

Summary in Spanish

¿UNA CUESTIÓN DE CORTESÍA? ESTUDIO CONTRASTIVO DEL LENGUAJE FÁTICO EN LA CONVERSACIÓN JUVENIL

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En este trabajo proponemos que las palabras vacías y frases de relleno, o marcadores discursivos, así como las palabras tabús, tienen una finalidad social, pues contribuyen a mantener la fluidez de la conversación y la relación entre los hablantes jóvenes. Con mayor aproximación diremos que la función fática de esos recursos se relaciona, a su vez, con la cortesía lingüística. (Bravo, Albelda, en este volumen).

El término “fático” da pie a una amplia gama de interpretaciones, desde palabras sueltas sin valor informativo (por ejemplo, Verschueren 1999: 23) a insultos (Mateo y Yus 2000), conectores de enlace (González 2004) y palabras vacías o frases de relleno, las cuales en cualquier caso persiguen como propósito principal evitar vacíos en el habla. Obviamente, existen diferencias culturales entre distintas lenguas, especialmente cuando se trata de expresiones formulaicas, tal como se mostrará en este trabajo (cf. Mc Carthy y Carter 1994).

El punto de partida de este estudio es la máxima de cortesía de Leech (1983: 141-142) “Máxima Fática”, según la cual lo esencial reside en el mensaje: “Evita el silencio” o “Sigue hablando”. La pregunta que intentaremos contestar, basándonos en esta máxima, es: ¿hasta qué punto las estrategias fáticas utilizadas por los jóvenes en este estudio se pueden caracterizar como corteses?

Se han utilizado dos corpora para este estudio: *The Bergen Corpus of London Teenage Language* (COLT) y el *Corpus de Lenguaje Adolescente de Madrid* (COLAm), de aproximadamente medio millón de palabras (<http://torvald.aksis.uib.no/colt/cwb>). COLAm es parte del proyecto COLA (*Corpus Oral de Lenguaje Adolescente*) que se propone reunir el habla oral de adolescentes de España y algunas capitales de Latinoamérica. El corpus COLAm, utilizado en este trabajo, fue recogido en Madrid entre 2002 y 2003. Consta por el momento de 200.000 palabras (<http://www.colam.org>).

La definición de discurso fático de Malinowski, es decir, “un tipo de discurso en el que los enlaces de unión se crean mediante el simple intercambio de palabras en el que no se comunican ideas, (1923: 315), está “ampliamente aceptado” (Laver 1975: 215; Vigara Tauste 1990: 1090). Lyons (1977) subraya el aspecto comunicativo que, según él, se concibe como parte de la función social del lenguaje, y argumenta que la

*comunidad fática*¹ se realiza mediante un número limitado de enunciados carentes de valor informativo (cf. Levinson 1983; Crystal 1995; Senft 1995; Verschueren 1999). Según Laver (1974), las dos funciones principales de la comunidad fática son el establecimiento y la consolidación de la relación interpersonal (1975: 232), las cuales tienen lugar principalmente en las fases iniciales y de cierre de las interacciones y se consiguen mediante modelos estereotipados de comportamiento (1975: 232-233). Stenström (1994: 11) define el habla fática como un precalentamiento “adicional” para *entrar en faena* que sirve para crear un atmósfera agradable; Senft (1995: 3) refiere a los enunciados fáticos como medios para mantener los canales de la comunicación abiertos; Langford (1994) subraya que es habitual intercambiar información que cree lazos antes de proceder al intercambio de datos de tipo más profesional (1994: 151), mientras que Mc Carthy y Carter (1994), por su parte, señalan las diferencias culturales en cuanto a las expresiones estandarizadas.

Cheepen (1988) ofrece una definición más amplia. A su modo de ver, la comunidad fática puede “tener lugar como palabras cortas o frases entre otra habla no-fática, y también se puede extender a la totalidad de un encuentro (como en una charla)” (1988: 20-21). Dice que desde 1923, ha habido una tendencia muy fuerte entre los lingüistas a minusvalorar el grado en el que la comunidad fática domina el diálogo, y de verlo solamente como algo que sucede en frases cortas entremetidas entre usos “más importantes” del idioma (1988: 21).

Amén de las definiciones tradicionales del habla fática, citadas arriba, un tipo de medio comunicativo mencionado por Mateo y Yus (2000) se realiza mediante palabras tabús. Las palabras tabús, que se dicen, “sin intención alguna de insultar” son ejemplos de habla fática. Gibbon (1977) sugiere el uso de palabras de *relleno* fáticas, como *oh* y *er*. Los conectores que unen los enunciados se conciben como medios/elementos de comunidad fática por Bazzanella (1990) y por González (2004: 313), quien, refiriéndose a Fuentes (1993: 213-214), describe “*bueno*” como un elemento concesivo, frecuentemente usado por los hablantes como conector de proposiciones, utilizado para no perder el hilo argumental y como un mitigador de la amenaza de la imagen. En relación con esto diríamos que ciertas palabras vacías o frases de relleno también se podrían usar como mitigadores de la amenaza de la imagen, al mismo tiempo que ayudan al hablante a seguir hablando, sin ir más lejos, el español *en plan* y su correspondiente *like* en inglés:

y nada esta mañana me dice mi padre bueno entonces que al final que vas a hacer esta tarde **en plan** bien sabes y yo no se (MAORE3J05).

Zegarac (1998: 340-341), manteniendo un enfoque teórico relevantista, dice que el término comunicación fática no es un fenómeno natural, sino que lo fático es un resultado de la situación contextual. Según él “[nuestras] intuiciones sobre el uso fático de la lengua se basan en modelos de elementos interaccionales incluyendo: (a) de lo que trata la información comunicada, (b) los tipos de evidencia extraídas en la conversación, (c) la fuerza con la que se comunica algo, (d) la distribución de efectos cognitivos en concordancia con el tipo de evidencia extraída consiguiendo estos efectos.” (1998: 340-341). Subraya que la comunicación fática a veces es convencional y hace referencia a

¹ Con el término de *comunidad fática* partimos de la definición original de Malinowski: “a type of speech in which ties of union are created by a mere exchange of words” (Ogden and Richards 1923: 315)

tópicos *seguros* como el tiempo, el bienestar del oyente, etc. (1998: 348; cf. Leech 1983, abajo)

¿Dónde trazar la línea entre el habla fática y el habla informativa? ¿Es una mera cuestión de intuición? ¿Es la “faticidad” (*phaticness*) una cuestión de grado? Zegarac y Clark (1999: 565) abordan la “interpretación fática” (Zegarac 1998), “como algo según lo cual la interpretación es fática hasta el límite en que su mayor relevancia se halla en las conclusiones implicadas, y que no dependen del contenido explícito del enunciado, sino de la intención comunicativa.” Esto parece razonable, pero no del todo convincente.

