

ADAM PLUSZCZYK

University of Silesia

adam.pluszczyk@us.edu.pl

SOCIALIZING AMONGST STUDENTS – AN INVESTIGATION OF SMALL TALK PHENOMENON FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF FEMALE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

The purpose of the article is to concentrate on the phenomenon of *small talk*. It attempts to analyze the functions of small talk, the attitudes to small talk and the circumstances which either favour or impede the occurrence of small talk, such as formality, the interlocutors, the topics, etc. The study concentrates on the attitude of Polish, Greek and Spanish female students to the phenomenon of small talk. There are a number of queries in the form of a questionnaire that the informants were exposed to. Based on the informants' responses, the obtained results will determine the factors which facilitate the occurrence of small talk, the significance of small talk, the functions it serves and the attitude the informants have towards this allegedly trivial and flippant phenomenon.

Keywords: *small talk, functions of small talk, attitudes to small talk, questionnaire, female respondents*

1. Introduction

Small talk is usually associated with meaningless, uninformative conversation characterized by short and obvious exchanges which are regarded as unimportant, trivial and superficial. Nevertheless, regardless of its alleged triviality and superficiality, small talk occurs in various places and seems to be unavoidable, as it serves a number of various functions and is used for many reasons. Some people love engaging in small talk simply because they need it

and feel very comfortable in the repartee of nonsensical triviality. Others do not like it or even hate it for many reasons, for instance because they do not enjoy it or they are simply not skillful enough to engage in it. Hence, the attitudes one has towards the phenomenon of small talk might vary and this variation depends on many factors - cultural, social (age, social status, social distance, gender), psychological (personality) and contextual (other interlocutors, the topic discussed, etc.) which either favour or disfavour the occurrence of small talk.

The article explores the role, various functions, and the importance of small talk, with a further emphasis placed on the attitudes the respondents have towards this phenomenon in various contextual settings. Additionally, the study aims at determining the circumstances - more specifically the factors which either favour or impede the incidence of small talk. In order to observe and analyze the perception of the informants to small talk, the respondents are exposed to a questionnaire with a number of questions.

The paper encompasses a theoretical background with the review of the professional literature. First of all, it provides various definitions of small talk, its objectives, role and functions. Moreover, it also mentions the topics which one usually raises during small talk and some cross-cultural differences. The practical part includes methodology, the questionnaire results and the analysis – which includes a discussion of the results, observations, conclusion, as well as the limitations and implications of the study.

2. Theoretical background - literature review

In the theoretical background, the various definitions of small talk, its objectives, role and functions, as well as the perception of small talk world-wide, including the choice of topics will be provided. In addition, it discusses some examples of cultural differences regarding the phenomenon of small talk.

2.1. The definition of small talk, its objectives and functions

It should be stressed that in the professional literature, the notion of *small talk* is not well defined and, as a result, it is difficult to provide a satisfactory and reliable definition of the term. Thus, “if the term has been used in linguistics at all, it is not strictly defined, relying on the intuitive notion of language users instead” (Schneider 1988: 4). However, there are several definitions of *small talk*, such as the following:

– *small talk* is informal, friendly conversation about unimportant subjects, light or casual conversation, as in the following example: “they made *small talk*

while waiting for the meeting to start”, “at the corporate get-together we made the obligatory *small talk* with some people from the home office” (Merriam Webster Dictionary, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/small%20talk>).

- it is a polite conversation about ordinary or unimportant and uncontroversial issues (The New Oxford Dictionary of English, 1998)
- Schneider (1988: 4) refers to small talk as “of little or minor consequence, interest or importance, trifling, trivial, unimportant”
- small talk is also referred to as a kind of interaction which is deprived of real communication accompanied by politeness (Schneider 1988: 13)
- According to Jaworski (2000), *small talk* is defined as phatic communion, casual conversation, gossip, social talk, etc.
- According to Watzke-Otte (2008: 13), “small talk is characterized as “brief talk, i.e. in contrast to technical, informational, problem-solving or conflict discussions, with small talk, the conversation remains superficial; the selected or appropriate topics are less controversial and are not discussed in depth.”

There are a number of reasons why we use language as “we communicate everything from urgent warnings to random thoughts, proposals of marriage to complaints. We use it to cajole, threaten, placate, inform, entertain and command” (Genetti 2017: 6). However, language also serves many other purposes and has other functions – a social function in this respect as it constitutes a tool for many social interactions among people - by sharing feelings rather than conveying information, establishing and maintaining interaction, building up solidarity, making and maintaining relationships, making contacts and creating social bonds. Thus, according to Lyons (1968: 417), phatic communion (as one of the six functions of language) “serves to establish and maintain a feeling of social solidarity and well-being”. Similarly, “... language is particularly good at promoting interaction between people... Language is particularly good in social roles, at maintaining social ties and influencing others” (Aitchison 1996: 21, 25). Thus, continues Aitchison (1996: 24), even words which do not carry much meaning (meaningless words) can contribute to the success of a conversation. As a result, utterances which serve a phatic function are not very informative as they stress human interaction socially and buttress solidarity and build bonds among people. The phatic function of a language is based on the idea that we use a language to get on with others and to maintain good relationships according to certain social and cultural norms.

The *phatic* function is, however, equally important from a sociolinguistic perspective. Phatic communication conveys an effective or social message rather than a referential one. ... language is not simply used to convey referential information, but also expresses information about social relationships (Holmes 2001: 259).

The focus is not on the exchange of important information, on a discussion result or the resolution of a problem. Instead, the point is to make a congenial impression on the other party and to give them the feeling of being pleasantly entertained: the things that count are an enjoyable, relaxed discussion atmosphere and the build-up and maintenance of relationships (Watzke-Otte 2008: 13).

Small talk has a number of advantages. Admittedly, there are a lot of interlocutors who engage in small talk and who cannot imagine daily communication without small talking at least once in a while. In addition, small talk is ubiquitous as it occurs in a number of communicative exchanges in both formal and informal contextual settings. Hence, regardless of the alleged non-serious and unimportant nature of small talk and the negative associations it evokes, it is ubiquitous as it takes place in a number of less serious interactions. Similarly, it might also accompany the “more serious” communicative exchanges as the preliminary stage of a real conversation. Thus, “small talk provides communicators with simple, often mundane topics to discuss until the conversation turns towards a more stimulating topic” (Wakefield 2016: 13-14). Similarly, adds Wakefield (2016: 104), “people also use small talk as a way to bridge the gap between topics of importance”. Apart from that, small talk has a positive influence on the interaction on condition that the amount of small talk is suitably dosed as “in the right dosage, small talk contributes to a relaxation and loosening up of the conversational atmosphere, and to your discussion partner opening up. It reduces distance and promotes trust” (Watzke-Otte 2008: 13).

