phatic interpretations? The answer we suggest is that phatic interpretations are likely for utterances containing a linguistic form which has the following properties: (a) it is easy to process; (b) it is mutually manifest to the interlocutors in what kind of context the linguistic meaning of the utterance would be highly relevant, and (c) it is mutually manifest that the speaker could not have intended the main relevance of the utterance to lie with its linguistic meaning on this particular occasion. This is a rather loose characterisation, but it reflects our view that the phaticness of an utterance as a whole is a matter of degree, and that, by definition, no utterance can be entirely non-phatic.

To see that the less processing effort a linguistic expression imposes on the hearer the more suitable it will be as a phatic, consider (14)–(17).

(14) How are you?
(15) How are you today?
(16) How are you these days?
(17) How are you now that you've had the operation?

In most readily conceivable contexts, (14) is more likely to lead to a phatic interpretation than (15), (15) more likely than (16), and (16) more likely than (17). This follows from considerations of effect and effort: extra linguistic material requires greater processing effort and, therefore, points to the importance of the linguistic meaning of the utterance for arriving at the overall interpretation. It is interesting to note in this connection that an utterance of (15), (16) or (17) may easily be used as an insincere 'non-phatic'. This will be the case if the speaker wishes to assure the hearer overtly of her genuine interest in the hearer's welfare, thus avoiding some possible socially undesirable implicatures about the superficiality of her interest in the speaker that a manifestly phatic utterance (e.g.(14)) might give rise to. But our

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general point still holds: other things being equal, the more processing effort is required for the interpretation of the linguistic meaning of the utterance, the less manifestly phatic the utterance will be. And conversely, other things being equal, the less effortful the interpretation of the linguistic expression is, the more suitable that expression will be for phatic communication.

We have already shown that, in principle, phatic interpretation is a function of the context in which the utterance is interpreted (see example (11)). But the widespread phatic use of language is possible only if people can initiate phatic exchanges more or less at will. In other words, it must be possible to manipulate the context so as to ensure that the intended phatic interpretation is consistent with the Principle of Relevance, even when, other things being equal, a non-phatic one might be optimally relevant. It seems to us that on any given occasion this is possible to the extent that the interlocutors' mutual cognitive environment includes some assumptions about the way conversations are usually conducted: how are certain topics usually relevant? What is the social relationship between the communicators? What are the social norms for appropriate linguistic behaviour? Consider again (2).

(2) Glengarry Glen Ross

RR:	How are you
GA:	Fine (,,) you mean the board (,) you mean you mean you mean on the board
RR:	I (,) yes (,) okay (,) the board
GA:	I'm fucked on the board
Speakers:	RR = Ricky Roma, GA = George Aaronow

(*Glengarry Glen Ross* 1992, dir. Tony Foley, screenplay David Mamet)
Conventions: (,) = short pause; (,,) = long pause.

In this case, Aaronow entertains one interpretation of 'how are you' and then replaces it with an alternative. He chooses the alternative interpretation because that interpretation is highly relevant to him: he is a salesman, he has not been doing well, he is in danger of losing his job, and the success of each salesman in the firm is displayed on a board in the office. What is interesting here is that Aaronow might have opted for the non-phatic interpretation first. Considerations of relevance predict that other things being equal, the second interpretation should be highly manifest in the hearer's immediately accessible context. The question is: why was it not the first one to be considered? One plausible answer is that the contextual knowledge about the way in which a verbal expression is typically used affects the interpretation process by constraining the hearer's assumptions about the way in which that expression is intended to be relevant. Typically, the more often a topic is raised in conversation with a certain purpose in mind, the stronger the connection between the topic and the purpose will be. And the more often the

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utterance of a particular linguistic string is used to give rise to a particular interpretation, the stronger the connection between the linguistic string and the interpretation will be.