Leech (1983: 141) insiste en que la relación existente entre la cortesía y la comunión fática, o la actividad de seguir hablando tan solo por mantener la sociabilidad, donde temas corrientes como el tiempo, o afirmaciones sin información del tipo *¡Te has cortado el pelo!*, son de gran ayuda. La única meta de este tipo de charla es mantener relaciones sociales amigables y, a su vez, evitar una infracción de las reglas de cortesía. (1983: 39-40)

Dado que este tipo de comentario supone una *ruptura* del Principio de Cooperación de Grice, violando la Máxima de Cantidad, Leech ve la necesidad de una máxima adicional, a la que llama “Máxima Fática”, cuyo propósito es el *Evita el silencio* o *Sigue hablando* (1983: 141). Dice, no obstante, que “sería inadecuado describir la comunión fática como un mero evitar el silencio” y añade que “sirve para extender el terreno común del acuerdo y de la experiencia compartida por los participantes a través de la elección de temas no-controvertidos y concentrándose en las actitudes del hablante en vez de en los hechos. (1983: 141-142). Mantener el silencio cuando uno está involucrado en una conversación sería descortés.

El fin principal de los corpora COLT y COLA es construir corpora orales de habla espontánea juvenil de dimensiones aceptables. El hecho de que los jóvenes, entre 13 y 19 años, supieran que se les estaba grabando, con bastante frecuencia ha tenido el efecto de que algunas grabaciones puedan considerarse en su totalidad como fáticas. Son charlas sin ningún valor informativo especial, el hablar por el hecho de hablar, lo cual concuerda con Cheepen (1988: 20-21), quien dice que la comunión fática no sólo ocurre como frases cortas entre otras en el habla no-fática, sino que también se puede extender a todo un encuentro (como una charla) que puede durar horas, sólo que las charlas juveniles no duran tanto.

Cuando alguien cuenta algo, sería descortés no responder de una u otra manera. Verbalmente el interés se podría mostrar con una retroalimentación mínima (por ejemplo: *mhm*), interjecciones (*oh*) o palabras tabús (*joder*, *fuck*).

La retroalimentación mínima (*retrocanalización*), no sólo señala que el oyente está escuchando, sino que tiene el efecto de animar al interlocutor, señalando: *¡cuéntame más!*: Sin la retroalimentación el hablante podría dejar caer el tema. Obsérvese que no se trata de cambio de hablante, el hablante continúa hablando, haciendo caso omiso a los *mhms* y *mms* que pudieran aparecer. La retroalimentación en forma de interjección espontánea se hace patente en los ejemplos (1) y (2):

(1) J01: pero tú donde vives

J05: en el golf

J01: **ufffff**

J05: [pero yooo]

J01: [qué paliza no]

J05: yaaa sabes pero es que tampoco me importa mucho... COLAm35:3

- (2) W1: found Jules?
 ‘has encontrado a Jules?’
 W2: he’s in the other room.
 ‘está en el otro cuarto’
 W1: **oh**....
 ‘ah’
 W4: right now
 ‘justo ahora’
 W1: oh bollocks. COLT 42202: 42-45
 ‘joe mierda’

En el caso (1), *ufffff* significa a la vez “qué lejos” y “sigue hablando. En ambos corpora las palabras tabús resultaron ser señales de reacción común.

En su estudio del habla preadolescente Fine (1981: 55-56) argumenta que los amigos tienen permiso y se espera incluso que se insulten, y añade que se agrega un insulto sobre otro, cosa que concuerda enteramente con nuestros hallazgos sobre el lenguaje juvenil. Y, como dijeron Mateo y Yus (2000: 111), los insultos con el fin de reforzar los lazos sociales o la fuerza fática de un intercambio debería tomarse únicamente como una manera de socializar y como una estrategia de interacción conversacional. El ejemplo siguiente es un extracto de una conversación entre jóvenes (14 años):

- (3) G05: el Gomi se quedó solo
 G03: no seas **hijo de puta**
 G05: que se queda solo
 G03: pues qué **te jodas**
 G05: que **me jodan** a mí por
 G03: porque eres **tonto**
 G05: vaya **witch**
 G03: eres un **tolijo**
 G07: mira leí dos veces en...
 G03: en una puta mariquiquita COLAm42:17

En ambos corpora, los tabús dominan en el habla de los chicos. En COLT los chicos de Londres usan expresiones del tipo *you are a dick, bloody chieffer, peanut head, you little wanker and the girls you stupid cow, you fucking slag and you're such a whore*.

En las conversaciones de las chicas de Madrid nos encontramos con expresiones del tipo *joder, hostia* y *que te cagas*, pero ningún abusivo. Ninguno de los abusivos ni otras palabras tabús parecen ser usadas con el fin de molestar o de tener el efecto de insultar. Generalmente se han dicho de modo jocoso o lúdico, a veces expresados “alegremente”, según Fine (1981: 54). No cabe duda de que las señales de retroalimentación, hechas por *backchannels* (o *retrocanalización*), interjecciones o palabras tabús, tienen un efecto animador que muchas veces desemboca en una narración más animada.

Como dijo Fuentes Rodríguez (1990: 165), se usan en español ciertos vocativos meramente para establecer y mantener el contacto e incluso a veces como una manifestación de afecto. Menciona *hombre* como el apelativo más común, usado tanto

por mujeres como por hombres. *Hombre* aparece en las conversaciones juveniles en COLAm, pero raras veces, mientras que el apelativo más usado es *tío* (a veces *tronco* o *chaval*) y *tía* (a veces *hija* o *tronca*).

- (4) J01: ah claro así me hago famosa **tía** y canto y todo
J03: **tía** pues en serio lo de lo de no llevar sujetador es mazo de cómodo **tía**
J02 : {R} **tía** estás boba {R]
J03: pero esto no lo escucha nadie
J02: **tía** no no lo escucha to todo el mundo que rebobine y lo oiga **tía**
COLAm20:2

Es interesante que no haya ningún término correspondiente a este en el corpus inglés COLT.