Moreover, through small talk, we can form relationships, diminish the distance between the interlocutors and make our connections with other people. As a result, “...small talk establishes a shared perception of reality, thus connecting human beings to one another through negotiated discourse. The fact that human beings connect over it makes small talk inherently worthwhile” (Wakefield 2016: 10). Moreover, by engaging in small talk, we contribute to the naturalness, pleasantness, friendliness and comfortability of the entire situation in which a conversation takes place. In addition, through small talk, we can also reduce the level of tension, anxiety, nervousness or stress, dispose of potential negative feelings and unnecessary suspicions towards our interlocutors. Finally, thanks to small talk, we can avoid uncomfortable silences which are so undesirable and which undoubtedly occur when we have nothing to talk about at times and which make us feel ill at ease (Wakefield 2016: 13). In fact, these are the most important reasons why people decide to engage in small talk.

Small talk constitutes an important part in professional life, such as the business environment and many other institutional settings. In addition, it is also an indispensable element in private life. In other words, small talk contributes to building relationships in both social and professional settings (Pullin 2010: 456). Therefore, it is necessary to make a list of the various functions small talk serves:

- to kill an uncomfortable or undesirable silence
- to get to know other people, to familiarize oneself with other people (Wakefield 2016)
- to make contacts and maintain relationships (Watzke-Otte 2008: 13)
- to make a good impression on others, to make them feel comfortable
- to decide on common interests, hobbies, to create a common ground
- to be polite, not to be rude (<https://www.englishclub.com/speaking/small-talk.htm>)
- to function socially, to build solidarity and rapport, to create bonds (Pullin 2010)
- to build rapport among workers and solidarity in institutional settings (Pullin 2010)
- to build community (Fleming 2018)
- to formulate an opinion about our interlocutors (Watzke-Otte 2008: 13)
- to bring forth a relaxation and loosening up of the conversational atmosphere (Watzke-Otte 2008: 13)
- to reduce distance and to facilitate trust (Watzke-Otte 2008: 13)
- to support and reinforce interpersonal relationships between people socially and professionally
- Holmes (2000: 34) argues that “small talk is one means by which we negotiate interpersonal relationships, a crucial function of talk with significant implications for on-going and future interactions”.
- Pullin (2010: 456) stresses that small talk facilitates and promotes solidarity, rapport and good relationships at work - in professional settings

As can be observed, there are a number of various functions of *small talk* and all of them seem to be equally important. Similarly, there are many reasons why people might want to engage in small talk. However, it is crucial to remember that the function of small talk is related to many factors.

2.2. The topics of small talk

As far as the topics for small talk are concerned, some of them seem to be relatively commonly respected and discussed - that is culturally, universally and globally by both males and females, such as the weather, sports, fashion, hobbies, etc. Nevertheless, there are also certain topics which are reserved for either males or females. At other times, we can talk about a preference of certain topics by one or the other gender. Hence, “While everyone likes to talk about the weather, women are also likely to compliment each other’s clothing and appearance, whereas men are more likely to employ playful insults. In both cases, people are signaling a desire to establish a mutually comfortable level of involvement in the

conversation” (McAndrew 2020, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/out-the-ooze/202001/why-small-talk-is-big-deal>).

It must be stressed, however, that the choice of the topics does not have to be such a simple matter, either. It is crucial to remember that there are a number of topics which would not be regarded as “safe” and which might provoke a heated discussion, which might lead to unnecessary conflicts. Taking into account the suitability or appropriateness of the topics for small talk and the potential sensitivity of the interlocutors, there are a number of topics which can be raised, but there are also other topics which should be avoided. Hence, there are a number of topics which can be regarded as neutral and safe, for instance shopping, journeys, professional matters, TV, music, hobbies, family life, the news, eating habits, animals, transport, the weather, dreams and plans (Watzke-Otte 2008: 114-139). However, there are also several topics - referred to as taboo topics or dangerous topics which should not be raised at all or which should be avoided as they might provoke unnecessary arguments, misunderstandings or even conflicts among people, for example family problems, money, illnesses, dramas, disasters, politics, religion, sexuality, etc (Watzke-Otte 2008: 114-139).

Thus, it is important to be aware of the repertoire of the possible topics open for discussion and make sure that the selection of the topics is adapted to the right place, time and the situation where small talk occurs. Thus, for instance, it is acceptable to talk about families in Italy, but in China it can be a more delicate topic. Similarly, whereas there are a number of topics of conversation which are welcome in Britain or the US, they do not necessarily have to be welcome or can even be taboo topics elsewhere (Tomalin and Nicks 2007: 16). Thus, “it’s worth researching what to talk about and what to avoid: certain topics get everyone going, but some just lead to an embarrassed and uncomfortable silence. And they are not the same everywhere” (Tomalin and Nicks 2007: 16). It is also worth pointing out that sometimes it is difficult to predict the development of the scenario. In other words, innocent or relatively safe topics might give rise to serious and heated discussions.

2.3. The various attitudes to small talk cross-culturally

There are various attitudes one has towards the phenomenon of small talk and they depend on many different factors which either favour or inhibit the occurrence of small talk - cultural, stereotypical, social (age, social status, social distance, gender), psychological (personality features) and contextual (the situation, other interlocutors, the topic, the intention of the interlocutor, etc). There are a number of factors which might contribute to a positive or negative attitude to the phenomenon of small talk. The very attitude can be permanent or temporary which means that some people have a positive or negative attitude

regardless of the circumstances. At other times, the attitude might change depending on various factors.

Regardless of the undisputed light-hearted nature of small talk, it is not always an easy matter. In fact, it can be problematic, difficult, discouraging and even complicated as "... conversing with strangers can be awkward, stilted, even painful", (Tung 2017, <http://www.realsimple.com/work-life/work-life-etiquette/manners/10-big-rules-small-talk>). Admittedly, the art of small talk is based on certain rules, for instance how to initiate a conversation, how to finish a conversation or what topics should or can be raised and what topics should be avoided in order not to expose the interlocutors to an unnecessary risk of embarrassing or confusing them. Moreover, as soon as we start a conversation, the dialogue should go naturally, but it is also crucial to know how to keep a conversation going; in other words, how to make it natural and, at the same time, make sure that the interlocutors feel alright and comfortable instead of feeling uncomfortable or even suffering at times (this might also happen if the interaction is unsuccessful). It is necessary to emphasize the fact that it is not always easy to maintain the conversation naturally. Thus, "preparation may make the difference between a stimulating, low-risk conversation and an awkward exchange of words. To prepare for small talk, minimize distractions and reduce anxiety" (Wakefield 2016: 16).

Schneider (1988) admits that there are usually negative connotations when we take small talk into consideration as it is perceived as trivial, insignificant, unimportant, etc. Fleming (2018) adds that *small talk* is generally associated with insignificance, non-seriousness, superficiality and unworthiness. Apart from that, continues Fleming (2018), it is also associated with aimlessness, triviality and simply, a waste of time.

