

The Interference of Pekalongan Javanese Phatic Expression in Bahasa Indonesia Spoken in Pekalongan

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Abstract

This study examines the forms, functions, and pragmatic meanings of phatic expressions in the Javanese dialect of Pekalongan, a coastal region in Central Java known for its egalitarian and expressive communication style. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach within a functional discourse framework, data were collected through observation, audio recordings, and interviews involving native speakers in various social contexts. The findings identify nine distinctive phatic forms—/o/, /ɔ̃m/, /pok/, /bol/, /mhad̪:/, /kə/, /ki/, /ne/, and the long suffix /-a/—each performing specific pragmatic roles such as expressing invitation, emphasis, emotional involvement, affirmation, and social familiarity. Although these particles lack lexical meaning, they carry significant interpersonal value by maintaining conversational harmony, reinforcing solidarity, and softening communication. The frequent use of such phatic elements reflects the open and communal nature of the Pekalongan society, where politeness and intimacy are highly valued. Moreover, several of these particles have been assimilated into local varieties of Indonesian, illustrating processes of pragmatic interference and linguistic diffusion within bilingual interactions. The study concludes that phatic expressions in the Pekalongan dialect function not only as linguistic markers of social connection but also as reflections of local identity and coastal cultural values. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the relationship between linguistic structure and social function.

Keywords: phatic expressions, Pekalongan dialect, sociopragmatics



Introduction

Language serves not only as a means of conveying information but also as a medium for establishing and maintaining social relationships among speakers. One of the most prominent manifestations of this social function of language is found in *phatic expression*. Phatic expressions refer to linguistic forms used not to transmit new information but to maintain social bonds and interpersonal harmony. Such utterances function to open, sustain, or close interactions, fostering a sense of familiarity, politeness, and solidarity among interlocutors (Handayani, Purnanto, & Sumarlam, 2023). Hence, phatic elements demonstrate that language operates beyond its informational purpose—it also acts as a vital social adhesive in everyday communication.

Phatic expressions may take the form of particles, words, phrases, or clauses that syntactically occupy the initial, medial, or final positions in a sentence, depending on the speaker's pragmatic intentions. According to Reranta (2022), the phatic function acts as a *social lubricant* that facilitates smooth communication and prevents conversational breakdowns. Therefore, any analysis of phatic discourse must consider the relationship between the social function of language and its syntactic structure as the medium through which meaning is realized.

Previous studies have shown that the forms and functions of phatic expressions vary across different social and cultural contexts. Yuliana (2024) found that phatic utterances are often employed to express invitations and requests for permission in the context of visiting behavior, whereas Sukmawati (2023) demonstrated their use in public speeches to strengthen emotional bonds between speakers and audiences. Similarly, Reranta's (2022) research on the Lampung language revealed that phatic forms have specific syntactic roles in reinforcing interpersonal meaning. However, studies on phatic discourse in coastal dialects, such as that of Pekalongan, remain limited and underexplored.

The analysis of phatic expressions in the Pekalongan Javanese dialect is essential because these expressions have transcended their original linguistic context and become embedded in the Indonesian language as used by the local community. This phenomenon illustrates pragmatic interference and code-mixing, where speakers unconsciously transfer dialectal features into Indonesian to preserve nuances of intimacy, politeness, and social harmony. Consequently, examining phatic expressions originating from the Pekalongan dialect that have been assimilated into Indonesian is significant for understanding how local identity and coastal cultural values shape linguistic behavior. Such an investigation aligns with Hymes' (1974) and Wardhaugh's (2010) perspectives that language reflects the social and cultural contexts of its speakers, thereby contributing to a broader understanding of cross-linguistic pragmatics in Indonesian sociolinguistic settings.

Based on this background, the present study aims to describe the forms, functions, and syntactic positions of phatic utterances in the social interactions of the Pekalongan

community. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of sociolinguistic and pragmatic studies, enriching our understanding of the interplay between syntactic structure and the social functions of language within the cultural context of coastal Javanese society.