Al comparar las conversaciones y las estrategias usadas, los turnos son más cortos, hay más interrupciones, hay más risas y más uso de palabras tabús en la conversación española que en la inglesa.

Lo que se refleja tanto en el corpus COLAm como en COLT es que los hablantes son conscientes de ser grabados. Por ejemplo, a veces es difícil para los *reclutas* (las personas que llevan la grabadora) hacer hablar a los demás y que estos digan algo de fundamento, en vez de decir tonterías. Lo que de manera definitiva refleja la situación de la grabación es el generoso uso de palabras tabús. En especial los chicos tienen una tendencia a empezar usando palabras tabús, como un modo de aparentar algo, siendo los tres elementos más frecuentemente usados *fuck*, *shit* and *dick* y *joder*, *coño* y *mierda*, respectivamente, y en ningún caso relacionado con el cuerpo o sexo.

En lo que respecta a las señales de reacción, los adolescentes ingleses introducen señales “no solicitadas” de retroalimentación mínima, efectuadas mediante *mhm* or *mm*, los cuales funciona como *backchannels* (*retrocanalizaciones*), un modo no verbal de mostrar interés, que estimula al hablante a seguir hablando sin causar cambio de turno. Elementos similares no aparecen en las conversaciones españolas, donde las señales mínimas de retroalimentación, realizadas típicamente por *sí*, son explícitamente solicitadas por el hablante de turno, con un cambio de turno como resultado. Señales de reacción mediante interjecciones son frecuentes en ambos grupos, así como las palabras tabús.

Decir algo en una situación donde no hay nada que decir es una “cuestión de cortesía común” (Malinowski 1972: 152). Esto no implica que haya una relación entre la educación mínima y la comunión fática, tal como lo señala Zegarac (1998: 350-358), quien distingue entre sentido lingüístico y efecto cognitivo, diciendo que el uso del elemento fático viene a ser determinado por lo que es más relevante. Con otras palabras, si el habla fática o una expresión fática es cortés o descortés no es una cuestión de convenciones, sino una cuestión de interpretación de una situación particular.

El uso de palabras tabús e insultos viene al caso en este aspecto. Desde el punto de vista cultural, el uso de palabras tabús puede resultar altamente descortés en una lengua y ser a la vez señal de compañerismo en otra. Como apuntan Mateo y Yus (2000: 17), los insultos tienen una función social y el significado carece de importancia, algo que nos parece que concuerda con nuestros hallazgos en el lenguaje juvenil.

Basándonos en la Máxima Fática de Leech: “Evitar el silencio hablando”, como punto de partida, hemos intentado mostrar en este trabajo que el uso por los jóvenes de Londres y Madrid de expresiones criticadas por los adultos está altamente motivado por

fines fáticos, y que éste se puede considerar en justicia como cortés. A este respecto nótese sobre todo el uso de la animación a la retroalimentación, las señales de reacción, los cercadores semánticos, las muletillas, o las palabras tabús creadoras de relación. Todos estos elementos ayudan a mantener viva la conversación.

A MATTER OF POLITENESS? A CONTRASTIVE STUDY OF PHATIC TALK IN TEENAGE CONVERSATION

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Conversational interaction between friends often supplies a minimum of information, but a maximum of supportive chat (Aitchison 1996: 22).

Abstract

This corpus-based article explores London and Madrid teenagers' use of phatic expressions as a politeness device in their everyday conversations. The starting-point for the study is Leech's 'Phatic Maxim', which he suggests as a supplement to the four maxims making up Grice's Cooperative Principle. The purport of the maxim is to avoid silence by keeping talking, which may involve anything from loose formulaic talk to connectors and the use of taboo words, all of which are phatic devices with a strong bonding effect. The teenage talk studied here is largely void of the formulaic expressions that characterize conversational openings and closings in adult speakers' casual encounters. Both groups are frequent users of turn-final appealers which trigger turn-initial uptakes and of reaction signals realized by interjections and taboo words, all with a strongly bonding effect. Boys in particular are not only allowed but even expected to use taboo language as a sign of camaraderie and a means to reinforce the phatic strength of an exchange. In both corpora, there is ample use of fillers that help the speaker to hold the turn, and hedges, which often act as fillers in addition to helping the speaker avoid self-commitment. And whereas the Spanish teenagers use certain vocatives as a purely conversational resource to establish and maintain contact, the English teenagers insert 'unsolicited' minimal feedback signals (for example, realized by *mhm* or *mm*) which encourage the current speaker to go on speaking.

Keywords: Corpus linguistics; Teenage conversation; Phatic expressions; Continuity; Rapport.

1. Introduction

Teenage talk has been criticized for being inarticulate and full of slang and taboo words and not least for being peppered with unnecessary small words (pragmatic markers). In this paper, which explores the use of phatic talk in Spanish and English teenage conversation, we argue that not only small words but also taboo words often have a purely social purpose, helping to keep a conversation going and creating a feeling of rapport between the speakers, in other words that they have a phatic function, which in turn is related to linguistic politeness.

As this paper will illustrate, the interpretation of the term “phatic” allows scope for a wide range of applications - from loose talk with no informative value (Verschuieren 1999: 23) to insults (Mateo & Yus 2000), connective linkers (González (2004) and verbal fillers, the main purpose of which is to avoid gaps in the conversation (Gibbon 1997). There are obviously cultural differences between languages, in particular as regards formulaic expressions (cf. McCarthy & Carter 1994), but, as the paper will show, in this study the similarities tend to dominate.

The starting-point for the study has been the maxim of politeness that Leech (1983: 141-142) suggests as an addition to the four maxims constituting Grice’s Cooperative Principle, and which he calls the “Phatic Maxim”, the core message of which is “keep talking!”. In the following this maxim will be adopted, it may seem, in a rather simplistic way, to explain the relation between phatic talk and politeness in teenage talk. The question we will try to answer on the basis of this maxim is to what extent the phatic strategies adopted by the teenagers in this study can be characterized as polite.

2. The data

Two corpora have been used for the study: *The Bergen Corpus of London Teenage Language* (COLT) and *Corpus de Lenguaje Adolescente de Madrid* (COLAm), both containing approximately half a million words.

