



PATANI MALAY PHATIC EXPRESSION

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Abstract

This study examines the significance of phatic expressions in Patani Malay speech as part of communicative practices that reflect the social and cultural identity of its speakers. This research aims to describe the variations of phatic forms and their pragmatic functions in daily interactions, particularly how particles such as *ka*, *dok*, *la*, *weh*, *po*, *keh*, and *deh* are utilized to maintain conversational harmony and mark interpersonal closeness. This study employed a qualitative descriptive method with data collection techniques comprising in-depth interviews with Patani Malay people. The obtained speech data were analyzed syntactically and pragmatically to uncover patterns of phatic usage within natural communication contexts. The results indicate that phatic expressions in the Patani Malay dialect exhibit variations in form, encompassing single particles, short phrases, and brief clauses that function flexibly to soften utterances, convey light emotions, and maintain social relationships. These findings further reveal that phatic particles play a crucial role in mitigating Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs), refining speech, and ensuring that conversations proceed cooperatively. This study concludes that the use of phatics serves as a linguistic strategy that affirms the values of politeness, solidarity, and the cultural identity of the Patani community.

Keywords: interpersonal communication, Patani Malay dialect, phatic expressions, politeness strategies, pragmatic functions

INTRODUCTION

Malay constitutes a prominent language within the Austronesian family (Malayo-Polynesian branch), serving as a lingua franca and being extensively used in Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, Singapore, and other Southeast Asian communities (Md. Salleh & Yamat, 2019). Historically, its diffusion throughout the Malay Archipelago and the Malay Peninsula was facilitated by trade routes and extensive contact (Klamer, 2019). (Harun et al., 2018). estimate the total Malay-speaking population to be approximately 281 million, comprising 77 million native speakers and 204 million second-language speakers. In several Southeast Asian nations, Malay holds the status of an official or national language and is regarded as a symbol of national identity within language planning frameworks (Mohamad, 2022). Beyond its macro-linguistic function as a means of cross-regional communication, the complexity of this language demands a deep understanding of the micro-linguistic elements that maintain social relations, one of which is the use of phatic expressions. The existence of phatic elements serves as evidence that language functions as the adhesive of solidarity in a pluralistic society.

Phatic expressions in the Malay language constitute pragmatic elements that serve a vital function in maintaining interactional continuity, strengthening intimacy, and marking the speaker's emotional engagement within a conversation (Mubarak & Aldriani, 2019); (Safira & Reranta, Bentuk dan fungsi partikel fatis dialek Melayu Bangka, 2025). Various recent studies indicate that Malay communities across diverse regions possess unique characteristics regarding phatic forms. For instance, Bangka Malay utilizes specific particles such as *jo*, *kan*, *kek*, and *se?*, which function to reinforce meaning and maintain social contact between speakers (Safira & Reranta, Bentuk dan fungsi partikel fatis dialek Melayu Bangka, 2025). Meanwhile, in the oral communication of Rambah

Malay, phatic expressions are found in varied forms of particles, words, and phrases that are predominantly used to initiate and sustain the flow of conversation (Kusuma, Ningsih, & Gunawan, 2020). In other regions, studies on Jambi Malay show that the use of phatics such as *kan*, *iyo*, and *dak* is highly productive within family conversation discourse to create a relaxed and intimate atmosphere (Rahima & Wahyuni, Bentuk Fatis dalam Wacana Lisan Percakapan Keluarga Pada Masyarakat Melayu Jambi, 2021). (Faizah, 2012) Functional variations are also observed in the Kuok and Kampar dialects of Riau Malay, where phatic categories are employed not only for politeness but also as strategies for breaking the conversation, verification, and affirmation within oral traditions (Faizah, 2012; Yusma, Rahmi, & Hermendra, 2025). Furthermore, in Sungai Rokan Malay and Kupang Malay, phatics play a significant role in expressing cognition and volition, as well as clarifying the speaker's intent in daily interactions (Gunawan 2020; Malelak, 2024). Although research on phatic expressions has been conducted extensively across these various dialect variants, specific studies regarding phatics in Patani Malay remain limited and have not been comprehensively described; thus, further study is required to complement the mapping of linguistic variation in the Malay world.