How willing one is to engage in small talk might also depend on our personality and the personality of our interlocutors. For instance, it is obvious that an introvert or a person who is inhibited would be reluctant to engage in small talk since they might feel nervous or ill at ease. Thus, "... making small talk with strangers, or just anyone you don't really know too well for that matter, seems to be an inevitable thing that works its way into the awkward moments of our lives" (Valev 2015, <https://www.bustle.com/articles/120864-6-ways-to-avoid-small-talk-because-life-is-more-meaningful-than-the-weather>).

By contrast, there are also people who regard small talk as unnatural, artificial, pointless or even stupid. Moreover, small talk is sometimes forced and in fact, interlocutors might not be very happy to participate in it. As a result, it is not surprising that small talk does not always come so easily or naturally. On the other hand, there are a lot of people for whom small talk comes spontaneously, naturally and easily as it constitutes an integral part in their daily communication. The topic which is currently discussed during small talk is also important in the sense that it can contribute to the success or failure of the conversation

(Schneider, 1988). Finally, the social distance between the interlocutors - that is how well we know each other - can also be influential and make the interaction more or less successful (Befu 1986).

It is necessary to stress that the perception and attitudes towards small talk are not the same everywhere due to various stereotypes, cultural differences and national features. As a result, in certain cases, small talk is common, accepted, necessary and even expected, but in others it is not. There are cultures which are very willing and open to engage in small talk and this is quite natural. For example, small talk is quite common in the American culture. By contrast, the ubiquity of small talk in the USA can be contrasted with the lack of appreciation of small talk in Scandinavia - Scandinavian people do not feel uncomfortable with the unbearable silent moments (McAndrew 2020). Similarly, "... in Delhi, where I grew up, commerce is brusque. You don't ask each other how your day has been. You might not even smile" (Mahajan, <http://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/my-struggle-with-american-small-talk>). Thus, "For example, Americans are more likely than those from many cultures to smile at strangers and to engage in personal discussions with people they hardly know.... (Meyer 2014: 174). Thus, there are certain cultures where small talk can be regarded as shallow, boring, and/or trivial, whereas in others it can play a crucial role.

Similarly, in the workplace, the incidence of small talk is also culturally-oriented. In some nationalities, engaging in small talk is common whereas in others it is marginal, peripheral or even completely ignored. For instance, if we take less casual circumstances into account - that is in business settings, "some nationalities thrive in the cocktail party atmosphere and others do not ... Yet the very thought of small talk poses substantial problems for some other nationalities" (Lewis 2006: 88). Thus, for instance, small talk in Arab countries is so common that it can even occur in professional settings - during business meetings, for example. Similarly, in such countries as Japan, small talk during business meetings is quite natural with a view to developing personal trust (Carté and Fox 2008: 71). Nonetheless, continue Carté and Fox (2008: 71), "...in more functional cultures, on the other hand, people expect to start on the business agenda within minutes of sitting down. With Germans, Swiss, Scandinavians and Finns, for example, small talk is often no more than a couple of sentences".

3. Methodology

3.1. The objectives of the study

The aim of the study is an analysis of the various functions, reasons and role of small talk among female students from three different universities - the University of Silesia (Poland), The University of Corfu (Greece) and The

University of Mallorca (Spain). Based on the informants' responses in the questionnaire, it will be determined what role and function small talk has, how important it is among these students and what attitude(s) the informants have towards this phenomenon. Finally, the purpose of the study is to pay closer attention to the conditions or the circumstances which either facilitate or hinder the occurrence of small talk, such as different contextual settings (formality, informality), the gender of the interlocutors (males, females), how frequently small talk occurs and who engages in it more often and why and where small talk occurs. Moreover, by examining three different study groups representing different cultures (Polish, Greek and Spanish), it will be determined if there are some differences with reference to small talk based on the perceptions and attitudes of the Polish, Greek and Spanish female students. As a result, below are the research questions which constitute the subject of the analysis in the study:

- a) What role and function does small talk have?
- b) What is the informants' attitude to small talk?
- c) Where does small talk usually occur?
- d) What is the role of the gender of the interlocutor in the occurrence of small talk?
- e) What is the role of formality in the occurrence of small talk?
- f) What topics are raised when small talk occurs?

3.2. Participants and data

The questionnaire was conducted among 95 participants - more specifically students who study English aged between 19 and 24 from three different universities: the University of Silesia (Poland), The University of Corfu (Greece) and The University of Mallorca (Spain). The informants were first or second year students studying English Philology. There were 25 Polish students, 46 Greek students and 24 Spanish students who participated in the study. It is necessary to stress that all of them are female students, which undoubtedly limits the scope of the study to women and how they regard the phenomenon of small talk. Even though there are gender questions which refer to men and women, the respondents are only females and the obtained results pertain to the perspective of women.

The data consists of survey results obtained from 95 female students. Based on findings from the professional literature and verified with the students' responses, certain observations, conclusions and implications for further study will be made.

3.3. Tools

In order to investigate the phenomenon of small talk, the informants were exposed to a number of enquiries in the form of a questionnaire. There are 22 open-ended questions in the questionnaire (see appendix) and the informants were to answer them. They took 15-20 minutes in order to provide their answers. It is also necessary to stress that the questionnaire all the informants were exposed to (Polish, Greek and Spanish) was in English, as this is the language which is studied by the informants.

3.4. Procedure

The respondents were requested to respond to 22 questions in a form of a questionnaire devoted to the phenomenon of small talk. The results of the questionnaire constitute the basis for further discussion and the observations with reference to small talk - its various functions, objectives and the circumstances which either favour or impede the incidence of small talk among students. The content of the charts includes a summary of the informants' responses in the questionnaires which undoubtedly are very informative.

4. Analysis

4.1. Presentation, findings and discussion of the results of the questionnaire

These are the results of the questionnaire conducted in the three different universities. The informants' responses - female students from the three different universities in this respect, have been provided in the column respectively. These are the questions which constitute the basis of the investigation and a summary of the responses which appeared in the questionnaire.

a) What role and function does small talk have?

Q 1-2	1. In your opinion, why do people engage in small talk? What role / function does it play?		
	2. Why do you engage in small talk? What role / function does small talk play for you?		
	University of Silesia	University of Corfu	University of Mallorca
Q1	-to kill the silence which is so undesirable, to avoid silent moments	-to start a conversation -to make new friends, to meet new people	-to evade an uncomfortable silence, to avoid feeling

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> which last too long, to prevent awkward silence -to break the ice, to start a conversation -to get to know each other -to feel more comfortable around people -to have a pleasant conversation -to have a casual conversation with strangers, to talk casually -to feel comfortable with the people we do not know -to form relationships, partnerships, to flirt -to meet new people -to achieve success -to show friendliness -to socialize with others -to reduce barriers, especially when people do not know each other -to get to know someone better -to be polite, respectful -to keep the conversation going -to show interest -to start a conversation - small talk as a starting point; to warm up the atmosphere before the 'real' conversation -to reduce stress, to feel more comfortable around the people we do not know well -to interact socially 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -to keep the conversation going -to avoid an uncomfortable silence -to have fun -to socialize -to avoid boredom -to flirt with people -to create a friendly environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uncomfortable -to let the conversation flow between people -to be polite -to break the ice
Q2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -to make new friendships, to meet new people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -to develop my social skills -to meet new people, to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -to communicate with people you barely know -to evade an uncomfor-