COLT was recorded in London in 1993 by student recruits, who volunteered to record their conversations with their friends of the same age and a similar social background for a few days. To that extent, they were equipped with a walkman recorder and a minute lapel microphone. The speakers, including the recruits, were boys and girls aged 13 to 17 from working-, middle-, and upper-class school London areas. The recordings have been orthographically transcribed and word-class tagged, and the entire material is accessible on the internet in the form of orthographic text with accompanying sound files and a search programme (<http://torvald.aksis.uib.no/colt/cwb>; see also Stenström et al 2002).

COLAm is part of the COLA project (*Corpus de Lenguaje Adolescente*), which is run in cooperation between the Spanish and English departments at Bergen University, Norway. The primary aim of the project was to create a complementary Spanish corpus, which made it possible to compare Madrid and London teenage language. The secondary aim has been to include teenage conversations from some Latin-American capitals to enable a comparison between different varieties of Spanish teenage language – and their relation to English. Today, COLA includes recordings from Santiago de Chile and Buenos Aires in addition to the Madrid material, which has been used for the present study and which contains only peninsular Spanish.

COLAm was compiled in Madrid 2002-2003 on the COLT model, which has also dictated the further processing of the recordings, with the internet version as the final product. One important difference as regards the recording procedure is that the Madrid recruits were equipped with mini-discs, which resulted in better sound quality and faster processing of the material (<http://gandalf.hit.uib.no/cola>, <http://www.cola.tk>).

3. Phatic talk

3.1. Characteristics of “phatic communion”

Although linguists tend to use the term “phatic communion” in quite different ways (Lyons 1977: 740), Malinowski’s definition of the term, “a type of speech in which ties of union are created by a mere exchange of words, and which does not communicate ideas (1923: 315), is “widely accepted” (Laver 1975: 215). Lyons (1977) emphasizes the communicative aspect, which he sees as part of the “social function” of language and argues that phatic communion is realized by a limited set of utterances with no informative value (see also Levinson 1983; Crystal 1995; Senft 1995; Verschueren 1999).

According to Laver (1975), the two main functions of phatic communion are the establishment and consolidation of the interpersonal relationship and the “management of the transition from non-interaction to full interaction, and the transition from interaction back to non-interaction” (1975: 232), which “occurs primarily in the opening and closing phases of the interaction”, and is “achieved through stereotyped patterns of behaviour” (1975: 232-233). Stenström (1994: 11) defines phatic talk as the “extra” warming-up and winding-up talk, which helps create a pleasant atmosphere”, Senft (1995: 3) refers to phatic utterances as “means for keeping the communication channel open”, and Langford (1994) emphasizes that “it is usual to exchange information of a more socially bonding kind... before moving on to exchanges of a more specifically professional kind” (1994: 151), while McCarthy and Carter (1994) point to cultural differences when it comes to the use of standard expressions.

Cheepen (1988) has a wider definition. In her view, phatic communion can “occur as short words or phrases among other, non-phatic speech, and it can also extend over a whole encounter (such as a chat)” (1988: 20-21). She argues that “there has been, since 1923, a strong tendency for linguists to understate the extent to which phatic communion dominates dialogue, and to view it as occurring ONLY in short phrases amidst other, more ‘important’ uses of language” (1988: 21).

Going beyond the more traditional definitions of phatic talk mentioned above, a type of communicative devices mentioned by Mateo and Yus (2000) is realized by taboo words in their capacity as “communicative devices”. “Praise-centred” taboo words, they argue, “with no intention of insulting” are examples of “phatic” talk. Gibbon (1997) suggests the use of “phatic fillers”, such as *oh* or *er*. Connectives, which link utterances, are seen as phatic devices by Bazzanella (1990) and by González (2004: 313), with reference to Fuentes (1993: 213-214), who describes *bueno* as a “concessive element frequently used by the speaker as a propositional linker, so as not to lose the argumentative thread, and as a face-threat mitigator”. In this connection it might be added that certain small words, too, can be used as face-threat mitigators, while at the same time helping the speaker to go on speaking, notably Spanish *en plan* and its English equivalent *like* (see Section 4.1.4).

Zegarac (1998: 340-341) finally, who takes a relevance-theoretical approach, argues that the term phatic communication “does not identify a natural class of phenomena” but that what counts as phatic is a product of the contextual situation. According to him “[our] intuitions about the phatic use of language are based on a pattern of interacting factors, including: (a) what the information communicated is about, (b) the types of evidence exploited in the interpretation, (c) the strength at which

the information is communicated, and (d) the distribution of cognitive effects according to the type of evidence exploited in achieving those effects.” (1998: 340-341). ↗. He emphasizes that phatic communication is often “unadventurous”, with reference to “safe” topics, such as the weather, the hearer’s well-being, and so on (1998: 348; cf Leech 1983 below).

3.2. *The Phatic Maxim*

In his chapter on politeness maxims, Leech (1983: 141) underlines the close connection between politeness and phatic communion, or “the activity of talking merely to preserve sociability”, where “stock subjects” (such as the weather) or “uninformative statements” (such as *You’ve had your hair cut!*) are very helpful. The only goal of this kind of chit-chat is to maintain friendly social relations, and, in turn, evade a breach of politeness” (1983: 39-40).

Since this kind of remarks constitute a breach of Grice’s Cooperative Principle by violating the Maxim of Quantity, Leech sees the need for an additional maxim, which he calls the “Phatic Maxim”, the purport of which is to “Avoid silence” or “Keep talking” but it would be “inadequate to describe phatic communion as simple avoidance of silence” (1983: 141), he adds; it rather “serves to extend the common ground of agreement and experience shared by the participants.” (1983: 142) through the choice of non-controversial subjects and concentration speaker attitudes instead of facts. Being silent when engaged in a conversation would be impolite.

4. Phatic talk illustrated

4.1. *General*

The primary aim of the COLT and COLA projects was to make teenagers talk in order to collect two reasonably large corpora of – hopefully - spontaneous teenage conversation. No other reasons were given to the recruits. In order to obtain as genuine speech as possible, the recruits were instructed to keep the recording equipment hidden, so that, ideally, the other students would not notice that they were being recorded. In reality, however, this turned out not be the case, judging by the frequent references to what was going on, such as *¿se me ve el micrófono?*, *ay me está grabando*, *lo único que hacemos es tonterías con el micrófono*, *¿lo has grabado esto?*, appeals such as *so come on, talk to me!* *come on, it’s just a microphone*, and so on. Some students were afraid of being recorded when using bad language, as for instance one of the 15-year-old private-school boys in COLT:

(1)

W1: the cleaner upstairs, she asked me to find out what kind of cakes everybody liked cos she’s buying every single person an individual, like you know, a single cake for everybody. not like a big one to share like she’s buying everybody a cake each.