In example (2), it is mutually manifest to the interlocutors that the question 'How are you' is usually not used to show the speaker's genuine interest in the hearer's welfare, but rather as a vague indication of the speaker's favourable disposition towards the hearer. Ricky Roma's utterance, by virtue of its linguistic meaning, indicates that some information about the hearer's welfare is relevant to the speaker. How much information is relevant depends on the accessibility of specific contextual assumptions. In most contexts, general knowledge about the way the expression *how are you* is usually used will be highly accessible, and will play an important role in the interpretation process. In this example, Aaronow's knowledge about the use of this linguistic string, and his knowledge of Roma's character (Roma is a ruthless and successful salesman), provide overwhelming evidence for the first interpretation. If Roma wanted to make sure that his utterance was intended to raise the question of Aaronow's status on the board rather than merely to 'make chit-chat', he could have uttered a string such as (18):

(18) How are you doing on the board?

Interpreting this would involve extra processing effort, but the extra effort could be easily justified as it would make sure that the hearer arrived at the intended interpretation more quickly, without having to waste effort considering whether the relevance of the utterance lay mainly with evidence provided by the mere act of ostension. In other words, Relevance Theory clearly predicts that Aaronow will assume that Roma's utterance is a phatic one.

So where does the evidence for the second interpretation come from? First, it is mutually manifest to Roma and Aaronow that the jobs of all salesmen in the firm are on the line and that everybody's chances of keeping their job depend on how efficient they are in closing sales. Second, a question asking for information about his performance is highly relevant to Aaronow, who has not been doing well, and has been struggling against the odds (because, in his opinion, he has been given bad leads). Third, if Roma is asking about Aaronow's performance, then Aaronow will have an opportunity to talk about his unhappy situation; this might be so desirable to Aaronow that he considers wilfully misunderstanding Roma's utterance in order to shift the conversation on to the topic he would like to focus on. If this is right, it is Aaronow's despair, more than anything else, that leads him to reinterpret the question. In this example, the processing of a particular utterance in slightly different ways (by expanding the context in different ways and focusing on different implications) results in rather different interpretations. On the first interpretation, Ricky Roma's utterance weakly implicates some information about the speaker's social attitude towards the hearer. On the second

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interpretation, it communicates much stronger implicatures about the speaker's interest in the hearer's welfare.

Relevance Theory provides a natural explanation for the way in which seemingly inappropriate responses are given. We now turn to two such examples. First, the case where a phatic response is relevant, but a manifestly non-phatic one is given. Second, the case where a non-phatic response is relevant, but a manifestly phatic one is given. Consider again (1)

(1) *Groundhog Day*

ML: I hope you enjoy the festivities.

PC: Oh I'm sure I'm going to. *(pulls face)*

ML: There's there's talk of a blizzard.

PC: Well, we may catch a break and that blizzard's gonna blow right by us. All of this moisture coming up outa the south by midday is probably gonna push on to the east of us and at high altitudes it's gonna crystallise and give us what we call snow. *(winks)* Probably be some accumulation. But here in Punxsutawney our high's gonna get up to about 30 today, teens tonight, chance of precipitation about 20 per cent today 20 per cent tomorrow. Did you wanna talk about the weather or were you just making chit-chat?

ML: *(shrugs and shakes head)* Chit-chat.

PC: OK. Right. See you later. B'bye.

ML: Oh em eh will you be checking out today Mr. Connors?

PC: Chance of departure today one hundred per cent.

Speakers: ML = Mrs. Lancaster; PC = Phil Connors.

(*Groundhog Day* 1993, dir. Harold Ramis, screenplay Danny Rubin and Harold Ramis)

When Mrs Lancaster says 'There's talk of a blizzard' she presumes that it is mutually manifest to her and to Phil Connors that making chit-chat is her main reason for talking about the weather. A detailed account of the current climatic conditions requires considerable processing effort and suggests that the main relevance of the answer lies with meteorological information. Phil Connors' detailed answer might indicate one of two things: either (a) Mrs Lancaster's presumption about the mutual manifestness of the reason for bringing up the subject is not warranted, or (b) by giving a manifestly inappropriate answer, Phil Connors is trying to communicate something: e.g. that he doesn't like chit-chat, that he is a busy man who has no time for discussing trivial matters, that Mrs Lancaster should not bring up this sort of topic again, etc. The following exchange illustrates the converse situation:

(19) Pauline: I was really sorry to hear about what happened to you when you were abroad. It must've been really awful. I hope you've managed to get over it OK.