Although extensive research on phatic expressions has been conducted across various Malay variants and regional languages in Indonesia, there is a significant gap in the literature regarding the Patani Malay dialect. Patani Malay is a variant spoken by a substantial Malay community in Southern Thailand. As one of the historical foundations of Malay civilization, the Patani community boasts a massive number of speakers and unique speech culture characteristics resulting from complex linguistic and cultural contact. The number of Patani Malay speakers in Thailand's Deep South constitutes 83% of the population, or more than one million people across the four border provinces (Premririt & Burarungrot, 2021). Unfortunately, academic attention to micro-pragmatic aspects, such as phatic expressions in this dialect, remains minimal compared to the Riau Malay dialect or other regional languages in Indonesia. Yet, understanding phatic expressions in Patani Malay is crucial for mapping how Malay identity is maintained through linguistic strategies in border regions.

Based on this urgency, this study aims to analyze phatic expressions in Patani Malay by focusing on the classification of their forms and pragmatic functions. This study examines how phatic particles, words, and phrases are utilized in the natural interactions of Patani speakers. This research moves beyond a mere inventory of forms to dissect their social functions in strengthening bonds of friendship and politeness (Lestari, 2024; Wahya et al., 2021). By uncovering these patterns of phatic usage, this study is expected to complement the treasury of Malay linguistic documentation and provide new insights into the communication strategies of Patani Malay society in maintaining social harmony.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive design. This approach was chosen because it has the capacity to describe natural and in-depth linguistic phenomena without relying on numerical statistical procedures, but rather on the meaning of verbal data. The main objective of this study is to identify, classify, and comprehensively describe the variations in the forms and pragmatic functions of phatic expressions that appear in real interactions. This aligns with the methodological principles in the study of phatic phrases in Kupang Malay, which emphasizes the description of form and meaning (Malelak, 2024) as well as research on phatic Malay in the Sungai Rokan dialect, which aims to obtain a complete picture of language use in the context of community communication (Gunawan, 2020). Furthermore, qualitative descriptive methods have also proven relevant for dissecting phatic categories in oral traditions, as applied in the analysis of Riau Malay in the Kampar dialect (Yusma, Rahmi, & Hermendra, 2025).

The data in this study are oral utterances containing phatic expressions in the Patani dialect of Malay. The primary data sources were obtained directly from informants, namely native speaker students from Patani, Narathiwat Province. The selection of informants was carried out purposively with age criteria ranging from around 20 years to represent the younger generation of speakers who actively use the dialect in the social realm. The data collection strategy through interaction with native speakers (informants) to obtain recordings of natural conversations refers to techniques commonly used in phatic research, such as those conducted on Riau Islands Malay speakers (Mubarak & Aldriani, 2019) and research on the influence of the Lampung language in conversation (Reranta, 2017).

The data analysis procedure was carried out through a series of systematic steps to ensure the accuracy of the results. The first step began with the transcription of speech data from recorded interviews and observations. Next, the data were analyzed using the distributional method to classify phatic forms whether particles, words, or phrases and determine their function based on sentence context, as applied in the phatic analysis of Jambi Malay family conversation discourse (Rahima & Wahyuni, 2021). This analysis process followed an interactive flow that

included data reduction to sort out the main points, data display to organize the pattern findings, and concluding with conclusion drawing to verify the social function of phatic, in accordance with the qualitative data analysis framework (Jaenudin, 2019).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study examines the role of phatic expressions in the Patani Malay language, which are often regarded as pivotal elements in daily social interactions. Phatic expressions, defined as particles or phrases that do not directly contribute to propositional meaning, assist in establishing a more refined and harmonious conversational tone. Through the analysis of speech data, this research aims to elucidate their syntactic form variations as well as their pragmatic functions within the Patani Malay cultural context. The results reveal that phatic expressions in Patani Malay speech exhibit a diversity of syntactic forms, ranging from simple particles such as *ka*, *dok*, *la*, *weh*, *po*, *keh*, and *deh* to short phrases or concise clauses that are flexibly employed within everyday discourse. These forms play a crucial role in initiating, sustaining, and terminating conversations, while simultaneously softening utterances, expressing subtle sentiments, and demonstrating interpersonal intimacy between speakers. Although the Patani Malay dialect possesses unique characteristics that distinguish it from other Malay variants, its phatic system performs similar communicative functions: strengthening solidarity, maintaining harmony, and ensuring the fluidity of dialogue. The most notable distinction lies in the syntactic arrangement and the selection of specific Patani particles, which reflect the cultural identity and linguistic ethical norms of the speaking community.