W4: it’s **fucking** brilliant.

W3: the one who’s [down here as well?]

[shit they didn't record] that did they?

W1: it doesn't matter

W4: well I said a rude word.

W?: {nv} laugh { /nv }

W1: [well no it doesn't matter er]

W7: [anonymity guaranteed.] COLT 42103: 89-97

Others did not seem to mind:

(2)

GO1: uy pero ¿qué haces?

'hey but what are you doing?'

GO2: vamos bicho tronco

'come on you bastard'

G12: bicho macho para ponerte una **mierda** de grabación

'you bastard just do do this shit of a recording'

GO3: {risa}

'laughter'

GO1: eh pero luego voy a escuchar con tal que me guste lo tu pongas eh COLAm41: 1

'hey but afterwards I'm going to listen as long as you put on what I like'

The fact that everybody knew what was going on quite often had the effect that entire recordings can best be described as phatic; they are chats with no real informative content, talk for the sake of talking, which is in agreement with Cheepen (1988: 20-21), who argued that "phatic communion does not only "occur as short words or phases among other, non-phatic speech" but may also "extend over a whole encounter (such as a chat), which may last for several hours.", except that the teenage conversations did not normally last that long.

4.1.1. Openings & closings

Phatic talk is typically found in the opening and closing phases of the interaction (cf Laver 1975: 232). But unlike many real-life as opposed to recorded conversations, and telephone conversations in particular (cf Stenström 1994: 135f), the teenage conversations in COLT and COLAm do not have recognizable openings realized by greetings and warming-up talk or closings in the form of winding-up talk and farewells, which we ascribe mainly to the recording situation. Therefore there are very few instances of conventionalized phatic words such as *hola* and *hello* or other standardized phatic expressions. These occur only when a friend suddenly joins the group of speakers in the middle of ongoing talk. If there is an opening section at all, it is almost exclusively realized by talk about the recording, as in example (3) from COLAm, which starts as follows:

(3)

GX1: ¿estás grabando?

'are you recording?'

JO1: sí

'yes'

- GX1: huy como mola tronca
 ‘hey I like that’
 JO1: {risa}
 ‘laughter’
 GX1: qué movida
 ‘what a mess’
 JO3: ay por favor qué cansancio
 ‘oh please I’m so tired’

This is followed by small talk about personal matters (eg *cuando es tu cumpleaños*) and more talk about the recording, before the “real topic” is embarked upon, boys, or more specifically going to Sevilla, where the boys are much more good-looking than those in Madrid:

- J01: voy por la calle en Madrid son todos feísimos yo los veo a todos horribles digo
 uauauah qué tío más feo
 ‘if I walk along the streets in Madrid they are all so ugly, I mean I find them all terrible’
 J04: no todo el mundo es feo
 ‘no everybody is not ugly’
 J01: en Sevilla
 ‘in Seville’
 J03: vete vete a las chabolas y seguro que encuentras gitanos que te parecen monos
 ‘go go to the shacks and I’m sure you’ll find some gipsies that are good-looking’
 COLAm6:1-5

There is an abrupt ending, when the recorder is suddenly switched off:

- 1J3b: [estás grabando/]
 ‘are you recording?’
 1J3: [es que se va a ac – sí pero es que tiene no bateria . entonces se va a acabar ya
 ‘but it is going to fin - yes but it doesn’t have any battery left it’s going to end now’
 1J3b: [(xxx)]
 1J3: [es que se va a apagar me . cago en la leche . ven vamos] COLAm38:16
 ‘[but it’s going to die shit . come let’s go’

Similar examples are found in COLT.

4.1.2. *Appealers and uptakes*

Phatic devices have a strong bonding effect by contributing to the establishment and maintenance of communicative contact (Laver 1975; Senft 1995; Mateo & Yus 2000). What devices can be more effective in this respect than a turn-final item serving as an “appealer” for feedback followed by the next speaker’s turn-initial “uptake”? (Stenström 1994: 71, 79-80). Spanish *eh/* and *no/* (“/” indicating a rising tone) and English *eh? okay? right?* and *innit?* were found to serve as appealers in COLAm and COLT, as illustrated in examples (4) to (9):

- (4)
 J02: bueno ahora recogemos **eh/**

‘well now we’ll tidy up things together eh’
G03: **no** nos ha dicho Diego que no COLAm41:1
‘no Diego has told us not to’

(5)

J01: ... hace frío **no**/
‘... it’s cold isn’t it’
JX1: **sí** COLAm19:15
‘yes’

(6)

W1: you thought that was funny **eh**?
W2: **yeah** . COLT 134802: 28-29

(7)

W1: I’ll be down in about twenty minutes , **okay**?
W9: **alright** .COLT 139308:200-201

(8)

Tiffany: he’s going out with wo=, a gi=, a woman called Keilly, **right**?
Susie: **yeah**. Right. COLT 135004:132-133

(9)

W1: yeah but the insurance company are probably gonna pay erm , through me
innit?
W2: **oh yeah** { unclear } { nv } laugh { /nv } COLT: 56-57

There is no doubt that the speaker who initiated the exchange would feel at a loss without the interlocutor’s reaction. Moreover, the interlocutor would be extremely impolite not to respond.

In this connection, it might be mentioned that García Vizcaino & Martínez-Cabeza (2005: 75) discuss the phatic use of Spanish *bien* or *y bien*? “as cue to the hearer to begin or continue a turn” corresponding to English *well* or *well then*? None of these items were found in turn-final appeler position in COLT and COLAm, however.