Literature Review

The study of phatic discourse is rooted in the concept of *phatic communion*, which refers to the use of language for establishing and maintaining social relationships rather than merely conveying information. In Javanese culture, phatic expressions such as *lho*, *kok*, and *ta* serve important pragmatic functions in preserving politeness and fostering a sense of closeness among interlocutors. Studies by Anggraini (2023), Sari (2022), and Yuliana (2024) also demonstrate that phatic discourse plays a crucial role in maintaining solidarity and promoting egalitarian politeness within social interaction. In coastal communities, Dewi (2025) found that phatic utterances tend to be used more openly and expressively, reflecting the egalitarian and dynamic character of coastal society. Consistent with the findings of Reranta (2022) and Reranta and Safira (2025) in their studies on the Lampung and Bangka Malay languages, phatic functions also contribute to reinforcing social harmony and local identity. Within the Pekalongan dialect, phatic utterances can thus be understood as social expressions that embody linguistic adaptation to a coastal culture characterized by communicativeness, courtesy, and a strong sense of communal togetherness.

Methodology

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with a functional discourse framework to describe the forms, functions, and pragmatic meanings of additional phatic expressions in the social interactions of Javanese speakers in Pekalongan. Language is viewed as a social instrument that constructs and maintains interpersonal relationships rather than merely a system of linguistic signs (Rohmadi, 2020).

The data were collected from the linguistic area of the Javanese dialect of Pekalongan, which covers the former Pekalongan Residency region, including Pekalongan City, Pekalongan Regency, Batang, and Pemalang. The data were obtained from naturally occurring speech within various social settings, such as food stalls, households, and community gatherings. Data collection was conducted through non-participant observation, audio recordings of spontaneous conversations, and in-depth interviews with native speakers. Digital recordings were utilized to capture prosodic elements such as intonation, stress, and pauses that influence the phatic meaning (Hidayat, 2024). The collected data were then phonetically transcribed using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) to facilitate comprehension by non-Javanese readers and accompanied by English translations, both literal and natural, to ensure cross-linguistic intelligibility. Phonetic transcription also aids in identifying the unique phonological characteristics of the Pekalongan dialect that contribute to the formation of its phatic functions.

The analysis was conducted using a descriptive-interpretative approach within an interactive model, encompassing data reduction, presentation, and verification. The

researcher served as the primary instrument, interpreting the data within its social and cultural context. Data validity was ensured through source, method, and theoretical triangulation (Rizki, 2020; Kartika, 2021). The research was carried out in the Pekalongan region of Central Java, an area known for its egalitarian and communicative community, aligning with the study's objective to reveal local variations of phatic expressions as reflections of Javanese coastal culture.

Result and Discussion

This study identified nine forms of additional phatic expressions in the Javanese dialect of Pekalongan that are commonly used in everyday conversations. These forms include *o*, *lhim*, *pok*, *bol*, *mhad*, *ke/ki*, *ne*, and the long suffix. Each form carries distinct pragmatic functions, such as signaling invitation, emphasis, closure, or social familiarity. Within the egalitarian and open community of Pekalongan, phatic expressions play a vital role in maintaining interactional harmony, strengthening social bonds, and expressing the cultural identity of coastal Javanese society.

The fundamental concept of phatic communication lies not in conveying propositional information but in fostering social connection. Phatic elements serve to reinforce solidarity and politeness among interlocutors. These findings align with studies by Widodo (2023), Suharyono (2021), and Yuliana (2024), which demonstrate that phatic expressions among Javanese speakers function to affirm social intimacy and egalitarian politeness. Similarly, research by Reranta (2022) and Reranta & Safira (2025) confirms the universal role of phatic expressions in reinforcing social harmony and local cultural identity, including within the communicative and open society of Pekalongan.