Data 1

[e.so? a.do u.dʒi.ja:n ka:]
'Tomorrow there exam /ka?/'
Do we have an exam tomorrow /ka?'

The particle */ka/* in this utterance functions as a confirmation marker that softens the question so it does not sound coercive or pressuring to the interlocutor. In a pragmatic context, the particle */ka/* serves to transform a question that is potentially interrogative in nature into a form that is more friendly and casual. Its placement at the end of the first clause indicates its function as a phatic element that maintains interpersonal relationships; namely, it signals that the speaker is not demanding information directly, but rather verifying something in a polite manner. The presence of */ka/* also indicates social intimacy between the speaker and the interlocutor, as this particle is commonly used among individuals who are already acquainted. Thus, the social meaning of this particle extends beyond merely confirming information to also maintaining harmony and preventing face-threatening acts. Practically, */ka/* creates a warm and informal conversational atmosphere, allowing the interaction to proceed in an air of familiarity without generating tension.

Data 2

[da:.mo do? bu.aʔt ap e:]
'You /dok/ doing what?'
What do you /dok/ want to do?

The particle */dok/* in this utterance not only marks the progressive aspect or an ongoing action but also functions as a phatic marker that maintains social relationships. The placement of */dok/* after the pronoun or subject indicates that its syntactic function is peripheral acting not as the propositional core, but as a softener of speech style. Its usage renders this question more relaxed, informal, and friendly, helping to initiate the conversation without placing pressure on the interlocutor. From the perspective of social relations, */dok/* asserts that the conversation is taking place in an intimate atmosphere, reflecting an informal relationship between the speaker and the interlocutor. Thus, */dok/* creates a comfortable interactional space, reduces social distance, and strengthens solidarity. Its presence in the sentence structure helps maintain conversational flow, so that a question which might otherwise seem interrogative becomes more fluid and non-face-threatening.

Data 3

[ho?ŋ.iŋ har.ga bo.le: ku.raŋ si.kit ka:]

'This price can reduced little /ka/?'
Can you lower the price a little bit for this one /ka/?

The particle /ka/ in this transactional context functions as a politeness strategy to soften the request. Request or bargaining utterances are inherently face-threatening to the seller as they contain an element of price negotiation. By appending /ka/ to the end of the sentence, the speaker eliminates the impression of commanding or demanding, rendering it a polite request. Syntactically, /ka/ appears as a peripheral element in the sentence-final position to signal that the speaker is allowing room for the seller to respond without pressure. Its usage also reflects the Patani Malay speech culture, which upholds harmony and respect for the interlocutor. Thus, /ka/ serves as a balancer between practical needs (bargaining) and communicative ethics (maintaining politeness), ensuring that the interaction proceeds within an atmosphere of mutual respect without generating social tension.

Data 4

[di.ja da? da.taŋ la.gi ka:]
'He not come again /ka/?'
Has he not come yet /ka/?

This utterance highlights the role of the phatic particle /ka/, positioned at the end of the clause to create a soft and non-judgmental interrogative tone. The particle /ka/ functions as a confirmation marker that mitigates the assertiveness of the preceding information, ensuring that the speaker's message is not perceived as a complaint or reprimand, but merely as a friendly request for clarification. In the context of Patani Malay communication, the use of /ka/ at the utterance-final position serves as a pragmatic strategy to maintain interpersonal relationships, particularly when the topic discussed is potentially sensitive, such as an individual's absence. /ka/ helps to mitigate the Face-Threatening Act (FTA) and renders the question more fluid, cooperative, and respectful of the interlocutor's feelings. Furthermore, /ka/ reflects the values of politeness upheld in Patani speech culture, where speakers tend to avoid direct confrontation by appending phatic elements to the end of sentences. Thus, the presence of /ka/ in this utterance functions not only as a softener but also as a marker of social solidarity and intimacy, illustrating the distinct character of verbal interaction within the Patani Malay community.

Data 5

[ki.ta maw d̪ʒum.pa di kam.pus ka]
'We goin meet on campus /ka/?'
Shall we meet on campus /ka/?