4.1.3. Reaction signals

When somebody tells a story or gives an account of something, the listener is expected to show an interest in what s/he is being told, either verbally or non-verbally. It would be very rude to demonstrate a lack of interest by not responding in one way or the other. Verbally, the interest might be expressed in the form of minimal feedback (eg *mhm*), interjections (eg *oh*) or taboo words (eg *joder*, *fuck*). Minimal feedback is illustrated in (10):

(10)

W1: well did I tell you we had to do this , I did tell you , we had to do this **erm**
W9: don't think you did .
W1: dra= **er** some of us had to do a drama competition { unclear }

- W9: **mm**
 W1: got a hundred percent for acting
 W9: **mhm**
 W1: and it was money prizes but they took , they were looking for things to take marks off cos all the other schools doing it were state schools
 W9: **mm**
 W1: and so that money prizes aren't gonna go to a school like
 W9: **no**
 W1: ours and so **erm** { nv } clears throat { /nv } so , they , so we would have come second had we had an , had we had an audience , I mean that's the ridiculous thing it's the content , having to do with what you know the environment is it ? so we got but we got a hundred per cent acting or something and the two masters are gonna take us out , the five of us out to dinner .
 W9: oh , nice . COLT 42702: 1-14

Minimal feedback signals, or backchannels, do not only show that the addressee is listening, but they also have an encouraging effect, signalling “tell me more!”; without them the current speaker might just drop the topic. Notice that there is no speaker change; the current speaker just goes on speaking without paying “open” attention to the *mhms* and *mms*, as it were.

There is a difference between the two corpora both as regards the occurrence and the realization of feedback. In COLT, feedback in the form of backchannels realized by “unobtrusive” items such as *mm/mhm* is common, and as we have seen, the current speaker goes on uninterrupted. In COLAm, this kind of feedback does not seem to occur at all. Instead we find examples like (11), where the feedback is triggered by the current speaker’s turn-final appeler (*no/sí*). In other words, the current speaker asks openly for feedback, which results in the addressee’s response in the form of a turn shift, indicating “I am listening”, “I agree” and “go on speaking”.

(11)

- J04: te han echado de clase qué chollo
 ‘they’ve thrown you out of class lucky you’
 J06: porque está menopásica menopáusica la tía mira entra en clase yyy dice estaba todo el mundo ahí de juerga **no**
 ‘ because she’s menopausal menopausal look she gets into the classroom and everybody was fooling around ok’
 J04: **sí**
 ‘yes’
 J06: entonces eeh eeeh eeh la o sea la hemos visto entrar y nadie se ha inmutado todo el mundo ha seguido a lo suyo estábamos escribiendo la tarjeta para Rocio que es su cumpleaños no el domingo [entonces nadie se ha inmutado **sí**]
 ‘ then eeh eeeh eeh we well we saw her coming in and nobody moved everybody went on doing
 their stuff we were writing a card to Rocio because it’s her birthday on Sunday isn’t it [then nobody moved eah]’
 J04: **[sí]**
‘[yes]’
 J06: sí entonces ella ahí sentada tal como con cara de mala leche pero que no le apetecía gritar ni nada **no**

‘and then she was like sitting there with an annoyed face but as if she didn’t want to scream or anything eh’

J04: **sí**
‘yes’

J06: entonces cuando justo cuando ha empezado a ex iba a empezar a explicar y una niña le ha preguntado una duda entonces estaban Carla que está aquí y María aquí hablando como de punta a punta ... COLAm35:4
‘then when just when she started to ex she was going to start to explain and a girl asked her a question then Carla was here and Maria here like talking from one end to the other’

Feedback in the form of interjections is illustrated in (12) and (13):

(12)

J01: pero tu donde vives
‘but where do you live?’

J05: en el golf
‘by the golf court’

J01: **uffff**

J05: [pero yooo]
‘[but I I I I]’

J01: [qué paliza no]
‘[a hard job isn’t it]’

J05: yaaa sabes pero es que tampoco me importa mucho ... COLAm35:3
‘yeah but you know I really don’t mind very much’

Here *ufffff* does not only encourage J05 to go on speaking; it also reflects J01’s reaction (“that”s very far away”). In other words, it works not only on the interactional level but also on the referential level. In contrast, *oh* in (13) does indeed react to what the current speaker just said but does not affect the interactional level, since the current speaker goes on speaking without taking any notice.

(13)

W1: found Jules?

W4: he's in the other room .

W1: **oh**

W4: right now

W1: oh bollocks . COLT 42202: 42-45

But in both corpora, taboo words were found to be more common reaction signals than interjections.

In his study of preadolescent talk, Fine (1981: 55-56) argues that friends are allowed and even expected to insult each other as a show of camaraderie, adding that insults often “build upon each other”, which agrees entirely with our findings with regard to adolescent talk, that is boys’ talk. And as mentioned by Mateo & Yus (2000:111), insults with the purpose of reinforcing social bonds or the phatic strength of an exchange “should be taken solely as a socialising and purely interactive conversational strategy.”. This is an extract from a boy’s conversation:

(14)

- G05: el Gomi se quedó solo
'Gomi was left alone'
- G03: no seas **hijo de puta**
'don't be such a son of a bitch'
- G05: que se queda solo
'but he is alone'
- G03: pues qué **te jodas**
'fuck off'
- G05: que **me jodan** a mí por
'they should try me because'
- G03: porque eres **tonto**
'because you're dumb'
- G05: vaya **witch**
'what a witch'
- G03: eres un **tolijo**
'you are a son of a bitch'
- G07: mira leí dos veces en ...
'look I read twice in...'
- G03: en una puta mariquiquita COLAm42:17
'in a fucking little ladybird'

In both corpora, taboo words dominate in boys' talk. The London boys in COLT use expressions such as *you are a dick*, *bloody chieffer*, *peanut head*, *you little wanker* and the girls *you stupid cow*, *you fucking slag* and *you're such a whore*. In the Madrid girls' conversations we meet expressions such as *joder*, *hostia*, and *que te cagas* but no abusives. None of the abusive nor other taboo words seem to be used for the sake of insulting nor to have an insulting effect (cf Stenström et al 2002: 80-81). They are generally said in a rather playful way, "often expressed 'joyously'" according to Fine (1981: 54). There is no doubt that feedback signals, whether they are realized by backchannels, interjections or taboo words, have an encouraging effect, which often results in a livelier or more exciting account.