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -to make a good impression on other people -people engage in small talk when they do not know what to talk about -to reduce stress -it relieves tension -it relaxes the atmosphere -to avoid boredom -to kill the silence, to fill the empty space -I engage in small talk because people start it -to be nice and kind, to avoid silence -to feel more comfortable, less nervous -I engage in small talk in order to have a neutral conversation with the person I am talking to -to get to know people -to listen to people -for entertainment (time goes by faster) -for humour -to be more sociable -it is a good ice breaker -I try not to engage in small talk -I do not engage in small talk too much - it is a waste of time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> make friends -to avoid an uncomfortable silence, especially with strangers -to interact with friends and family -to flirt -to have a good time, to have fun, to spend time in an enjoyable way -to socialize - small talk plays a social role -to communicate informally with other people -to start a conversation without pressure or stress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> table silence - silence is not enjoyable -to be polite, not to ignore another person -to start a conversation -to reduce stress and tension
--	---	---	--

Table 1. The informants' responses to questions 1-2

1. In your opinion, why do people engage in small talk? What role / function does it play?
2. Why do you engage in small talk? What role / function does small talk play for you?

According to table 1 which refers to the first two questions, all the reasons why small talk is used by the informants are definitely positive. In other words, it seems that small talk has many functions and plays a very important role, not only to keep the conversation going, but also to be polite, friendly, humorous, to enjoy oneself, to feel relaxed, to socialize, etc. It must be stressed, however, that there are a lot more responses on the part of the Polish informants. This might

indicate that the Polish informants have the biggest appreciation for the important role small talk has. In other words, it can be observed that it is Polish informants who appreciate the phenomenon of small talk the most and who are the most aware of its positive aspects and advantages. Similarly, one might risk statement that Polish informants are more aware of the significance of small talk in everyday communication.

b) Where does small talk usually occur?

Q 3-4	3. In your opinion, where do people engage in small talk? 4. Where do you engage in small talk?		
	University of Silesia	University of Corfu	University of Mallorca
Q3	-in public places -everywhere, wherever, but especially when getting some business contacts, when dealing with customers -in big companies -at school, at work, at the university -in parks -in public transport - on buses, trains, at the bus stop, at the bus-station, at the railway- station -in hospitals -in waiting rooms -in a lift	-in public places -on a plane -in cafes-at school, at the university -on a street -in the working environ- ment -in public transport - on buses, trains, at the bus stop, at the bus-station, at the railway-station -in banks, in shops, -in pubs, in restaurants	-in a lift-on a bus, on a train -in a queue -at the university -at the supermarket -at parties -in the workplace - at work
Q4	-in public places -in public transport - on buses, trains, at the bus stop, at the bus-station, at the railway-station -at home -in a lift -in shops -in restaurants -in waiting rooms	-in cafes, in coffee shops -at school, at the univer- sity -at the airport, at the bus stop -in an elevator -in public transport - on buses, trains, on the plane, at the bus stop, at the bus-station, at the railway-station -at the supermarket	-anywhere -in an elevator -in bars, pubs, restau- rants -at the supermarket -in class -at the bus stop -at parties -on a street

		-in a park -in restaurants, in clubs -at various parties -in hospitals -at the doctor's office	
--	--	--	--

Table 2. The informants' responses to questions 3-4

3. In your opinion, where do people engage in small talk?

4. Where do you engage in small talk?

As can be observed, there are a number of various places where small talk might occur regardless of the nationality of the study group. It is undeniable that the places provided by all the informants are mostly public places where there are usually a lot of people with whom various forms of interaction might take place. It is also necessary to highlight the fact that most of the places mentioned above are public spaces which enable us to interact casually - in other words to engage first of all in an informal conversation based on small talk (such as supermarkets, parks, street, means of transport, lifts, parties or restaurants. It is also crucial to point out that each study group engages in small talk in the workplace where, theoretically, there is not much time or no time at all to talk, especially for such interactions.

c) What is the role of the gender of the interlocutor in the occurrence of small talk?

Q 5-10	5. In your opinion, do men or women mostly engage in small talk? Why? 6. In your opinion, do men talking to other men or women mostly engage in small talk? Why? In your opinion, do women talking to other women or men mostly engage in small talk? Why? 7. Do you usually engage in small talk with men or women (or both)? Why? 8. Do you prefer engaging in small talk with men or women (or both)? Why? 9. How important is small talk for men? 10. How important is small talk for women?		
	University of Silesia	University of Corfu	University of Mallorca
Q5	-both genders engage in small talk in order to be polite, to socialize -women because they are more open to people -women as they want to show friendliness and empathy -women because they	-both genders feel the need to communicate, to be polite -women as they like to talk a lot -women as they want to show friendliness and empathy -women engage in small	-both genders engage in small talk in order to socialize, to be polite -women because they are more empathetic -women engage in small talk more often than men maybe because they tend to be more

	<p>are more talkative, they usually talk more than men</p> <p>-women because they just like talking and thus are more likely to start a conversation</p> <p>-women as they have the ability to talk about nothing</p>	<p>talk more often as they are more talkative; women talk more than men</p> <p>-women do not like silence</p> <p>-women because they are more communicative</p> <p>-women - there are many things they can discuss as opposed to men, who mostly talk about politics or sport</p>	<p>polite-mostly women engage in small talk as they want to be polite</p> <p>-women do not like uncomfortable silences</p> <p>-women are more open to talk to people</p>
Q6	<p>-women because they are more open to people</p> <p>-rather women talking to other women or men engage in small talk as they are more talkative</p> <p>-same-gender interactions are more comfortable</p> <p>-women can talk about everything</p> <p>-women talking to other women - they understand each other better</p>	<p>-each gender prefers engaging in small talk with people of the same sex because it is easier to find something they have in common</p> <p>-both genders engage in small talk in the same way</p> <p>-men engage in small talk with women in order to flirt and vice versa</p> <p>-women engage in small talk more than men and mostly with other women because they feel more comfortable</p> <p>-it is easier for women to engage in small talk</p> <p>-it is easier to engage in small talking same-gender interactions, for instance due to the topics</p>	<p>-for men silence is fine in certain cases</p> <p>-both genders engage in small talk in order to avoid an uncomfortable silence</p> <p>-it is easier for women to engage in small talk with other women</p> <p>-people are more comfortable talking to people of the same gender</p>
Q7	<p>-both - I want to be nice to other people; gender does not really matter</p> <p>-both - I like to talk to everybody</p> <p>-both - I am talkative and I do not care who I am talking to</p>	<p>-both genders like engaging in small talk</p> <p>-I find it easy to converse with both genders</p> <p>-with men, as I feel more comfortable talking to them</p> <p>-with women because</p>	<p>-both - gender does not matter; with both equally, gender is not important</p> <p>-both - I do it to be polite</p> <p>-both although talking to women lasts longer</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -with men because they are more talkative and willing to engage in small talk -with women I feel more comfortable -with women, it is easier 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> they talk more -mostly with women as they are more approachable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -with women - they are more open -mostly with women because I feel more comfortable -both - it depends on the person
Q8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -both genders - I can talk about different issues with both of them -both - I like to talk to everybody -both - I do not care about gender-talking to women may be slightly easier as they are more into small talk -women are more polite -with women it is more comfortable, but I engage in small talk with both men and women -with men - they are more willing to engage in small talk -with men because they usually do not talk as much as women do -with women because they are more talkative -with women because I feel more comfortable talking to them -with women as they are more easy-going -with women because we have more things in common - it is easier to find common topics with the person of the same gender -with women because there is always something to talk about - they 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -with women because we have a lot in common -with women because I can find more topics to talk about and the same interests to discuss -with women - I feel more comfortable -with women - I feel more confident speaking with them -women are more polite -no preference since small talk occurs randomly -I do not like small talk -both although I am a little suspicious of men-both - I feel comfortable with both -both if I feel comfortable with my interlocutor -both - with those who are polite -with men because I sometimes feel bored with women 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -with women due to the topics -with women because they respond while men mostly answer with monosyllabic words -I do not mind - gender does not matter -women are more polite -with women because I feel more secure and comfortable -with women the conversation is more comfortable and natural -with women - they are more active and careful -both - there is always something to talk about -with women as I feel more comfortable and there are more topics to discuss -both, but with the people I know