The particle /ka/ in this utterance functions as a marker of solicitation that softens the invitation, ensuring the proposal does not appear as an imposition of the speaker's will. In a pragmatic context, /ka/ transforms what could syntactically be interpreted as a declarative statement of intent ("We want to meet") into a negotiable proposal that respects the interlocutor's autonomy. Its placement at the end of the clause signals that the speaker is seeking consensus rather than issuing a directive, thereby creating a communicative space for the listener to agree or disagree without feeling pressured. The presence of /ka/ here underscores a strategy of positive politeness, indicating that the speaker values the listener's convenience and desires a mutual agreement. Thus, the social meaning of this particle serves to mitigate the potential weight of the request, preserving the interlocutor's negative face by offering them an "out" or a choice. Practically, /ka/ establishes a cooperative and democratic conversational atmosphere, fostering a sense of equality and shared decision-making between the participants.

Data 6

[sa.ja bo.le: ki.rim la.gi ka:]
'I can send again /ka/?'
Can I send again/ka/?

The particle /ka/ in this context functions as a politeness marker in a semi-formal situation. Even though the speaker is interacting with a lecturer, the usage of /ka/ renders the request for permission more polite, humble, and non-coercive. The placement of /ka/ in the sentence final position indicates that the speaker affords the interlocutor the space to decline without feeling pressured. Within the context of hierarchical social roles, the use of /ka/ serves as a pragmatic strategy to maintain the harmony of academic interactions. Thus, this particle serves not only a phatic function but also acts as a politeness device reflecting the communicative etiquette within Patani Malay culture.

Data 7

[bo.le: bu.aʔt ku.raŋ ma.nis ka:]
'Can make less sweet /ka/?'
Can you make it less sweet/ka/?

This utterance employs the particle /ka/ as a device for mitigating requests. Expressing criticism regarding the taste of food or beverages carries the potential to offend the service provider. However, by appending /ka/, the speaker transforms a critical comment into a subtle suggestion. The particle /ka/ lowers the degree of face threat and renders the request more acceptable. In a pragmatic context, this phatic usage establishes a respectful and cooperative atmosphere between the buyer and the seller, illustrating how the Patani Malay language posits politeness as a crucial aspect of social interaction.

Data 8

[pe:.ar ma.te.ma.ti.ka ta.di ka.we taʔ pa.ham deh]
'Homework mathematics earlier I not understand /deh/'
The last mathematics homework i don't understand /deh/

The particle /deh/ in this utterance employed to articulate a mild grievance without conveying an impression of excessive complaining. Syntactically, /deh/ is positioned at the clause-final position as a terminal element providing subtle emotional emphasis, signaling that the speaker is experiencing difficulty yet wishes to maintain a tone that is not perceived as negative. This particle reflects the speaker's humility, indicating an acknowledgment of a lack of knowledge without intending to explicitly demand assistance.

Data 9

[ka.we sa.kit ha.ti we:]
'I sick heart /weh/'
I have brokenheart /weh/

This utterance features the use of the phatic particle /weh/, which functions as an expressive marker to intensify the emotional nuance of the statement. Syntactically, /weh/ is positioned at the clause-final position and does not alter the core sentence structure; rather, it provides a pragmatic effect by emphasizing the speaker's emotional state. Within the Patani Malay cultural context, the usage of such particles is often not intended to exhibit overt hostility, but rather serves as a form of emotional release that remains within the boundaries of politeness. The particle /weh/ signals that the speaker's complaint is not aggressive in nature, but is instead an expression of inner feelings seeking understanding from the interlocutor. Its function as a phatic element renders the utterance more natural, intimate, and aligned with the speech patterns of the Patani community, who tend to avoid direct confrontation. Thus, /weh/ reinforces emotional meaning without aggravating the atmosphere, cementing interpersonal bonds by displaying vulnerability or honesty in a subtle manner. The presence of this particle also demonstrates that expressive strategies in the Patani Malay dialect utilize phatic elements as a means to maintain a balance between the conveyance of emotions and polite communicative ethics.