4.1.4. Linkers

Connective linkers are sometimes difficult to separate from fillers (Section 4.1.5). They both work on the macrostructural level, both within and between turns; that is to say, both as a discursive and an interactional device. Spanish *bueno* and *pues* and English *well*, and sometimes *cos* (*because*), are typically used on this level. Some linguists refer to this use as purely phatic (eg Vigara 1990: 77; Cortés 1991: 106). Martínez García (1990: 600) in González (2004: 262), claims that *pues* "carece de todo significado y función y solo se utiliza como una especie de 'muletilla' en un intento de explicar una 'causa' que en realidad no se conoce", a view that is shared by Cortés Rodríguez (1991: 33) and Fuentes (1993: 213), but is strongly opposed by Gonzalez, who, following Briz (1993: 46), argues that the role of pragmatic markers like *pues* "cannot be viewed – only – in purely phatic terms", or, in other words, as simply filling an empty space, a view that we fully support. According to Fuentes Rodríguez (1990: 137), these items "[p]arecen ser de poca importancia en la comunicación. Sin embargo, constituyen [...]"

el recurso más utilizado en una conversación”. Consider the use of *pues* in (15), where two girls are discussing what to wear at a party:

(15)

LJ3: tú ¿qué te vas a poner?
‘ what are you going to wear?’

X: **pues** yo me voy a poner una falda larga vaquera y luego por arriba es que no lo sé tengo muchas opciones COLAm18:3
‘well I’m going to put on a black jeans skirt and on top I really don’t know I’ve got many options’

Pues in this position, serving as a turn-taker and response marker, is by no means pragmatically empty but indicates some insufficiency in the response, just like the English equivalent *well* would do in a similar situation (cf Lakoff 1973; Svartvik 1980; Stenström 1984). The insufficiency in (15) consists in X not knowing exactly what to wear. Thus, the answer is incomplete, which explains the occurrence of the face-saving mitigator *pues*. A similar function is realized by *well* in (16), where W7 provides an indirect response instead of a direct *yes*-answer.

(16)

W9: are you sure it's right that there are girls in the room?

W7: **well** it says on the door, girls' annexe . COLT 41901: 211-212

Bueno in this position, as a response marker, “parece un puro atenuativo, conector sin más matices añadidos”; according to Fuentes, “más fático, más continuativo puramente hablando” (1993: 213). It indicates the beginning of a turn, linking up with what preceded and attenuating the response:

(17)

1J3: como es manga francesa/
‘ince it is a French sleeve’

1J3a: **bueno** es como así azulita COLAm38:
‘well, it is like bluish’

When occurring in a monological sequence, Fuentes (1993: 213-214) sees *bueno* as a purely phatic connector used to continue or resume the argumentative thread, although it is, properly speaking, an element that indicates the end of one theme and the transition to a new. According to García Vizcaíno and Martínez-Cabeza (2005: 82f) the two major functions of *bueno* are “transition” and “redress”, realized as rectification and self-correction. Rectification, they say, “is oriented to save the hearer’s positive face while self-correction is intended to save the speaker’s positive face”.

Examples (18) and (19) illustrate the continuative use of *bueno* and *well*:

(18)

J01: no o sea yo le digo digo bueno tal pues es que claro yo iría a Sevilla = vas a venir a la feria y yo iría pero no tengo sitio = **bueno** si organizais un par de días y me sacais por ahí = dice eso está hecho tal vienes a mi casa {risa} = {R} sí sí {R} {risa} COLAm5.

‘well like I tell him OK then well of course I would go to Seville are you going to the fare I would but I haven’t got a place to stay OK if you fix a couple of days and you take me out somewhere = he says consider it done then you can stay at my place then {laughter} = {R}yes yes {R}{laughter}’

(19)

W1: he had this really nice cap , and it was a really smart cap , I just really liked it and he was a bit of an ugly **well** he wasn't ugly he was just really gormless and I said erm he must have been about twenty something and I said to him , can I have your hat, he said no it's from a friend it's sentimental or something COLT 42704: 121

The two main functions of *well* are as transition marker and attenuation marker (García Vizcaíno and Martínez-Cabeza 2005: 78f), the latter of which is illustrated in (19). We agree that it mitigates the threat of a potential FTA by attenuating a previously expressed opinion, notably the speaker’s own opinion. This function is similar to the self-correction in *bueno*. All in all, “*well* in the attenuation function and *bueno* in its rectification function are used as politeness strategies to mitigate the illocutionary force of the FTA and hence, to save participants’ face in the interaction” (2005: 87).

4.1.5. Fillers and hedges

Fillers help the current speaker to hold the turn, thus keeping the conversation going by filling an empty space and preventing silence. In our view, pure fillers, or as near as one can get to pragmatically empty items, are typically realized by filled pauses, as in (20) and (21):

(20)

J06: entonces **eeeh eeeeh eeeh** la o sea la hemos visto entrar ... COLAm 35:3
‘ then eh eh eh well like we have seen her come in’

It is obvious that the speaker does not know how to continue at the start of the turn. Notice the co-occurrence with *o sea*, which also points to uncertainty.

(21)

W9: Come on I want the truth and nothing but truth , [what did you say] ?
W1: [er , well] I told her that , I told her all the sad things you'd ever done in your life
W9: Like what ?
W1: Like **erm , er** , I can't think off hand now . COLT 42002:20-23

Here the speaker openly admits his predicament by *I can't think off hand now*.

Hedges, too, often act as fillers besides modifying an utterance and helping the speaker avoid committing him/herself. Take for instance Spanish *en plan* and its English equivalent *like*. They are both very helpful when the speaker struggles for words, or does not know how to proceed, but they are not pragmatically empty like the filled pauses *erm/er* and *eeeh*.

(22)

J01: pero es anoréxica **en plan** que está famélica

‘but is she anorectic like she is all emaciated’

J02: sí sí sí que es anoréxica que está en tratamiento que toma pastillas yyy y entonces – no pero tampoco se le nota tanto eh o sea en las piernas sobre todo

pero nooo o sea o mucho nooo además es ideal la niña

‘yes yes yes she is anorectic she’s being treated and is taking pills and and and then no but you wouldn’t notice it so well the legs above all and so but no well not much no ooo and it is a lovely girl’

J01: y va **en plan** apretada o va **en plan** – suelta

‘but does she wear her clothes all tight or loose’

J02: sultecilla yo creo no sé no normal normal ... COLAm31:2

‘rather loose I think I don’t know normal normal’

Here, the use of *en plan* serves to protect the speaker’s positive face: J01 does not say straight out that the girl she is talking about is *famélica*, *apretada* or *suelta*. In (23), on the other hand, the stalling function of *like* seems to predominate:

(23)

W1: ... my brother at least thinks Jimmy's really nice ,

W8: Does he ?