The particle *pok* is one of the most frequently occurring phatic forms in Pekalongan conversations. It lacks a fixed lexical meaning but serves pragmatic purposes such as marking invitation, emphasis, and social alignment between speakers and interlocutors. Typically, *pok* appears at the end of an utterance to affirm intent or strengthen a sense of togetherness in casual conversational contexts.

Datum 1: /'mɔndɪŋ 'nɔŋkrɔŋ di dəkət tɔl adʒa pɔʔ/
'better sitting in near toll road only, pɔʔ/'
'It's better to hang out near the toll road pɔʔ/'

Based on the data above, the particle *pɔʔ* functions as an invitation intensifier that creates a sense of intimacy and togetherness. Without *pɔʔ*, the utterance sounds more neutral and less engaging for the interlocutor. This function aligns with the findings of Widodo (2023) and Sari (2022), who argue that phatic elements in Javanese serve to soften invitations and reinforce social solidarity. Likewise, Anggraini (2023) emphasizes that phatic forms reflect egalitarian politeness in modern Javanese interactions. Thus, in the Pekalongan dialect, *pɔʔ* functions as a marker of inclusive invitation, maintaining familiarity and social cohesion among speakers (Rohmadi, 2020).

The particle /ɔ/ is one of the phatic forms frequently found in the conversations of Pekalongan speakers, particularly at the end of utterances. Lexically, this particle does not carry a specific meaning; however, pragmatically, it functions as a marker of closure or confirmation within discourse. It is used to indicate acceptance, mutual understanding, or simply to soften the ending of a conversation, thereby maintaining a relaxed and natural tone.

Datum 2: /'taɖi səmpɾʌt̚ laɖi'an bəŋt̚ar di kə'las ɔ/
'past ever practice short in class ɔ/
'did you practice at class ɔ?'

Based on the data above, the particle /ɔ/ functions as a marker of confirmation as well as a softener, creating a relaxed and friendly tone in conversation. This element reflects acceptance and mutual understanding between the speaker and the interlocutor. Without the particle /ɔ/, an utterance tends to sound more assertive, flat, and less sociable. These findings are consistent with Sari (2022) and Widodo (2023), who emphasize that phatic particles such as *o* play an important role in maintaining social harmony and reinforcing the collective identity of the Pekalongan community.

The particle /ɸim/ is a distinctive phatic form of the Pekalongan dialect that functions to signal emotional intimacy and social solidarity between speakers and interlocutors. This particle typically occurs at the end of utterances in casual conversations among peers. Phonetically, /ɸim/ is pronounced with a soft and slightly falling intonation, indicating warmth and a sense of closeness.

Datum 3: /'bəlɔm ki 'masi aku 'eɖit̚ 'ɖik̚it̚ 'biar lə'bih 'rapi | ɸim:/
'have not this still I edit little to more tidy, ɸim.'
'Not yet, I am editing it to make it more perfect, ɸim'

Based on the data above, the particle /ɸim/ signifies a close social relationship between the speaker and the interlocutor. This element does not contribute lexical meaning but serves to maintain warmth and intimacy within the conversation. When /ɸim/ is omitted, the utterance sounds more formal and less expressive. This finding aligns with Anggraini (2023) and Widodo (2023), who note that phatic expressions in Javanese function to strengthen social solidarity and preserve relational balance among speakers. Thus, /ɸim/ serves as a marker of familiarity and social equality, reflecting the open and egalitarian character of the Pekalongan community.

The particle /m̚haɖ̚:/ represents a distinctive phatic feature of the Pekalongan dialect that is not found in standard Javanese. Pragmatically, /m̚haɖ̚:/ functions to express mild astonishment, emotional emphasis, or the speaker's affective involvement in the topic of discussion. This particle reflects the expressive and open communicative style characteristic of coastal Javanese society.

Datum 4: /h̄a: m̄h̄aḍ: rapaḥna 'ḍzaḍi ḍzam 'tiga | kə/
'oh mhad, the meeting become clock three, yes?'
'well /m̄h̄aḍ:/, will the meeting be conducted at three?'

Based on the data above, the particle /m̄h̄aḍ:/ expresses a sense of mild surprise conveyed in a relaxed and friendly tone. This element not only serves to convey inquiry but also indicates the speaker's emotional involvement toward the received information. The presence of /m̄h̄aḍ:/ enriches interpersonal meaning and maintains the expressive nuance of speech. These findings are consistent with Dewi (2025) and Suharyono (2021), who assert that phatic elements function to display the speaker's attitude and strengthen social intimacy in informal Javanese communication.

The particles /kə/ or /ki/ function as phatic markers of affirmation and spontaneous mutual understanding between speakers and interlocutors. Phonetically, both forms frequently occur at the end of utterances with a light intonation, indicating emphasis as well as social closeness. Their use reflects the communicative character of the Pekalongan community, which values egalitarian and open interaction in the exchange of information.

Datum 5: 'uḍah kə 'ḥiṅgal ḥaṅḍa'taṅanadza bjar'bisa ḍi'kumpulḅ'
'already kə, just sing hand to able submitted'
'Already kə, it just needs the sign before being submitted'

Based on the data above, the particle /kə/ is used to emphasize the speaker's intention while maintaining a relaxed and friendly conversational tone. This element does not introduce new information but reinforces an affirmative meaning and invites confirmation from the interlocutor. When *ke* is omitted, the utterance sounds more final and less interactive. These findings are in line with Dewi (2025) and Anggraini (2023), who explain that phatic particles such as *ke*, *toh*, and *lho* function to build solidarity and express social intimacy among speakers.

The particle /bol/ serves as a phatic element functioning as a friendly address in informal conversations among peers. Socially, it is employed to call or casually engage the interlocutor in a relaxed and amicable tone. The use of /bol/ reflects a close and egalitarian social relationship, characteristic of the open and egalitarian communicative style of the Pekalongan community. From a sociopragmatic perspective, such address particles fall under the category of phatic expressions, which function to reinforce familiarity and smooth interpersonal interaction, as noted by Dewi (2025).

Datum 7: /bol/ ḍesain poḥter ' uḍa ' ḍzaḍi po?/
'Bol/,design poster already become pok?'
'Bol/, the poster design has been already made /po?/?'

Based on the data above, the particle /bol/ signifies emotional intimacy and contributes to creating a light and relaxed conversational atmosphere. This element functions to

soften the act of addressing or calling someone, avoiding a formal or rigid impression. When /bol/ is omitted, the utterance sounds flatter and loses its expressive nuance. These findings are consistent with Widodo (2023) and Anggraini (2023), who assert that phatic functions play an essential role in maintaining communicative warmth and reinforcing social solidarity within the Pekalongan community.

Conclusion

This study concludes that phatic expressions in the Pekalongan Javanese dialect serve as essential linguistic tools for maintaining social harmony and expressing communal identity. The identified particles—such as /o/, /^him/, /pok/, /bol/, /^hhaq:/, /kə/, and /ki/ perform diverse pragmatic functions, including signaling invitation, emphasis, emotional closeness, and affirmation. Although these elements lack lexical meaning, they carry significant interpersonal value by softening speech, fostering familiarity, and preventing conversational rigidity. Their frequent use reflects the egalitarian, expressive, and open character of Pekalongan's coastal society, where communication prioritizes warmth and solidarity over formality.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that several phatic forms from the Pekalongan dialect have permeated local varieties of Indonesian, illustrating processes of pragmatic interference and code-mixing shaped by everyday interaction. This phenomenon highlights how local linguistic identity influences broader communication practices. Overall, phatic expressions in Pekalongan exemplify how syntax, prosody, and social function intertwine to maintain interpersonal connections. The study thus contributes to sociolinguistic and pragmatic scholarship by showing that language, beyond its informational role, operates as a vital medium for sustaining social cohesion within culturally dynamic communities.

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