	like to talk about everything -with men - talking to them is more interesting		
Q9	-quite important -less important for men - they are more straightforward, more to the point -men do not care at all, they do not usually care -it is not very important for men -less important than for women -not very important -not important at all	-less important for men -for men it is not so important - men get straight to the point -it is not very important for men at all -quite important -less important for men who are more straightforward -not as important for men as it is for women -quite important -very important when flirting and socializing -not so important -important for both -it depends	-very important - men like talking -not important, not so important -as important as it is for women -less important for men -not really important, not very important -important when flirting or socializing with people
Q10	-important for women -more important for women - to make a good impression -very important for women - they have the need to talk about something all the time -important for women as they are constantly talking -more important for women who are generally more talkative than men -more important for women than for men	-women engage in small talk more than men -for women small talk is more important -it is more important for women rather than men -a bit more important for women -important for women - they enjoy talking -very important, quite important, i.e. when flirting and socializing -not so important -important for both-it depends	-very important -important to be polite -its innate in women - very important -as important as it is for men -more important for women because they tend to be friendly and talkative -slightly more important for women -very important because women like talking

Table 3. The informants' responses to questions 5-10

5. In your opinion, do men or women mostly engage in small talk? Why?

6. In your opinion, do men talking to other men or women mostly engage in small talk? Why?

In your opinion, do women talking to other women or men mostly engage in small talk? Why?

7. Do you usually engage in small talk with men or women (or both)? Why?

8. Do you prefer engaging in small talk with men or women (or both)? Why?
9. How important is small talk for men?
10. How important is small talk for women?

The answers provided by the informants confirm the fact that it is mostly women who engage in small talk due to a number of reasons, such as to be polite, to show empathy, to be friendly, to socialize and to avoid unnecessary silences. This is also ascribed to women's character and personality - women confirm that they are more sensitive, talkative, communicative and open.

As one can observe - there are a number of various reasons why the informants engage in small talk and who they choose for their interlocutors. Based on the students' responses, we can observe that both genders engage in small talk, but small talk is more important to women than to men (at least based on women's perception). The informants admit that same-gender interactions, as opposed to mixed-gender conversations are easier at times due to common topics and interests. Moreover, they feel more comfortable and secure talking to the same gender - that is women in this respect. Such features as talkativeness or politeness are ascribed to females. Some of them admit that gender does not matter at all and that it makes no difference to them who they interact with.

According to the responses, we can observe that the informants (females) definitely associate small talk with women rather than men. In other words, they claim that small talk is much more or at least a bit more important for women as women are more talkative. However, at the same time, they admit that both genders participate in small talk when they flirt or socialize and thus, these two reasons are common for both genders.

d) What is the informants' attitude to small talk?

Q 11-14	11. In your opinion, is small talk entertainment or a necessity for people? Why?		
	12 In your opinion, is small talk entertainment or a necessity for you? Why?		
	13. How important is small talk for your colleagues? Why?		
	14. How important is small talk for you? Why?		
	University of Silesia	University of Corfu	University of Mallorca
Q11	-it is entertainment -necessity as there are a lot of introverts in the society -kind of necessity in order to show interest, care, friendliness and respect	-it depends on our personality - introverts vs. extroverts -both -it depends - if you meet someone for the first time, it is a necessity -it depends on the in-	-necessity - just to keep the conversation going -mostly necessity because we need a way to break the ice and establish a kind of connection -necessity - not to be regarded or misjudged

	<p>-in business - rather a necessity and it is more stressful whereas with friends it can be entertainment</p> <p>-necessity as not talking to each other seems awkward</p> <p>-it depends: in formal situations - necessity, in informal situations - entertainment</p> <p>-necessity as people usually talk just to talk to avoid silence as they think that silence is bad</p> <p>-necessity at work to maintain relationships</p> <p>-necessity because we only talk to each other when it is necessary and not because we want it</p> <p>-entertainment because people like to know each other</p> <p>-both necessity and entertainment</p>	<p>tentions</p> <p>-it can start as a necessity and turn into entertainment</p> <p>-both, but most often it is a necessity</p> <p>-both - people feel the need to socialize and express their views on pleasant things</p>	<p>as impolite</p> <p>-necessity - we do not know what to do or what to say in silence</p> <p>-necessity - to start a conversation</p> <p>-necessity - I would never engage in small talk if I did not have to</p> <p>-necessity to avoid awkward silences</p>
Q12	<p>-entertainment because I like to talk, even about trivial things</p> <p>-entertainment because I am an open person</p> <p>-kind of necessity - to show interest and respect</p> <p>-necessity - to avoid an awkward silence</p> <p>-necessity - to break the ice</p> <p>-entertainment when talking to friends, colleagues</p> <p>-in business rather necessity, with friends -</p>	<p>-entertainment as I enjoy talking to other people, but I do not necessarily need that interaction</p> <p>-necessity: it isn't entertaining at all - it is like a task for social interaction</p> <p>-both entertainment and necessity</p> <p>-mostly entertainment - I enjoy talking to people and listening to them; I also try to understand them</p> <p>-necessity - to avoid silence</p>	<p>-necessity as I am rather shy and not very talkative</p> <p>-both when I feel like chatting more (entertainment) or when I want to establish human communication (necessity)</p> <p>-necessity in order to be polite</p> <p>-entertainment – talking to people is fun</p> <p>-entertainment if I know the person; necessity if I do not know the person</p> <p>-necessity - I would</p>