W1: **like** yeah because **like** , about what he did you know he was staying up for pairs and all this , and **like** giving him money and looking after Andrew , so he goes to my parents Jimmy's really nice. COLT 41606: 38-40

Hedges are typically face-saving devices. By modifying the force of an utterance and reducing the speaker’s commitment to what is being said, one of their major functions is to protect the speaker’s as well as the addressee’s face (cf Coates 1996: 156).

4.1.6. Appellatives

As mentioned by Fuentes Rodríguez (1990: 165) certain vocatives are used in Spanish as a purely conversational resource to establish and maintain contact and sometimes express affection. She mentions *hombre* as the most common appellative, which is used by females as well as males. *Hombre* does occur in the teenage conversations in COLAm, but very seldom, the most frequent appellatives being *tío* (sometimes *tronco* or *chaval*) and *tía* (sometimes *hija* or *tronca*).

(24)

J01: ah claro así me hago famosa y canto y todo

‘oh of course ‘ I’ll be famous and I’ll sing and all’

J03: **tía** pues en serio lo de lo de no llevar sujetador es mazo de cómodo **tía**

‘but seriously not wearing a bra is very comfortable’

J02 : {R} **tía** estás boba {R]

‘{R} you’re stupid {R]’

J03: pero esto no lo escucha nadie

‘but nobody is going to listen to this’

J02: **tía** no no lo escucha to todo el mundo que rebobine y lo oiga **tía** COLAm20:2

‘ no no no not everybody will listen they can just rewind and listen to it’

Interestingly, there are no corresponding expressions in the London teenagers’ conversations.

5. Discussion

5.1. Cultural differences

Generally speaking, when comparing the conversations and the strategies used, one gets the impression that the turns are shorter, that there are more interruptions, that there is more laughter and more use of taboo words in the Spanish than in the English conversations. And, as we saw in Section 4.1.6, there are no appellatives used as phatic devices in the English conversations. Whether this points to stronger involvement on the part of the Spanish teenagers due to their cultural background is an open question. Maybe the difference is a reflection of García Vizcaíno and Martínez-Cabeza’s (2005: 71) assertion that some cultures (e.g., Spanish) “consider closeness and solidarity as essential values in social interaction” as opposed to other cultures (e.g., British) where independence and individualism are more highly valued.

What is reflected in both COLT and COLAm is that the speakers are mostly aware of being recorded. For instance, it is sometimes difficult for the recruits to get the other students to speak and say something sensible instead of pure nonsense. What definitely seems to reflect the situation, being recorded, is the often very rich use of taboo words. Boys in particular have a tendency to start using taboo words in this situation as a way of showing off, the top three being *fuck*, *shit* and *dick* and *joder coño* and *mierda*, respectively, in either case words related to sex and bodily functions.

Phatic communion in the form of social talk about the weather, personal appearance and so on, which typically occurs when people meet in a non-recording situation, is largely missing in both groups, while small talk about the recording, especially at the beginning of the conversations, is somewhat more common in the Spanish group, which seems to indicate that the Spanish teenagers are less capable of ignoring the presence of the recorder.

As regards the use of small words, both groups are frequent users of turn-final appealers to trigger a turn-initial uptake, though using a different, culture-bound, inventory, with the exception of *eh*. On the other hand, Spanish turn-final *no* has no equivalent in English, where *okay*, *right* and *innit (isn’t it)* have the same appealing function.

With respect to reaction signals, the English teenagers insert “unsolicited” minimal feedback signals, eg. realized by *mhm* or *mm*, which act as backchannels, encouraging the current speaker to go on speaking, without causing speaker shifts. Similar items do not occur in the Spanish conversations, where minimal feedback signals, typically realized by *sí*, are specifically “asked for” by the current speaker in the form of an appealers, with speaker shifts as a result. Reaction signals realized by interjections are frequent in both groups, and so are taboo words.

The Spanish micro-structural linking words *bueno* and *pues* generally correspond to *well* in English. In addition to serving as connective linkers, contributing to the cohesion and coherence of the discourse, these items also serve as stalling devices, whereas “pure” fillers occur in the form of Spanish *eeeh* and English *erm/er*. Hedges, too,

realized by Spanish *en plan* and English *like*, often have a stalling function in addition to their characteristic function as utterance modifiers.

5.2. *Is teenage phatic talk polite?*

To say something in a situation where there is very little or hardly anything to say is belongs to common courtesy. This does not mean, however, that there is a direct link between politeness and phatic communion, as pointed out by Zegarac (1998: 350-358), who distinguishes between linguistic meaning and cognitive effect and argues that the phatic use of an utterance has to do with what is most relevant. In other words, whether phatic talk or a phatic expression is polite or impolite is not a matter of convention but a matter of interpretation in a particular situation.

The use of taboo words and insults is a case in point. From a cultural point of view, the use of taboo words can be perceived as highly impolite in one language and seen as a token of camaraderie in another, with a bonding effect, a use that is typical of teenage talk. From a moral point of view, it might of course be argued that the use of taboo words and insults is intrinsically impolite, but as Mateo & Yus (2000:17) point out, insults fulfil a social function while the meaning is almost irrelevant, something that we have found refers to the use of taboo words in general in teenage talk.

With Leech's Phatic Maxim, the core message of which is to avoid silence by keeping talking, as a comfortable starting-point, we have tried to show in this study that the London and Madrid teenagers' use of expressions that have been criticized by adults is highly motivated for phatic purposes and can rightfully be considered to represent polite behaviour, notably the use of encouraging feedback and reaction signals, face-saving hedges, the macro-structural small words (including pure fillers) and the use of rapport-creating taboo words. They all help to keep a conversation going.

6. Concluding remarks

An intriguing question that has to be answered is where to draw the line between phatic talk and informative talk. Is this just a matter of intuition? Is phaticness a matter of degree? Zegarac & Clark (1999: 565) discuss "phatic interpretation" (cf. Zegarac 1998), according to which the "interpretation is phatic to the extent that its main relevance lies with implicated conclusions which do not depend on the explicit content of the utterance, but rather on the communicative intention". This sounds reasonable but is not entirely convincing. What is it, for instance, that says that the hearer interprets the speaker's communicative intention the way s/he intended? This in turn has implications for the degree of (im)politeness involved. The discussion goes on.

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