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Arthur: Yes. I'm fine, thanks.

Clearly, Pauline is going out of her way to express her interest in Arthur's unpleasant experience. Arthur's response is manifestly not relevant to Pauline in the way Pauline expected. But it does provide evidence for an interpretation which Arthur intended to be optimally relevant, and which may include a range of implicatures about his social attitude towards her: Arthur doesn't want to engage in conversation with Pauline; Arthur thinks that Pauline is nosey; Arthur does not consider Pauline a close friend; Arthur finds Pauline boring; Arthur does not like being reminded of his bad experience; etc. None of these implicatures are derived by exploiting the linguistic meaning of the utterance. Since the evidence presented by the linguistic meaning of Arthur's response is manifestly not optimally relevant to Pauline, it leads her to make assumptions about what Arthur intended to communicate by giving a linguistically less informative response than would have been relevant to her.

So far, our discussion has relied on the view that phatic implications are communicated ostensively. In the next section we consider whether there exist phatic implications which are not ostensively communicated.

4. Ostensive and non-ostensive communication

Our definition rules out the possibility of non-ostensive phatic communication; for us, phatic interpretations are a subset of the possible kinds of interpretation of an act of ostensive communication. In this section, we consider the relationship between phatic interpretations in our sense and social relationships and we discuss implications which share all of the characteristics of phatic implicatures except one: unlike phatic implicatures, they are not ostensively communicated. We propose to use the term PHATIC IMPLICATIONS as a general term to cover these implications and phatic implicatures. Thus, just as implicatures can be seen as that subset of implications which are ostensively communicated, so PHATIC IMPLICATURES can be seen as that subset of phatic implications which are ostensively communicated. This section draws heavily on Blakemore's (1994) discussion of Relevance Theory and social goals.

Our definition of phatic interpretations makes no reference to social relationships:

> *Phatic interpretation*
> An interpretation is phatic to the extent that it contains implicated conclusions which do not depend on the explicit content of the utterance.

However, many implicatures which depend upon the recognition of an intention to communicate do concern social relationships. This is because the fact that someone has made manifest an intention to communicate with

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another person rules out certain social situations, most notably the possibility that the speaker despises the hearer so much that she refuses to interact with him at all. While our definition includes implicatures which are not about social relationships, it also reflects the fact that most phatic interpretations achieve relevance by suggesting something about the nature of the social relationship between the speaker and the hearer.

If an individual wishes to convey information to another individual about their social situation (or about anything at all), there are good reasons for attempting to achieve this by communicating the information ostensively. As pointed out above, every act of ostensive communication communicates the presumption that it is worth paying attention to, and that paying attention to it does not put the hearer to a gratuitous expenditure of processing effort. Informing somebody of something means drawing a particular set of assumptions to their attention. The best way to direct somebody's attention in the desired way is to make this intention mutually manifest (i.e. public). Otherwise, there is little likelihood that people will allocate their cognitive resources in exactly the way we would like them to. In other words, the intention to inform is more likely to be fulfilled if it is recognised, and more likely to be recognised if it is made public. This has obvious implications for the communication of all information, including social information: most successful informative behaviour is ostensive (cf. Blakemore 1994).

To see in more detail why information about social relationships in particular should be ostensively communicated, consider (20).

(20) Are you feeling tired after all that hard work?

The social attitude that the hearer of (20) attributes to the speaker will depend on the hearer's assumptions about the speaker's underlying intentions. Laver (1974) makes a number of observations about the relative social standings which speakers of various phatic utterances imply; one of these is that speakers may only comment on, or enquire about, attributes of the hearer if they are social 'equals' or 'superiors'. Given this, the hearer may take (20) to indicate, among other things, that the speaker does not consider herself inferior to him while making or not making any of the following assumptions:

(a) the speaker intends to make it mutually manifest that she is trying to make it manifest to the hearer that she does not consider herself inferior to him;
(b) the speaker is trying to make it manifest to the hearer that she does not regard herself as inferior to him, i.e. a subpart of (a);
(c) the speaker does not regard herself inferior to the hearer; i.e. a subpart of (b).