	<p>entertainment</p> <p>-entertainment for me - I like to be in touch with other people</p> <p>-necessity as I do not want to be rude</p> <p>-entertainment - it is fun as we can get to know new people</p> <p>-entertainment as it is always nice to talk to someone</p> <p>-entertainment - to spend free time nicely</p> <p>-mostly necessity - I feel forced to say something</p>	<p>-mostly necessity when I have a lot of things to do</p> <p>-it depends on your interlocutor</p> <p>-necessity because it is a social obligation</p> <p>-mostly entertainment as I use it with my friends</p> <p>-mostly necessity because I want to feel more comfortable with others</p>	<p>never engage in small talk if I did not have to - it is like an obligation</p> <p>-necessity - to avoid silence, not to be perceived as rude, to look polite and educated</p> <p>-both entertainment and necessity</p>
Q13	<p>-very important</p> <p>-it is important - it is a way to get to know people and to make friends</p> <p>-not very important - they do not do it so often</p> <p>-it does not matter</p> <p>-very important - people my age like to talk with others</p> <p>-not so important, but we engage in small talk at times</p>	<p>-important - to feel more comfortable with each other</p> <p>-very important - small talk constitutes an integral part of life</p> <p>-very important - small talk generates a good atmosphere</p> <p>-very important - no one likes silence</p> <p>-very important during daily interactions</p> <p>-important because of the chance to meet new people and socialize</p> <p>-quite important - it facilitates a conversation, but is not necessary</p> <p>-quite important - my colleagues do not want to be socially awkward</p> <p>-important - small talk reduces stress and anxiety</p> <p>-very important - to exchange ideas</p>	<p>-very important in order to be polite</p> <p>-very important because most of them are shy and do not know how to start a conversation</p> <p>-important - to break the ice, to get closer to others</p> <p>-important because it helps make new friends and avoid uncomfortable silences</p> <p>-important to start a conversation with other people, usually people we do not know</p> <p>-very important because they do not like silence</p> <p>-quite important because generally they do not like awkward silences</p> <p>-not important, not very important</p> <p>-not important at all because we do not need it</p> <p>-not so important</p>

Q14	-very important - it enhances relationships and bonds -not very important - I do it when I feel like it -not really important, but sometimes useful -important because it is useful -important - to kill time and get to know new people -quite important as small talk reduces tension and stress -it is not important for me - I do it so that people will not feel offended -sometimes it is important for me to make a good impression -not important, but I engage in small talk sometimes -it is nice, but not very important -important because we do not communicate with each other so often	-important - to feel comfortable with people -very important - without small talk, there's no interaction -really important - it is something we all need -very important - an easy way to relax -important and useful in daily interactions with people -important as small talk enables me to socialize -really important as I enjoy engaging in small talk -important because I want to interact with people -very important when I want to start a conversation -important - not to sit in silence -of minimal importance - lack of topics to discuss -not so important -not so important and sometimes pointless -not important - I do not mind sitting in silence	-very important to be polite -very important to establish relationships, friendship -important as it helps make friends -a bit important to be polite -important to start a conversation with other people, usually people we do not know -not important because silence is good sometimes -not important - it is not necessary -not important - it is pointless -not that important - I do not feel the need to talk all the time
-----	---	--	--

Table 4. The informants' responses to questions 11-14

11. In your opinion, is small talk entertainment or a necessity for people? Why?
12. In your opinion, is small talk entertainment or a necessity for you? Why?
13. How important is small talk for your colleagues? Why?
14. How important is small talk for you? Why?

Based on the students' responses, one observes that small talk can be both necessary or entertaining depending on the various circumstances. For instance, there are situations when it is necessary to engage in small talk, although it is not so pleasurable. As can be observed, there are a number of factors which make small talk a necessity or a social obligation, for instance, when we are shy and

not very talkative, when we have nothing to talk about (those uncomfortable silences), when it is necessary to initiate a conversation or keep the conversation going, when we want to be polite, friendly or similarly do not want to be regarded as rude or uncouth, when we start a conversation and break the ice or when we talk to our superiors in the workplace or talk to someone we have never seen before. However, small talk can be entertaining when we talk to our friends or at least the people we know or when we simply like talking to people. Similarly, one can state that small talk is important for the informants in each study group as, apparently, it serves a number of functions and is done for many reasons. At the same time, there are also those who have a negative attitude to the phenomenon of small talk and who claim that small talk is not that important for them as it is a waste of time, pointless, artificial, unnecessary or even stupid.

e) What is the role of formality in the occurrence of small talk?

Q 15-18	15. How important is small talk for your colleagues in formal situations? 16. How important is small talk for you in formal situations? 17. How important is small talk for your colleagues in informal situations? 18. How important is small talk for you in informal situations?		
	University of Silesia	University of Corfu	University of Mallorca
Q15	-very important -quite important -pretty important -not very important (5) -usually to make a good impression	-very important -it plays a vital role in formal situations -important - it helps people to feel more comfortable -not important at all (10)	-very important -quite important -not that important (9)
Q16	-rather important -very important, but I need to feel when to use it -quite important -not important (7) Why? - usually to make a good impression -to be polite and friendly -to show interest, care	-quite important -very important -important -not important - I do not engage in small talk in formal situations (10) Why? -to break the ice -to feel comfortable -to show politeness	-very important -quite important -not so important (8) Why? -to relax the atmosphere -to be polite -not to be impolite
Q17	-very important (5) -quite important (6)	-very important-quite important	-very important -quite important

	<p>-not so important, but we sometimes do it (4) -not as important as in formal situations (6) -used quite often, but it is not so important (4) Why? -to avoid silence -to socialize</p>	<p>-important -not important (9) Why? -to avoid awkward moments -to make a nice atmosphere -to socialize -to build a relationship, to make new contacts, to make friends -it facilitates communication</p>	<p>-important -relatively important -not important (7) Why? -to start a conversation -to create a friendly atmosphere</p>
Q18	<p>-important to keep the conversation going (8) -quite important as it can make the conversation more interesting and less awkward (3) -not so important as in formal situations (3) -not really important, but always pleasant (2) -not really important (3) -not that important (2) -not important (4) Why: -to make new friends, new contacts, social bonds -to feel comfortable -to start a conversation, to interact</p>	<p>-quite important -very important -relatively important -not so important (11) Why: -to make new friends -to establish relationships -to feel comfortable -to start a conversation, to interact</p>	<p>-important -very important -not so important (8) Why? -to start a conversation -to keep the conversation going -to show kindness and friendliness -to make the conversation going</p>

Table 5. The informants' responses to questions 15-18

15. How important is small talk for your colleagues in formal situations?

16. How important is small talk for you in formal situations?

17. How important is small talk for your colleagues in informal situations?

18. How important is small talk for you in informal situations?

As far as the formality of the situation is concerned (formal vs. informal situations), the preference on the part of the informants is not so clear-cut. For most of them, small talk is relatively important in both formal and informal situations. However, there are also those who admit that small talk is not important for them in either formal or informal situations. The reasons why the informants engage in small talk in formal circumstances are the following: to make a good impression (i.e. at work), to relax the atmosphere, to relieve tension and to show politeness or friendliness. Nevertheless, in informal situations the reasons are a little bit different, such as: to start a conversation, to keep it going, to establish social bonds, to make friends, to be polite, etc.

f) What topics are raised when small talk occurs?