Data 10

[a.ku tə.ŋəʔ dah tuh pə]
'I look done that /po/'
I saw that it has been done /po/

This utterance presents the phatic particle /po/, which within the Patani Malay dialect functions as a subtle marker to conclude a statement while indicating that the speaker is confirming an action without intending to create an impression of arrogance or directly contradicting the interlocutor. Structurally, /po/ occupies the final position as a peripheral element that does not affect the main proposition but plays a pivotal role in shaping interpersonal meaning. In a pragmatic context, /po/ signals that the speaker is conveying information in a relaxed and non-confrontational tone, ensuring that the conversation remains harmonious. The usage of this particle signifies a distinctive form of Patani politeness, particularly when the speaker wishes to clarify that an action has been completed without wanting to be perceived as interrupting or harshly refuting. Socially, /po/ assists in preserving

good rapport between the speaker and the listener, reflecting the speech style of the Patani community which avoids conversational tension. Its presence demonstrates that particle selection is not merely a linguistic element, but also a mechanism for maintaining harmony, politeness, and social cohesion. Thus, /po/ becomes a crucial phatic element in affirming actions, softening statements, and exhibiting the communicative identity of Patani Malay speakers.

Data 11

[de.mo su.dah bu.aʔt keh:]
'You already make /keh?/'
Are you finish it /keh?'

The particle /keh/ in this utterance functions as a hedging device that attenuates the directness of an inquiry regarding the completion of a task. In a pragmatic context, questions about progress or duty fulfillment can naturally carry an accusatory or authoritative tone; however, the inclusion of /keh/ shifts the illocutionary force from an interrogation to a gentle, supportive check-in. Its position at the utterance-final boundary marks the speaker's non-authoritative stance, suggesting that the inquiry is driven by care or curiosity rather than a demand for accountability. The presence of /keh/ implies a high degree of solidarity and emotional intelligence, as the speaker anticipates that the question might otherwise cause anxiety or defensiveness in the listener. Consequently, the social meaning of this particle is deeply rooted in the maintenance of harmony, ensuring that the verification of information does not compromise the relational bond. Practically, /keh/ cultivates a non-threatening and empathetic environment, allowing the conversation to remain fluid and amicable even when addressing responsibilities or obligations.

Data 12

[ka.lu hu.ḍʒaŋ taʔ ḍʒa.di la]
'If rain not make it /la/'
If it rains, we're not going /la/

The particle /la/ in this utterance functions as an emotive marker of resignation and consensus, utilized to deliver a conditional refusal or cancellation in a softened manner. In a pragmatic context, /la/ reduces the rigidity of the statement, signaling that the cancellation is not a harsh rejection but an inevitable consequence of external circumstances (the rain). Syntactically occupying the clause-final position, it marks the closure of the topic while simultaneously inviting the interlocutor to share in the speaker's perspective or understanding of the situation. The presence of /la/ appeals to "shared knowledge" or common sense between the speaker and the listener, implying that the decision is logical and should be accepted without hard feelings. Thus, the social meaning of /la/ in this context is to mitigate potential disappointment or conflict, emphasizing that the outcome is beyond the speaker's control. Practically, /la/ creates a casual and reconciled atmosphere, smoothing over the potential friction of a cancelled plan and reinforcing the bond of understanding between the speakers.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that phatic expressions in Patani Malay function as vital pragmatic instruments rather than mere redundant linguistic elements. The analysis of specific particles such as ka, dok, la, weh, po, keh, and deh demonstrates that these markers carry significant functional weight in managing interpersonal rapport and balancing information delivery with social etiquette. Specifically, these expressions operate as effective mitigation strategies to soften potential Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) in directive contexts and to channel emotions within the boundaries of politeness in expressive contexts. By systematically employing these markers, speakers not only ensure conversational fluidity but also actively construct and reinforce their unique cultural identity and group solidarity amidst a multicultural environment.

However, this research is limited by its focus on a specific demographic of university students within an academic migration context, which may not fully capture the archaic or formal speech patterns of older generations residing in Southern Thailand. Consequently, future research should expand the scope to include cross-generational analysis or comparative studies with neighboring dialects, such as Kelantan Malay, to map dialectal isoglosses more comprehensively. Such scholarly endeavours are essential to enrich the documentation of regional Malay varieties and to provide deeper insights into how peripheral linguistic elements shape the sociolinguistic landscape of the Malay world.

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