These inferences are determined by the hearer's assumptions about the speaker's intentions. If the hearer makes assumption (a) the information in

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(c) will have been communicated ostensively (i.e. overtly): both the communicative and the informative intentions will have been attributed to the speaker. In this case the hearer may well attribute to the speaker the intention to communicate something about her beliefs about an individual's rights to change socially accepted views about social hierarchies and about their role in human relationships.

If the hearer makes assumption (b), but not (a), then the speaker's intention to inform the hearer of her views about their relative statuses has been made manifest and fulfilled, without being ostensively communicated: there was no communicative intention. In Wilson & Sperber's (1993) terms, a form of covert communication will have taken place. The utterance may well convey some information about her social attitudes as in the first case, but the speaker cannot be held accountable for conveying this information. It is also worth noting that in this case the utterance does not provide evidence for assumptions about her views on an individual's right to oppose existing social hierarchies and their role in interactions between people. For these assumptions to be communicated, the speaker must make her intention to inform the hearer of (c) public. In other words, the content of the informative intention is partly determined by the recognition of the higher order communicative intention.

Now consider the possibility that the hearer draws the conclusion (c), without assuming either (a) or (b). In this case, there are three possibilities. First, assumption (c) may have been covertly communicated: the communicative intention is not attributed to the speaker, but both the intention to inform and the intention to conceal this intention are attributed to her. Second, (c) may be taken to have been conveyed accidentally: neither the communicative nor the informative intention is attributed. Third, it may be that the speaker does not actually have the intention to communicate (c), but the hearer is nevertheless justified in assuming that the speaker intended to communicate (c). In this case, what might be termed INADVERTENT OSTENSIVE COMMUNICATION has taken place. This differs from accidental communication in that the recognition that the speaker has accidentally communicated something may well absolve her from the responsibility of causing offence. In the case of inadvertent ostensive communication the hearer assumes that the speaker was in a position to avoid causing offence (even though she did not actually intend to convey the offending implicatures). That is why the speaker is nevertheless held responsible for causing offence to the hearer.

Obviously, this suggests a potential grey area: hearers may not be sure whether either the lower order or the higher order intentions were present. Another possibility is that they do not even consider the question worth pursuing. It is conceivable that evidence for the higher order intentions could be manifest to the hearer, but not manifest enough to be considered worth exploiting. There may be considerable differences between individuals in terms of what sorts of information they consider relevant: just as some

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people are more interested in sport or music or politics than others, so social status matters more to some people than to others. The point of this example is that it is only if the hearer assumes that the speaker is making her informative intention public that the utterance of (20) will have communicated ostensively some information about the speaker's attitudes regarding social distance and its role.

So communication which concerns social relationships tends to be ostensive. Here are two examples where information about social relationships is communicated NON-ostensively:

(21) *(the speaker is a car salesman who has just met the hearer)* Have you decided what kind of car you're interested in, Billy?

(22) I was surprised to hear that so many car salesmen are sexist. Personally, I always pay attention to the ladies as well.

By asking (21) the speaker overtly communicates that some information about the hearer's car-buying intentions is relevant to him (we depart here from the convention that the speaker is female because (21) and (22) are based on real utterances and because this is important in the discussion of (22)). But, by using the hearer's first name, (21) might also convey assumptions about social relationships that the speaker intends to make more manifest (though not mutually manifest) to the hearer, e.g. assumptions about how well he gets on with the customer, that his relationship with the customer is not strictly professional, that the customer should trust him as he would trust a friend, and so on. In relevance-theoretic terms, these assumptions are part of the speaker's informative intention but there is no related communicative intention. This is because the assumptions about familiarity and so on may easily become manifest to the hearer without the speaker's intention being made mutually manifest. This is what distinguishes the assumptions about familiarity from weak implicatures.

In contrast, (22) might convey assumptions which damage social relationships and which the speaker did not intend to convey, e.g. that he holds some sexist attitudes. Here, the speaker's intention to ostensively communicate information about his views on sexism, betrays something about his real attitude (which he himself may not be aware of). In this case the communicative and the informative intentions are both absent. Covert manipulation requires the intention to make particular information more manifest, without making this intention mutually manifest. Notice also that the success of conveying information sometimes depends on covertness. In (21) the salesman overtly focuses the hearer's attention on one set of assumptions (concerning the hearer's thoughts about which car to buy), while covertly making more manifest to the customer a different set of assumptions (about how well they get on, etc.). The customer may tacitly accept the covertly communicated assumptions precisely because they are made more manifest to him without attracting his attention. Manipulative

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behaviour may not be sociable, but it is socially very important: it makes possible a certain degree of control over other people's behaviour, without the speaker having to accept responsibility either for the information conveyed or for its impact on the audience.

Such covert communication may but need not involve the exploitation of linguistic meaning. The use of the hearer's first name in (21) to communicate assumptions about the social situation is an example of non-ostensive linguistic communication. We now turn to an instance of covert communication which does not exploit the linguistic meaning of the words used.

(23) Nice weather.

(23) said in a hoarse voice may be evidence that the speaker has a sore throat, without necessarily involving either the speaker's informative intention to let the hearer know about her medical condition, or the communicative intention (to make the informative intention mutually manifest). The speaker may want to make the hearer feel sorry for her, while not being prepared to acknowledge that that is what she wants. Her decision to communicate some assumptions covertly is probably socially motivated. If she were to complain publicly about her sore throat, she might also communicate socially undesirable assumptions about her weakness, lack of ability to cope with a minor health problem, and the like. In this example, some non-phatic information is communicated covertly and non-linguistically for social reasons. (For a more detailed discussion of such examples, see Wilson & Sperber 1993).

It seems reasonable to assume that the linguistic meaning of an utterance may preclude interpretations which help with the management of social relations. Surely, a speaker who uses (24) does not intend her utterance to be interpreted in this way.

(24) I'll never talk to you ever again.

In this case the linguistic content probably precludes such social assumptions from being ostensively communicated, but not necessarily from being covertly (i.e. non-ostensively) and non-linguistically conveyed. Again, the reasons for conveying some information covertly may be motivated by social reasons. A public appeal for reconciliation might be taken as a sign of weakness, lack of conviction in one's beliefs, lack of determination, vulnerability, and the like. But, by overtly asserting her determination not even to consider the possibility of a reconciliation, the speaker provides (whether intentionally or not) rather strong evidence to the contrary. Ostensive behaviour is inherently social. By making public (i.e. mutually manifest) the intention to inform, the speaker inevitably makes this second order intention itself public (i.e. mutually manifest). This embedding of intentions could, in principle, go on ad infinitum. Which level is actually exploited in utterance interpretation depends only on considerations of relevance.

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Some non-ostensive communication concerns social relationships. Some non-ostensive communication depends upon a communicative intention but not upon linguistically-encoded meanings. Some non-ostensive communication depends upon linguistically-encoded meanings. Given our definition of phatic interpretations, we could decide not to use the term 'phatic' in referring to any cases of non-ostensive communication, or we could extend it to include some or all of these cases. Not much depends on how the term 'phatic' is used; what is important is that we distinguish these different phenomena clearly. So our decision about how to use the term 'phatic' is based mainly on an attempt to be clear about the theoretical claims we are making. We propose to apply the term 'phatic' to assumptions whose derivation exploits mainly, or only, the evidence presented by the act of ostension, whether or not they are themselves ostensively communicated:

> *Phatic implication*
> A phatic implication is a conclusion which does not depend on the explicit content of the utterance (but does depend on the communicative intention, perhaps interacting with contextual assumptions, some of which may exploit linguistically-encoded meanings).

So, just as implicatures are the subset of implications which are ostensively communicated, phatic implicatures are the subset of phatic implications which are ostensively communicated.

Thus, (26) and (27) are phatic implications of (25), but they will only be phatic implicatures in certain contexts.

(25) How are you?
(26) The speaker wishes to communicate with the hearer.
(27) The speaker is prepared to talk to the hearer.

This terminological decision sets up a neat parallel between the relevance-theoretic views of phatic communication and communication more generally. It also allows us to account for the intuitions mentioned above: first, that there is a difference between utterances whose main point depends upon linguistically-encoded meanings and those whose main point depends simply on an act of ostensive communication; second, that there are degrees of phaticness; third, that phatic interpretations are more likely when the nature of the social relationship between interlocutors is in doubt. Finally, it makes it easier to talk clearly about what is going on when the relative likelihood of phatic interpretations varies from context to context: what varies is the likelihood of particular phatic implications being recognised as implicatures.

5. Conclusion

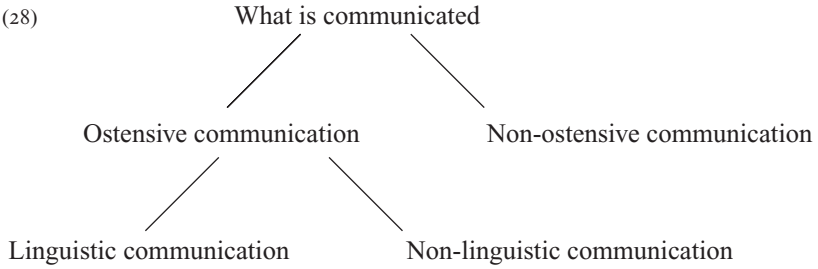
We have proposed that phatic interpretations are interpretations containing implicatures which depend upon recognition of a communicative intention

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but not only, or primarily, upon linguistically-encoded meanings. We have shown how this definition can account for the fact that 'phaticness' is a matter of degree, and how this approach can account for the interpretation of a range of fairly phatic and fairly non-phatic utterances. We have proposed an account of what makes some utterances more likely to give rise to phatic interpretations than others.

To summarise, we follow Wilson and Sperber (1993) in the assumptions we make about how assumptions can be communicated:

(28)



(adapted from Wilson and Sperber 1993)

Assumptions communicated in any of these ways can have a social function, or a function typical of what have been thought of as phatic utterances. We have not proposed, however, that phaticness should be defined in terms of functions. Instead, we suggest that interpretations which depend on (in our technical sense of 'depend on') the communicative intention and exploit the linguistic meaning of the words used to a limited extent, if at all, constitute the class of phenomena which should be termed phatic. Non-ostensively communicated assumptions which perform what might have been thought of as a phatic function are not necessarily phatic in our terms.

The phaticness of implications, or inferences, is a classificatory concept: implications either are or are not derivable on the basis purely of the recognition that an ostensive act has been performed. The phaticness of whole acts of communication, by contrast, is a matter of degree. Ostensive acts or utterances as a whole are always phatic in the sense that, by definition, they provide evidence that an ostensive stimulus has been produced. The more phatic implications a communicative act has, the more phatic it is.

In conclusion, we have suggested that the term 'phatic' be used in the following technical terms:

Phatic implication
A phatic implication is a conclusion which does not depend on the explicit content of the utterance (but does depend on the communicative intention, perhaps interacting with contextual assumptions, some of which may exploit linguistically-encoded meanings).

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Phatic implicature
A phatic implicature is a phatic implication which is ostensively communicated.

Phatic interpretation
An interpretation is phatic to the extent that it contains phatic implicatures.

Phatic utterance
A phatic utterance is one which gives rise to, or is intended to give rise to, phatic interpretations.

Phatic communication
Phatic communication is communication which gives rise to, or is intended to give rise to, phatic interpretations.

These definitions, together with the fact that Relevance Theory makes relatively precise predictions about when hearers or addressees will derive phatic implicatures and interpretations, form the basis of our future research which aims to test Relevance Theory in general by testing these predictions in particular.

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