Q 19-21	19. If you engage in small talk, what topics do you usually raise? Why? 20. If you engage in small talk, what topics do you usually raise with men? Why? 21. If you engage in small talk, what topics do you usually raise with other women? Why?		
	University of Silesia	University of Corfu	University of Mallorca
Q19	weather, holiday plans, education, entertainment, hobbies / interests, health, music (everyone listens to music), food (everybody likes to eat), latest news, recent facts, economic situation, gossip, university, exams, teachers, studies, books, TV programs - series, films, documentaries Why? -trivial, casual, superficial -safe, not provocative, neutral topics	weather, entertainment, sport, news (latest news), work, travel, gossip, hobbies, university, studies, family, education, music, clothes, movies, series, TV shows, events, politics, relationships, traveling, holiday plans Why? -trivial, casual, superficial -safe, not provocative, neutral topics	weather, college issues, university, studies, school, TV, classes, teachers, gossip, health, mood, daily life, everyday activities, complaints, feelings Why? -trivial, casual, superficial -safe, not provocative, neutral topics
Q20	weather, holiday plans, religion, politics, sport, relationships, cars, health, music, food, TV programs, university,	sport, news, work, school, weather, university, studies, exams, football, basketball, flirting, dating, relation-	weather, job, family, university, school, nature, sport, feelings

	exams, teachers, studies, books, economic situation, games Why? -trivial, casual, superficial -safe, not provocative, neutral topics	ships, movies, series, family, friends Why? -trivial, casual, superficial -safe, not provocative, neutral topics	Why? -trivial, casual, superficial -safe, not provocative, neutral topics
Q21	weather, holiday plans, clothes, the environment, food, sport, TV programs, education, entertainment, make-up, fashion, friends, events, books, hobbies, interests, music, news, the economic situation, cosmetics, beauty products Why? -trivial, casual, superficial -safe, not provocative, neutral topics	healthy lifestyle, gossip, TV shows, movies, series, hair, clothes, nails, kids, fashion, travel, news, family, arts, entertainment, religion, appearance, studies, sex, boyfriends, university, shopping, everyday life Why? -trivial, casual, superficial -safe, not provocative, neutral topics	famous people, problems, family, weather, children, parents, friends, university, relationships, everyday activities, feelings, emotions, health, food, daily life Why? -trivial, casual, superficial -safe, not provocative, neutral topics

Table 6. The informants' responses to questions 19-21

19. If you engage in small talk, what topics do you usually raise? Why?

20. If you engage in small talk, what topics do you usually raise with men? Why?

21. If you engage in small talk, what topics do you usually raise with other women? Why?

Based on the students' responses, one can easily notice that the topics suggested by the informants in each study group are very similar, but not identical. It is worth pointing out that the repertoire of the topics suggested by the informants is wide. It is also necessary to stress that the justification made by each study group is the same - these are the topics which are neutral and relatively "safe" in the sense that they do not provoke any arguments, misunderstandings or even conflicts, which is usually the case with "dangerous" and provocative topics.

4.2. Conclusions

The objective of the study was to determine the alleged significance of small talk among selected female students from three different universities. The study attempts to determine to what extent small talk is important for the informants

and how common it is in their cultures (Polish, Greek and Spanish). Moreover, it examines the various functions of small talk and the attitudes the respondents have towards this phenomenon. Finally, the study also attempts to determine how frequently small talk occurs in the speech of men and women from the perspective of women.

Comparing the obtained results based on the responses of the three study groups, one can observe that the responses are quite similar and there are not many differences in how female students from three different countries look at small talk. The only difference refers to questions 1 and 2: it seems that Polish informants are more cognizant of the significance of small talk in daily communication.

According to the results and observations based on the informants' responses, one can answer the research questions posed at the beginning. The findings of this study provide some insight into the phenomenon of small talk, its nature and how it is perceived by the selected study groups, even though they do not constitute a fully exhaustive account of the phenomenon.

Undeniably, small talk has a number of various functions and plays an important role in daily communication. The functions are definitely positive and apparently facilitate interaction among people. It seems that without small talk and all the advantages it carries, communication and interaction would be impeded and much more cumbersome. The attitude the informants have to small talk is definitely positive, as they engage in small talk for many different reasons. There are a lot of various aspects which make small talk entertaining and fun. Even though engaging in small talk can also be a necessity and thus not necessarily amusing at times, it is done for good reasons, i.e. to be polite, friendly, humorous, relaxed, to feel comfortable, to relieve tension, to socialize or even to flirt, etc. Thus, it is not surprising that small talk is advantageous and has positive associations.

Moreover, there are many different places where small talk occurs. These are mostly public places which facilitate casual or informal interaction among people, but also more formal - depending on the circumstances. In fact, small talk occurs in all the places where there are people and where interaction might occur.

Gender, which is associated with personality features ascribed to both males and females, but also other factors, such as the interlocutors, their personality features, contextual settings, i.e. same-gender or mixed-gender interaction, should be taken into account when analyzing small talk. It is crucial to stress that all the informants were female and thus the conclusions about the role of gender pertain only to women, not men. In other words, the conclusions about the role of gender in this respect are limited. Based on the obtained results we can conclude that although both genders engage in small talk, it is more important to women rather than men. Moreover, for women, small talk is definitely easier and comes

more naturally in same-gender interactions rather than in mixed-gender interactions - that is interactions involving men.

The formality of the interaction is also crucial. For most of the informants, small talk is important in both formal and informal circumstances. However, for some of them, the importance of small talk depends on the formality of the situation. Formality also determines the reason why the informants might want to engage in small talk. In other words, the reason for small talk depends on how formal the situation is.

Finally, the topics which are raised by the informants are miscellaneous and they are mostly associated with their interests and hobbies. They are usually chosen carefully in order to avoid unnecessary problems, such as arguments or conflicts. Thus, they can be regarded as unprovocative, therefore, these topics are neutral and safe instead.

Taking the responses into consideration and looking at the findings, it is important to stress that there are not many noticeable differences in the perception and attitudes to small talk from the perspective of the three selected study groups from the three different countries. In other words, one can risk that statement that the phenomenon of small talk among the Polish, Greek and Spanish informants is viewed and perceived similarly and that the attitudes towards small talk on the part of the participants of the study who represent the three different countries are almost the same.

