

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**THE USE OF SMALL TALK IN
ARABIC AND MALAY DRAMA: A
COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS**

ANIS NABILAH BINTI MAMAT

Thesis submitted in fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Applied Language Studies

Academy of Language Studies

February 2023

ABSTRACT

Small talk is a casual conversation between two speakers that aims to increase friendliness and strengthen social relations without conveying any information. It is also one of the language politeness strategies used to initiate communication. In general, this study aims to analyse the comparison of small talk used in the communication between Arabs and Malays. Both cultures have various expressions of small talk which must be understood systematically to avoid cultural conflict, confusions, miscommunication, and misinterpretation. Besides, it is challenging to understand the differences and similarities of small talk expressions between Arab and Malay culture due to a lack of research on the comparative study of Arab and Malay small talk. This study compared the usage of small talk in Malay and Arabic drama from three perspectives namely forms, functions, and gender. In this study, descriptive qualitative approach and content analysis method were both applied. The data of the study came from the Malay drama series "Nur 2" (5 episodes) and the Arabic drama series "أوراق الزمن المر" (5 episodes). Jumanto's (2014) approach, which was modified from Malinowski's (1923) Phatic Communion original theory, was used to deductively analyse the data. The collected data in this study was qualitatively analysed using Atlas.ti software version 8. The Arabic drama yielded 91 small talk expressions and the Malay drama "Nur 2" yielded 100. The study's findings show that there are similarities and differences in the use of small talk forms and functions between Arabs and Malays due to a variety of factors such as culture, gender, social status, context, and background of the conversation. Furthermore, the use of the forms and functions of small talk according to gender was found to be nearly identical with little variation. The findings of this study are expected to provide a clearer picture of the comparison of the use of small talk in two different cultures. It is also important to emphasise to the community the importance of cross-cultural communication, particularly in improving understanding of cultural differences and adapting to other cultures.

Keywords: *Small Talk, Phatic Communication, Cross-Culture Communication, Language Politeness*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Alhamdulillah, all praises to Allah S.W.T., the Most Gracious and the Most Merciful, I offer You my humble thanks and gratitude for giving me the strength to complete my master study. Thank you, Allah, for giving me the opportunity to embark on my master and for completing this long and challenging journey successfully. I realize that all things come from You, and I thank you for Your loving, sustaining grace throughout my journey, but finishing my study took years of hard work and a steep learning curve. Alhamdulillah, I was able to complete my journey.

It has been said that it takes a village to raise a child. I believe it takes a nation to raise an academician. Having said that, I wanted to express my sincere and profound gratitude to my supervisor Assoc. Prof Dr. Norhayuza Mohamad, and co-supervisor Dr. Mohammad Zaidi Zakaria. Thank you for the support, patience, and ideas in assisting me with this writing. I was indebted to them for their guidance, invaluable patience and feedback in surviving these 3 years in completing my master study.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to all my friends for their help in getting me where I need to be, for some great laughs, for being a great listener and for not allowing me to give up when my plans fell through. I could not have undertaken this journey without their words of encouragements and moral supports.

Last but not least, the greatest thanks also go to my parents, who have supported me unconditionally while I've been working on the study. Thank you both for giving me strength to reach for the stars and chase my dreams. I will never be able to repay them for their inspiring words, moral support, and financial assistance. This thesis is dedicated for my parents. Without them, this endeavor would not have been possible.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
CONFIRMATION BY PANEL OF EXAMINERS	ii
AUTHOR'S DECLARATION	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
LIST OF TABLES	x
LIST OF FIGURES	xii
LIST OF TRANSLITERATIONS	xiii
CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION	14
1.1 Introduction	14
1.2 Research Background	14
1.2.1 Communication	14
1.2.2 Elements of Politeness in Communication	15
1.3 Problem Statements	20
1.4 Research Objectives	23
1.5 Research Questions	23
1.6 Significance of the Study	24
1.7 Limitations of the Study	26
1.7.1 Topic Limitation	26
1.7.2 The Data	26
1.7.3 Time Limitation	26
1.8 Operational Definitions	27
1.8.1 Communication	27
1.8.2 Phatic Communion or Phatic Communication	27
1.8.3 Culture	28
1.8.4 Small Talk	28
1.8.5 Language Politeness	28
1.8.6 Comparative Study	29

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Small talk refers to a conversational aspect that is solely intended to increase the friendliness between two or more speakers. The research reported in this thesis is a comparative study on the use of small talk in Arab and Malay communication as depicted in the Arab drama series “أوراق الزمن المر” ‘*Aurāq Azzaman Almūr*’ and the Malay drama series "Nur 2". This chapter presents an overview of the study to better understand the concept of small talk in the Arab and Malay societies before discussing about the problem statement, research objectives, and research questions. It is followed by the research significance and limitations as well as the operational definitions and conceptual frameworks that underpinned the study. Finally, the discussion in this chapter ends with a conclusion.

1.2 Research Background

1.2.1 Communication

Communication refers to the interaction process between two or more parties for the purpose of exchanging ideas and maintaining interpersonal relationships (Dwihartanti, 2004). According to Aris & Yunus (2016), human beings are social creatures who constantly communicate with one another in order to achieve life goals and for the social system to survive.

Considering the importance of communication across various aspects of humans' social life, it is crucial for communication skills to be emphasised at all levels of society. Communication skills refer to one's ability of creating an interaction or interweaving process with another person or through an intermediary medium. Nearly all humans and social institutions require the communication processes to convey important information and exchange views. Considering that communication and society are two intertwined and inseparable aspects in life (Schramm, 1949), effective communication is crucial to ensure that any conveyed information is well understood across all members of society, maintain positive social relationships, and avoid potential