4.3. Limitations of the study, implications

There are several aspects which have not been investigated and which, at the same time, would be suitable for further research. In other words, there are a number of other research areas which would be worth investigating within the phenomenon of small talk.

First of all, the informants whose responses have been analyzed in the study are female students. It would definitely be interesting to take into account the opposite gender, verify and compare the responses and observe if they are similar or different. Although the queries in the questionnaire pertain to both genders, the responses have been made by female informants only and thus, only the female perception and attitude to the phenomenon of small talk have been registered, analyzed and discussed. In other words, the perception and attitude to small talk by male informants is unknown as they have not been investigated in this study. Admittedly, by comparing the responses of both genders, the obtained data would be used to formulate more conclusions about gender-based differences with reference to small talk. More specifically, the data would verify the validity of the current research and determine if small talk is more characteristic of men's or women's speech.

It would also be interesting to analyze the occurrence of small talk taking into consideration more languages and cultures which would demonstrate more potential differences in the perception and the attitude to small talk. Exposing the study groups - the informants to the questionnaire in their own native language and investigating small talk in their own language would be one way.

Finally, it would be recommendable to encompass many other factors which might allegedly contribute to the perception and attitude of the informants to the phenomenon of small talk, such as age, social status (i.e. the relationship between a student and teacher or a worker and a boss, etc.), the social distance between the interlocutors (stranger vs. someone who is known). Similarly, there are also many other linguistic aspects which are worth investigating and which have not been dealt with in this study, such as how small talk is started or even more interestingly, how it is ended, etc. It would be worthy, if not recommendable that continuing research in this area is necessary to deepen our knowledge and discover the nature of this interesting phenomenon of small talk.

References

- Aitchison J. 1996. *The Seeds of Speech: Language Origin and Evolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Befu, H. 1986. An ethnography of dinner entertainment in Japan. In T.S. Lebra and W. Lebra (eds.), *Japanese Culture and Behavior*, 108-21. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Carté, P., C. Fox 2008. *Bringing the Culture Gap. A Practical Guide to International Business Communication* (2nd edition). London/Philadelphia: Kogan page.
- Fleming, C.A. 2018. *The Serious Business of Small Talk. Becoming Fluent, Comfortable and Charming*. Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.
- Genetti, C. 2017. *How Languages Work. An Introduction to Language and Linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Holmes, J. 2000. Politeness, power and provocation: How humour functions in the workplace. *Discourse Studies* 2(2): 159 -185.
- Holmes, J. 2000. Doing collegiality and keeping control at work: Small talk in government departments. In J. Coupland (ed.), *Small Talk*, 32-61. London: Longman.
- Holmes, J. 2001. *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* (2nd edition). London: Pearson Education.
- Jaworski, A. 2000. Silence and small talk. In J. Coupland (ed.), *Small Talk*, 110-132. London: Longman.
- Lewis, R.D. 2006. *When Cultures Collide. Leading Across Cultures* (third edition). Boston/London: Nicholas Braeley International.

- Lyons, J. 1968. *Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mahajan, K. 2016. *My Struggle with American Small Talk*; <http://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/my-struggle-with-american-small-talk>
- McAndrew, F.T. 2020. *Why Small Talk Is a Big Deal. The ability to engage in small talk is an underrated social skill*; posted: Jan 18, 2020; <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/out-the-ooze/202001/why-small-talk-is-big-deal>
- Meyer, E. 2014. *The Culture Map. Decoding How People Think, Lead, and Get Things Done Across Cultures*. New York: Public Affairs.
- Small Talk in English*; <https://www.englishclub.com/speaking/small-talk.htm>
- Pullin, P. 2010. Small talk, rapport, and international communicative competence. *Journal of Business Communication* 47(4): 455-476.
- Schneider, K.P. 1988. *Small Talk: Analysing Phatic Discourse*. Hitzeroth: Marburg.
- Terpstra, V., and K. David 1985. *The Cultural Environment of International Business*. Cincinnati, Ohio: South-western publishing co.
- Tomalin, B., M. Nicks 2007. *The World's Business Cultures and How to Unlock Them*. London: Thorogood Publishing.
- Tung, J. 2017. *The 10 big rules of small talk. Know what to say in a social situation - and when and how to say it*; <https://www.realsimple.com/work-life/work-life-etiquette/manners/10-big-rules-small-talk>.
- Valey, N. 2015. *6 Ways to avoid small talk, because life is more meaningful than the weather*; <http://www.bustle.com/articles/120864-6-ways-to-avoid-small-talk-because-life-is-moremeaningful-than-the-weather>.
- Wakefield, M. 2016. *Small talk. The Definite Guide to Talking to Anyone in Any Situation*. Wrocław: Golden Road Publishing.
- Watzke-Otte, S. 2008. *Small talk. Jak Prowadzić Swobodną Rozmowę Towarzyską*. Warszawa: BC Edukacja.
- Merriam Webster Dictionary*. Retrieved from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/small%20talk>.
- The New Oxford Dictionary of English*, 1998. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Appendix - the questionnaire

The aim of the study is the analysis of the function of small talk and its significance. Based on the questionnaire, I wish to observe if “small talk” is common and if yes - why. Moreover, the purpose of the study is to pay attention to the circumstances which either facilitate or hinder the practice / use of “small talk”, such as the formality, gender, age etc. The theoretical background, the results of the survey, the observations, the conclusions and the implications will be presented in a research paper.

Before you start doing the questionnaire, provide the following information, please.

A. GENDER: _____**B. AGE:** _____

1) In your opinion, why do people engage in small talk? What role / function does it play?

2) Why do you engage in small talk? What role / function does small talk play for you?

3) In your opinion, where do people engage in small talk?

4) Where do you engage in small talk?

5) In your opinion, do men or women mostly engage in small talk? Why?

6) In your opinion, do men talking to other men or women mostly engage in small talk? Why?
In your opinion, do women talking to other women or men mostly engage in small talk? Why?

7) Do you usually engage in small talk with men or women (or both)? Why?

8) Do you prefer engaging in small talk with men or women (or both)? Why?

9) How important is small talk for men?

10) How important is small talk for women?

11) In your opinion, is small talk entertainment or a necessity for people? Why?

12) In your opinion, is small talk entertainment or a necessity for you? Why?

13) How important is small talk for your colleagues? Why?

14) How important is small talk for you? Why?

15) How important is small talk for your colleagues in formal situations?

16) How important is small talk for you in formal situations?

17) How important is small talk for your colleagues in informal situations?

18) How important is small talk for you in informal situations?

19) If you engage in small talk, what topics do you usually raise? Why?

20) If you engage in small talk, what topics do you usually raise with other men? Why?

21) If you engage in small talk, what topics do you usually raise with other women? Why?

22) Do you have any comments, suggestions?

If you are interested in the results of the study, please feel free to contact me at:

adam.pluszczyk@us.edu.pl,

aderle@o2.pl

Thank you for your cooperation!

Dr Adam Pluszczyk

Institute of Linguistics, University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland