

# Politeness strategies deployed by Filipinos in asynchronous computer-mediated discourse

**Cynthia B. Correo**  
*De La Salle University*  
cynthia\_correo@yahoo.com

## Abstract

The study explores the Filipino, particularly Bikolano, participants' management of their virtual conversation in an asynchronous online discussion forum, focusing on the deployment of politeness strategies. Anchored on Walther's (1992) social information processing theory, the study uses Brown and Levinson's (B&L) (1978, 1987) politeness theory as a theoretical lens. The five comment threads produced by 32 participants and used for data analysis were drawn from 166 comment threads posted from June to August 2012 in a Bikol-language social group site. Quantitative and qualitative analyses were utilized via frequency count and percentage and Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson's (1974) conversational analysis (CA) model, respectively. Findings reveal that the Bikolano online interactants tended to blend positive and negative politeness strategies rather than deploy them in isolation. The study validates the applicability of B&L's (1978, 1987) politeness theory in the Philippine context, affirming its universal elements while delineating certain linguistic and cultural nuances that make Filipino, specifically Bikol, politeness distinct by itself. In general, the computer-mediated interactions manifest the interlocutors' flexibility to modality change and their successful deployment of politeness schemes to effectively manage their web-based communication. Implications for transnational education are also discussed as part of the conclusion.

**Keywords:** Social information processing theory, conversation analysis, politeness theory, computer-mediated communication, Filipino/Bikolano<sup>1</sup> politeness strategies

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<sup>1</sup> Since Bikolanos are Filipinos by virtue of their citizenship, Bikolano politeness can be considered an aspect of Filipino politeness. However, it must be noted that the Philippines is a multicultural and multilingual country with diverse ethnic groups exhibiting strong loyalty to their culture and taking pride in using their native tongue (Yap, 2010). Thus, unless empirical evidence is presented showing that the Bikolano brand of politeness is similar, if not the same, with those of other ethnic groups, the synonymous use of Filipino and Bikolano politeness must always be clarified to avoid overgeneralization of findings.

## **1. Introduction**

The ubiquity of information technology, particularly the emergence of mobile phones, Wi-Fi technology, and social media tools, has significantly contributed to people's engagement in online communication both synchronous (e.g., Internet-relay chat, video chat) and asynchronous (e.g., email, discussion forum) (Labucay, 2011; Muniandy, 2002; Nielsen Holdings, 2012; Rao, 2012). Given the importance that language plays in the daily interaction with others, especially with people from different cultural backgrounds in the virtual environment, contemporary scholars refocus their research lenses on electronic discourses to determine how people manage cybernetic communication (e.g., Al-Shalawi, 2001; Anderson, Beard, & Walther, 2010; Bunz & Campbell, 2002; Heyd, 2008; Pariera & Conrad, 2003). Although recent research (e.g., Walther, 1992, 1996, 2005, 2007) suggests that individuals adapt to the medium of communication in use, questions recur regarding how these alternative communication channels affect the local management of conversation (Anderson et al., 2010). A primary concern is how participants successfully adapt to the system's features during conversation and how they manage social relationships amidst technological challenges brought about by the rapidly evolving Internet-based media. Informed by social information processing theory, this study uses Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) politeness theory in providing insights on how Filipinos, particularly Bikolanos, use politeness strategies as they attempt to realize their communication goals as well as establish, maintain, and shape social relationships in one type of computer-mediated conversation, the online asynchronous discussion forums.

### **1.1 Frameworks of the Study**

#### **1.1.1 Social Information Processing Theory**

Social Information Processing (SIP) Theory (Walther, 1992) challenges the view that computer-mediated communication (CMC) is incapable of producing meaningful social relationships among online interactants. SIP recognizes that the pace of development of online interpersonal relationship may require more time than face-to-face (FtF) relationships; but once forged, web-based social relationships may demonstrate the same relational dimensions and qualities as those of FtF. The theory argues that online communication experiences

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may even help facilitate relationships that may not have been formed in FtF environments because of intercultural differences and geographical challenges (Okdie, Guadagno, Bernieri, Geers, & Mclarney-Vesotski, 2011; Walther, 1992, 1996). SIP differs from other theories sharing a cues-filtered-out interpretation of CMC, which regard the absence of nonverbal cues as an impediment to forming impressions and social relationships in cybernetic milieu (Daft & Lengel, 1986; Walther, 1992, 1996; Walther & Parks, 2002). Walther (1992) asserts that in the absence of nonverbal cues, CMC users deploy discursive and interpersonal strategies adapted to the available cues provided by the medium by adjusting their language content and style. The theory implicates that although in FtF communication, interactants can rely heavily on verbal cues and kinesic behavior in contrast to the limited verbal cues in CMC interaction, an online interactant, who has devoted adequate time and experience in CMC, can manage satisfactorily a conversation in a similar fashion with FtF communication by strategically adjusting to the channel's advantageous features (Anderson et al., 2010; De Luna, 2011; Okdie et al., 2011; Walther, 1992).

### **1.1.2 Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory**

Brown and Levinson's (B&L) (1978, 1987) politeness theory posits that when individuals interact, they are concerned not only with the message being conveyed but also with their relationship with others as reflected in the way they present and maintain their "face." Face, the self-worth or self-image that individuals consciously or unconsciously claim as well as their acknowledgment of other individuals' face needs, has two major components: positive and negative face. Positive face refers to a person's concern for social acceptance — to be perceived as positively contributing to the social world and to feel a common ground with members of a social group. It is manifested when an individual expresses desires equally desirable to others such as good health, self-esteem, dignity, and honor; however, it is threatened when the individual is criticized or insulted. Other threats to positive face include disapproval or rejection, complaint, disagreement, contradiction, unleashed negative emotions, irreverence, the bringing of bad news, noncooperation, interruption, nonsequiturs, and inattention (Roberts, 1992). On the other hand, negative face reflects a person's desire to preserve a certain degree of autonomy and to act freely according to his own will and not to be imposed upon by others. Negative face is associated with any form

of intrusion into a person's self-determination (e.g., order, suggestion, advice, reminder, threat, dare, offer, promise, help) (Roberts, 1992). In B&L's view, as one interacts with another, his or her own face needs might be in conflict with other interactants' face needs; thus, during social interaction, a person tries to balance his or her own positive and negative face while attending to others' face needs. The theory claims that the desire to balance these face needs stems from the fact that most speech acts (e.g., requests, offers, compliments, advice) are inherently face-threatening acts (FTAs) capable of damaging a person's face. As conceptualized in this theory, politeness refers to "the intentional, strategic behavior of an individual meant to satisfy self and other face wants in case of threat" (Van Dijk, 1997, p. 50). A speaker may use a combination of strategies, particularly positive and negative politeness types, to soften FTAs (Rosenthal, 1996) (see Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987 for a complete list of these politeness strategies and a more comprehensive discussion of the theory).

B&L's notion of politeness invites numerous theories and approaches. It has also gained strong academic followers despite its contentious claim for universality (e.g., Burke & Kraut, 2008; Olazo, 2012; Regala-Flores, 2008; Shigemitsu, 2003; Sing Ting Cheung, 2009; Victoria, 2012). Some linguists, particularly Asians (i.e., Ide, 1989; Matsumoto, 1993; Sing Ting Cheung, 2009), argue that the theory affords no flexibility in accommodating cultural variability. Aside from the issue on its cross-cultural applicability, other scholars also criticize its focus on conflict-avoidance and its very notion of face (e.g., Lakoff & Ide, 2005). Amidst these criticisms, there are scholars (e.g., Ermida, 2006; Kiyama, Tamaoka, & Takiura, 2012) who argue that B&L's core concepts are operationally valid and, therefore, useful as an analytic tool for enriching cross-cultural communication. Recently, studies anchored on B&L's framework ventured into applying the model in online communication (Carlo & Yoo, 2009; Duthler, 2006), but only a few have delved into online discussion forums (Burke & Kraut, 2008; Simmons, 1994). In the Philippines, studies on politeness have also been conducted both online (Suarez, 2012) and offline (Labor, 2009; Labor & de Guzman, 2011; Olazo, 2012; Regala-Flores, 2008, Victoria, 2012) mostly using Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) politeness framework as a research lens; however, it seems that only Suarez (2012) explored politeness strategies as used in CMC, specifically requests via emails. Among the studies on politeness strategies in FtF situations, Olazo's (2012) study, which focuses on politeness strategies deployed by Bikolanos, becomes very relevant to the present study since

both involved Bikolanos from adjacent districts in Region V, Philippines, and therefore, the findings can be utilized to compare Bikolanos' use of politeness strategies in online and offline social interactions.

## 2. Method

This descriptive-analytic study employs a combination of quantitative descriptive analysis and Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson's (1974) conversational analysis framework to determine the way individuals deploy politeness strategies as they attempt to attain the pragmatic goal of their language. The data were drawn from 166 comment threads posted from June to August 2012 in a Bikol<sup>2</sup>-language social group site named *Bandilyo Budyong* (Public Announcement), a public-accessed web-based politically oriented discussion forum participated in mostly by residents of a municipality in Camarines Sur<sup>3</sup>, Philippines.

To collect the data, the researcher adopted a nonparticipant observer approach during the data-gathering phase, conducting a preliminary scanning of all the 166 comment threads and streamlining the analysis to five comment threads with a total of 279 posts or talk turns. The data selection was done on the basis of their representativeness in terms of structural features typical of discussion forum<sup>4</sup> and participants' active engagement in the interaction. Upon data retrieval, the data were prepared for analysis by assigning letter codes to the 32 participants (A-Z for the first 26 participants, then AA-AF for the 27<sup>th</sup> to the 32<sup>nd</sup> participants). The five comment threads were also labelled comment thread A (CTA) to comment thread E (CTE). The threads were further divided into the number of posts attached to it, with each post treated

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<sup>2</sup> The Philippines, being an archipelago, is one of the highly diverse multicultural and multilingual countries in the world. The country has over 170 languages spread across its 7,100 islands. One of these 170 languages is the Bikol language spoken in Region V, the Bikol Region.

<sup>3</sup> Camarines Sur is one of the six provinces in Region V. The region espouses several varieties of Bikol language, and the Bikol variety spoken by the participants of this study, Bikol-Partido, belongs to the North Coastal Bikol highly similar with Bikol Naga or the Central Standard Bikol spoken in Metro Naga area (Lobel, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> During the data-collection phase, the researcher noted that a typical discussion forum in Facebook began with a discussion starter presented as an Initial Post (IP), followed by a string of posts reacting either to the IP or to any of the previous posts within the same comment thread. However, it was also observed that some of the posts within a thread were reactions to an IP of another comment thread or to any of the posts outside of the comment threads where the posts were found.

as one turn unit. Postings composed of several sentences were further divided into sentences. Each line was numbered from 1 to the number of the last sentence, and each turn was also assigned 1 to the last number of the turns in a comment thread. A space intentionally created by the interactants was also assigned a number and so was the posting-information box displaying the time and date the posting was done and the number of 'Likes' it gathered from readers. Thus, the codes A7 and AB15 pertain to speaker A (first participant) at turn 7 and speaker AB (28<sup>th</sup> participant) at turn 15. Since the interactants in the discussion boards primarily used the Bikol Language in their interaction with some shifting in English at a very minimal rate, the Bikol corpus was translated to the English language through collaboration approach involving three translators considered highly competent users of both the Bikol and the English languages. The translated output was further subjected to translation evaluation by two Bikolano university professors teaching English courses.

The data were subjected to both quantitative and qualitative analyses; the former using frequency count and percentage and the latter primarily employing conversational analysis. To ensure the reliability of the quantitative results on politeness strategies, two coders — a Bikolano college professor with a degree of Ph.D. in English Language Teaching and a Bikolano secondary school teacher who was a graduate student taking Master of Arts in English Language Teaching — analyzed the corpus using the coding systems developed by the researcher based on Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) politeness theory. The coders were trained as to what these categories were and were given sample texts for each. They were given sample messages to code and were given feedback until they were able to appropriately identify each category and code the strategies into the appropriate section of the taxonomy. They were also given instructions to focus solely on the nature of the messages according to the given taxonomy. No attempt was made to judge the quality of the messages, merely the strategies exhibited (see sample coded data in Appendix A). After the individual coding, the pair, together with the researcher, convened to evaluate the results of the coding process. Based on the quantitative analysis, a qualitative analysis applying Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson's (1974) conversational analysis model was also done to gain deeper insights on how these strategies operate in the online conversation.

### 3. Results and Discussion

Displayed in Table 1 are the face threatening acts (FTAs) predominantly found in the asynchronous online discussion forum under study. In the 279 posts, 248 FTAs surface, with the negative FTAs a bit higher in percentage than positive FTAs.

**Table 1**

*Types of face threatening acts prevalent in the online discussion forum*

Type of FTA	CTA	CTB	CTC	CTD	CTE	f	%	Rank
<b>Positive FTAs</b>								
<i>Criticism</i>	3	29	22	19	23	96	38.71	1
<i>Other-Initiated Repair</i>		3	9	4	6	22	8.87	4
Total FTAs (Positive)						118	47.58	
<b>Negative FTAs</b>								
<i>Suggestion</i>	5	17	15	12	17	66	26.61	2
<i>Question</i>	1	9	12	9	7	38	15.33	3
<i>Request</i>	5	2	2	6	4	19	7.66	5
<i>Order</i>	2	1	2	1	1	7	2.82	6
Total FTAs (Negative)						130	52.42	
<b>Total FTAs</b>						248	100.00	

The FTAs directed to positive face were criticisms (mostly off-record) and other-initiated repair or correction while the negative FTAs include being given suggestion, being asked questions, being requested to do something, and being given orders. The politically polarized members exhibited conflicting goal-orientations, thereby, directly or indirectly *criticizing* (1) divergent political stances. Consequently, the messages posted for or against any would-be political candidate were subjected to scrutiny, explaining the predominance of *questions* (2) either to clarify information or to trap supporters into admission of the weaknesses of their respective political nominees. For instance, when a pro-administration supporter posted an allegation against a running candidate, some interactants *suggested* (3) and even *ordered* (6) the source to refer the matter to the proper authorities if she had sufficient evidence to warrant a case. But others contended that the accusation was

baseless because of the lack of understanding of a certain concept (i.e., flying voters), so *others initiated that it be repaired* (4). This political debate began when a member *requested* (5) other members of the group to share their ideas about the qualities of a good leader.

**Table 2**  
*Politeness strategies deployed by the Bikolano online interactants*

<b>Politeness Strategy</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Rank</b>
Positive Politeness	232	63.22	1
Negative Politeness	65	17.71	2
Bald On-Record	45	12.26	3
Off-Record or Indirect Strategies	22	5.99	4
Opting Out/No Communication	3	0.82	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>367</b>	<b>100.00</b>	

Table 2 presents the politeness strategies utilized to lessen the impact of FTAs in the politically charged virtual room. Positive politeness strategies were chiefly used to lubricate their e-discourse followed by the application of negative politeness strategies, bald on-record, and off-record or indirect strategies. It is remarkable that through the conversational analysis results, it was established that there were at least three cases where an interactant opted not to reply anymore, perhaps not to inflict more damage to her own face nor her affiliative relationship with the other interactants. Nonetheless, it must be noted that the quantitative results were used only as a guide for establishing the presence or absence of these substrategies in the participants' e-discourse. Caution in generalizing the quantitative output is advised since the participants demonstrated a tendency to use a combination of any of the positive politeness substrategies in their posts and sometimes used any of them in combination with any of the negative politeness substrategies.

The results suggest that the Bikolano online interactants deployed politeness strategies captured by B&L's (1978, 1987) politeness model as they recognized the presence of group members espousing opposing views. Consequently, they tactically utilized positive face-saving strategies to address this concern. Similarly, since in the discussion forum, nobody could force anyone to react to a post when it was imperative for some of them to engage in a fertile discussion, negative politeness strategies were deployed



to encourage members to participate while respecting their freedom from infringement. In general, bald on-record was utilized by those who felt most offended by critical postings or comments although this strategy was also deployed by those who did not have much time for the discussion or those who perceived that too lengthy a discussion would discourage members from reading the important threads. Off-record strategies were traceable in the hints when criticizing rather than giving bald-on criticisms. Off-record strategies were also manifested in the use of sarcasm and backchannels hinting negative emotions.

Table 3 displays the most prevalent positive politeness strategies used by the Bikolano online interactants. Among the 15 positive politeness substrategies mentioned by B&L (1978, 1987), 13 were tapped by the participants. The top three substrategies included seeking agreement; including both the speaker and the hearer/s in the activity; and exaggerating their interest, approval, or sympathy. *Seeking agreement* was primarily deployed as evidenced by their use of *mananggad* (indeed, an agreement upgrader), *aw kamo ka an* (It's up to you), *tama ka* (you're right), *may point ka* (you have a point), peace, and the number of 'Likes' to posts. The interlocutors also *included both the speakers and hearers in the activity* through the employment of the first-person plural pronouns (e.g., *kita* [we], *ta* [our], *nyato* [our], *sato* [us], *satuya* [us]), communal words (e.g., *maghiras* [share], *makatabang* [help]), and phrases (e.g., *gabos na yaraon igdi* [all who are present]) as parts of their linguistic cues. The Bikolano interactants also tended to exaggerate their expression of approval, interest, and sympathy to lubricate their language use as manifested by the utilization of adjectives showing positive qualities such as *magayon* (beautiful, of good quality), *mahigos* (tireless), *kadakol* (ample), *sinsero* (sincere), *marespeto* (respectful), *potential to be a leader*, *openminded*, *matinik* (expert), *nakanood ako saimo* (I learned from you), *bow* (kudos), *ayos* (alright), *matibay-tibay* (good), *100% correct*, *matindi* (superb), *pagmakulog* (sympathy), and the use of honorific "Sir" as a sign of respect.

**Table 3**  
***Positive politeness strategies deployed by the Bikolano online interactants***

<b>Positive Politeness Strategy</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Rank</b>
Seek agreement	63	27.16	1
Include both S and H in the activity	45	19.40	2
Exaggerate (interest, approval, sympathy with)	33	14.22	3
Use in-group identity markers	22	9.48	4
Notice, attend to H (his/her interests, wants, needs, goods)	16	6.90	5
Joke (laughter)	14	6.03	6
Presuppose/raise/assert common ground	10	4.31	7
Avoid disagreement	9	3.88	8
Give (or ask for) reasons	6	2.59	9
Intensify interest to H	5	2.16	10
Give gifts to H (goods, sympathy, understanding, cooperation)	4	1.72	11
Being optimistic	3	1.29	12
Offering or promising	2	0.86	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>232</b>	<b>100.00</b>	

The other positive politeness subtypes involved using in-group identity markers, attending to the need of hearers, asserting common ground, joking or laughing, avoiding disagreement, giving or asking for reasons, intensifying interest to hearer, and extending understanding. The in-group identity markers frequently used are as follows: *kahimanwa* (townmates), *tambayan* (hangout), *banwaan* (municipality), *padi* (godfather), *amigo* (friend), *igdiho* (here), *ginim an* (for all we know), *himunan* (might), *tubaan* (tuba drinking session), *inayyyy* (expression of feign fear), *ano na tayo* (what happens to us), *hadaw* (why), *ay inda kita* (nonsense), *raitan* (scream), and *ngani* (upgrader). The most prominent identity marker was the language chosen by the majority of the interactants as they preferred the Bikol language to ensure that all members in the site understand the content of the online interaction. For paying attention or showing concern to the hearer, the linguistic markers included greetings (e.g., *maray na hapon* [good afternoon]) and expressions of empathy (e.g., *pasensiya tabi* [sorry]). Asserting common ground was reflected in the speakers' clamoring for fairness and objectivity, whereas joking, laughing, or

use of sarcasm were indicated by the use of verbal laughter such as *hehehe*, *hahaha*, *ahahaha*. Some interactants, especially the pro-administration, tried to avoid disagreements by attempting to convince the other members to stop debating on the topic, which was supposedly neutral as it was about qualities of good leaders. Others tried to provide reasons or answers to questions to which other interlocutors opted not to respond, particularly if the questions or statements were perceived to be strongly face threatening. To intensify interest to hearer, some interactants underscored the relevance of the information to the hearer; others express gratitude, sympathy, and understanding despite having divergent interests and opinions. A few cases expressed optimism and offered assistance to other participants.

Among the 15 positive politeness subcategories in the B&L (1978, 1987) politeness model, two were untapped by the Bikolano online interactants: (1) asserting or presupposing the speaker's knowledge of and concern of what the hearer wants, and (2) assuming or asserting reciprocity. One possible explanation is that the interlocutors might have found these two substrategies inappropriate for the effective attainment of their communicative goals in such a conflictive online environment. For instance, it would be quite difficult for the interactants to assume reciprocity while they are engaged in a conflictive discourse.

**Table 4**

*Negative politeness strategies deployed by the Bikolano online interactants*

Negative Politeness Strategy	f	%	Rank
Don't presume/assume (use of question, hedges)	40	61.54	1
Minimize the imposition (use downgraders, modals)	12	18.46	2
Communicate Speaker's (S) want not to impinge on Hearer (e.g., apologize)	6	9.23	3
Impersonalize S and H	4	6.15	4
Go on-record as incurring a debt, or as not indebted H	2	3.08	5
Be conventionally indirect	1	1.54	6
<b>Total</b>	65	100.00	

Table 4 shows the negative politeness strategies employed by the Bikolano interlocutors, indicating that they also did recognize the need to

respect other members' freedom from imposition. Apparently, the participants demonstrated an inclination to avoid assuming spontaneous compliance to orders or positive response to their requests nor immediate acceptance of assertions, so they tended to lubricate these speech acts with hedges (e.g., *ngaya* [others/someone may say/think], *baka* [perhaps/probably], *garo* [seem], *tibaad/baad* [perhaps], *lugod* [unintentional, forced/hope], *malay ta* [for all we know]) or form them in question forms. They also minimized imposition by using downgraders (e.g., *sa hiling mo/nindo* [do you think], *baya* [just], *ano daw* [what if], *sana* [hope]) and modals (e.g., *pwede daw* [may/can, is it possible]). Some also apologized by saying *pasensiya na tabi* (sorry) when they were corrected, suggesting that they viewed the act of correction as a favor given by the one who initiated the repair. This is notable given the fact that when the repair was initiated by others and then repaired by them, some interactants seemed to be offended by the action.

Table 5 displays the specific linguistic devices and markers deployed by the participants based on the data analyzed. Aside from the verbal cues presented above, the interactants explicitly used certain linguistic structures to mitigate face threats all throughout their engagement in the conflictive discussion forum.

**Table 5**  
*Specific linguistic politeness devices and markers used as strategies*

Specific Linguistic Politeness Device and Marker	f
Tabi (please, excuse — used generally with co-equal, older people, people with authority)	65
Po (used generally with older individuals or people with authority)	24
Kinship markers	
<i>tugang/ugang</i> (brother/sister)	43
<i>nguhod</i> (younger brother)	6
<i>noy/ne</i> (younger brother/sister)	5
<i>kuya</i> (elder brother)	5
<i>matua</i> (elder brother/sister)	4
<i>pay</i> (uncle)	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>158</b>

Similar to the findings of Olazo (2012), one of the most frequently deployed linguistic devices was the word “*tabi*” which could mean “please or excuse” in the English language, followed by the word “*po*” and kinship

markers. The word “*tabi*” may be seen as a clipped version of the Tagalog politeness marker “*pasintabi*” meaning *giving due respect for someone* or *asking for pardon*. However, it has been observed that in their case, speakers of Tagalog use the term not as a staple lexical resource for social interaction but only in specific situations such as “*Tabi, tabi, sa nuno*” or “*Tabi tabi apo*” (Excuse me/us unseen beings/elemental beings)<sup>6</sup>. Two other illustrative linguistic applications are as follows: (1) “*Pasintabi po kay Roces sa paggamit ko ng kanyang salita sa aking akda.*” (With due respect to Roces, I coin his word in my work.) and (2) “*Pasintabi po sa mga kumakain, may naganap na pagsabog dito sa aming lugar.*” (With due respect to those who are eating, there was a bombing incident in our vicinity.). In the case of Bikolanos, although they also use the expression “*Tabi, tabi apo*” similarly with how the Tagalogs use it, the word “*tabi*” is a kernel politeness lexicon in their discourse.

Remarkably, the word *tabi* possesses a neutralizing effect both to the speaker and the hearer since it can be deployed as a sign of politeness or respect to an individual without compromising one’s social standing; thus, it can be used freely in both symmetrical and asymmetrical relationships regardless of vertical directions, that is, senior-subordinate or vice versa. On the other hand, the word “*po*” that was also frequently used by the interactants denotes deference to the hearer as it is generally used when addressing persons of authority or senior in age. The participants also used kinship markers profusely, denoting the affiliative orientation of the group which is common to Asian communities (Jocano, 1999; O’Brien, 1993; Realubit, 1983). The most extensively used kinship markers were *tugang/ugang* (brother/sister), *nguhod* (younger brother/sister), *noy* (younger brother)/*ne* (younger sister), *kuya* (elder brother), *matua* (elder brother/sister), and *pay* (uncle). This prevalent use of kinship markers even among nonfamily members validates Jocano’s (1999) observation that Filipinos exude familism or *magkamag-anak na pananaw* embodied in the practice of looking at people as members of one’s own family.

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<sup>5</sup> Tagalog, a language spoken by people from Quezon, Batangas, Cavite and neighboring provinces, shares many common linguistic features with Filipino, the lingua franca of the Philippines.

<sup>6</sup> One of the perpetuating Filipino folk beliefs listed in the *Encyclopedia of Philippine Folk Beliefs and Customs* is the belief in supernatural beings (e.g., “engkantos,” spirits) (Demetrio, 1991). It is believed that these unseen beings cause harm when hurt or offended so when a person passes by a place believed to be inhabited by these creatures, he or she should say, “*Tabi, tabi po,*” for the spirits to be aware of the passerby’s presence.

To further understand the way participants deployed the different politeness strategies, comment thread A (CTA) is subjected to *in situ* analysis starting with its Initial Post (IP) (Segment 1, CTA lines 1-5).

(1) CTA

- 1 A1 LET’S TALK ABOUT A NEUTRAL TOPIC THIS TIME, MY TOWNMATES:  
2  
3 WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE 2-3 QUALIFICATIONS THAT A LEADER,  
PARTICULARLY GOVERNMENT LEADERS, MUST POSSESS?  
4  
5 WE MAY ELABORATE OUR IDEAS FOR A MORE PRODUCTIVE  
EXCHANGE OF OPINIONS.

Segment 1 shows that comment thread A (CTA) opens up with A’s IP requesting the group members to share their opinions on qualities of a leader, particularly government leaders. The IP reveals that A deployed a combination of three positive politeness substrategies to mitigate the negative-face-threatening aspect of the request as she pursued her illocutionary goal. The first line prefaces the main request by establishing a common ground for both the speaker and the hearer through the use of the following: (1) plural inclusive pronoun “us” to indicate that anybody is welcome to join the discussion; (2) in-group identity marker, *kahimanwa* (townmates), to strengthen solidarity; and (3) the term, *neutral*, to assert common ground. The request proper, on the other hand, uses the consultative device “what do you think” to downgrade the degree of imposition threatening the negative face of the other members. In the third line, a combination again of positive politeness and negative politeness strategies is utilized in giving further instructions to possible interactants: the use of the inclusive pronoun “we,” the emphasis on a common goal as articulated in the phrase “a more productive exchange of ideas,” and the use of the modal “may” to hedge the imposition. The data reveal that to effectively mitigate the negative-face-threatening element of the request, A blended both positive and negative politeness strategies, with the former used more frequently than the latter.

## (2) CTA

- 7 A2 KIKIKIK... where are my victims?  
 8 Aren't they around?  
 9 It seems they smell my perfume ... OHAKIKIKIK!  
 10 16 August at 02:47 · Like · 1
- 11 A3 Good afternoo[n] to you *tugang* (brother) **D** ! Would you mind sharing your brilliant  
 12 insights about what you think are at least 2-3 qualifications or traits needed by an individual  
 13 to be a good leader particularly of our town?  
 14 Perhaps, you might help enlighten us  
 15 16 August at 13:00 · Like · 1
- 16 A4 that's \*AFTERNOON *tabi tugang*  
 17 16 August at 13:01 · Like · 1
- 18 A5 It seems those who will comment on this thread are still reflecting... let me wait for a  
 19 while because someone who is interested in sharing his insight might crop up  
 20 19 August at 18:49 · Like
- 21 A6 *Tugang* (Brother) H, would you share your thoughts on this topic.  
 22 I k[N]ow that you have many things to contribute.  
 24 August at 13:51 · Like

Displaying the five succeeding turns after the IP in segment 1, segment 2 manifests that **A** was determined to pursue the topic. The second turn was posted four minutes after the IP, where she strategically played her role as an *aswang*, the Philippine mythical figure, in search of her victims, which implies that she was indirectly inviting reactants to her IP. It was noted that some of the members of the site espoused literary or mythical pseudonyms in their accounts instead of their real names. In this post, **A** tactically deployed a cultural motif, belief in the supernatural (i.e., *aswang*), as a group identity marker, a positive politeness strategy. After almost ten hours and despite the 'Likes' in her posts, the IP found no answer, and so she pursued her talk to encourage members of the site, specifically addressing another member, **D**. The presence of 'Likes' in her posts might have encouraged her to continue, for the number of 'Likes' is generally perceived as a sign of affirmation or appreciation for a post. At turn 3, she used a combination of several politeness strategies both addressing the positive (e.g., greeting [attend to hearer]; in-group identity marker, specifically the kinship marker *tugang* [brother/sister]), and negative face needs of the members such as couching the request in question form, using a query preparatory device ("would you mind

sharing”), utilizing a consultative device (“what you think”), and using hedges (perhaps, would). At turn 4, when she repaired a misspelling committed at turn 2, she used the kinship marker “*tugang*” (brother/sister) and the specific politeness marker “*tabi*” unique to Bikolano language, which means either please or excuse. Despite further threat to her positive face, she took again the next turn (5) three days after the posting of her IP by providing a possible explanation for the silence “It seems those who will comment on this thread are still reflecting” and adding that she was willing to wait. This move reflects the deployment of two strategies again, one positive (providing explanation or reason for a behavior) and another negative (waiting) to indicate that the members could bid their time. At the next turn (6), she used again the kinship marker “*tugang*,” the query preparatory device (would you do x), and exaggerated interest in and approval of what the hearer would share. It can be seen that A utilized both types of politeness strategies to attain the transactional and interactional goals of the language, and in doing so, her efforts paid off as the IP successfully elicited not only its second part forming an adjacency pair of question-answer format but also the active participation of other members in the group.

In general, the *in situ* analysis confirms the quantitative results that in the asynchronous online discussion forum being studied, members encountered two types of face threats, positive and negative FTAs. These findings align with earlier findings that both types of FTAs confront interlocutors both in FtF (Burke & Kraut, 2008; Labor, 2009, 2010; Olazo, 2012; Regala-Flores, 2008; Victoria, 2012) and virtual interactions (Carlo & Yoo, 2009; Simmons, 1994; Suarez, 2012). Akin to previous research results (Labor, 2009, 2010; Olazo, 2012; Regala-Flores, 2008; Suarez, 2012; Victoria, 2012), the data show that Filipinos, particularly the Bikolano, online interlocutors under study tended to tactically combine both positive and negative politeness strategies in mitigating these FTAs, with positive politeness techniques being deployed more frequently than the negative politeness ones (Olazo, 2012; Victoria, 2012). These strategies were complemented with the use of bald on-record, off-record or indirect strategies, and opting out. These results lend support to Olazo’s (2012) findings that generally, Filipinos, particularly Bikolanos, attend to the interlocutor’s face, particularly the positive face, reflecting their strong sense of commitment to social relationship and their desire to live harmoniously with others (O’Brien, 1993; Realubit, 1983; Victoria, 2012).

The frequent use of in-group markers was compounded by the online interactants’ use of their unique variety of the Bikol language, Bikol-Partido,



belonging to the North Coastal Bikol (Lobel, 2013). The preferential use of this language heightens the “We-ness” among the interlocutors (MacCallion, 2007), making their e-discourse impervious to out-groups. The participants also recurrently used specific linguistic in-group markers distinct to their town such as geographical markers (*tambayan, kagit, banwaan*), particular set of beliefs (*aswang, engkanto*), forms of address (*padi, amigo*), and verbal expressions (*ginim an, hadaw*) to declare common grounds with the hearers/readers (B&L, 1978, 1987). This prevalent application of in-group markers confirms Olazo’s (2012) observation that Bikolanos frequently use this strategy to redress FTAs.

The interactants’ predominant use of kinship markers in their e-discourse may be seen as an embodiment of the Filipinos’ spirit of familism or *magkamag-anak na pananaw*, which explains their tendency to treat other people as members of their own respective families (Jocano, 1999). Moreover, the preponderance of politeness strategies employed by the Bikolano interactants supports the claim that Filipinos (Jocano, 1999), particularly Bikolanos (Obrien, 1993; Realubit 1983), put high premium on relationships and consider the external world of “others.”

As regards the use of upgraders, noted are the modal “must” and the question “right?” indicating bald on-record strategy. The participants also utilized Bikol hedges (*ngaya, gayod*), consultative devices (e.g., why don’t we do x), and pseudo-conditionals (e.g., if I were you) to attenuate the strength of their utterance, particularly their requests and suggestions. These findings resonate Olazo’s (2012) findings that these politeness strategies were used by the Bikolano interactants although her data focused on FtF interactions.

The data also reveal that the participants used bald on-record as a face-saving measure, especially when they were provoked. The bald response might have been deployed for saving their own negative face when they gave in to an equally bald order. The bald on-record utterances might also reflect the participants’ threatened positive face. On the other hand, bald on-record deployment seemed to be avoided in confronting the positive face of other interactants, except when there was an urgent need to attain the communicative goals by rebutting a counter-argument in a verbal battle. It has been noted that the participants avoided direct criticism and used off-record techniques instead, such as the use of sarcasm or highlighting unaddressed category-bound expectations, to indirectly criticize ineffectual government leaders. Remarkably, opting out became an effective recourse when the participants encountered a situation where they were put at a disadvantage as in cases

where they were asked certain questions eliciting self-incriminating answers (Pinker, 2007).

Remarkably, the Bikolano interlocutors codeswitched from Bikol to English from time to time both intersententially and intrasententially. Because of the possibility that codeswitching might have been possibly used as a politeness strategy, the data were subjected again to analysis to determine how codeswitching operates in the online discourse. The conversational analysis reveals that the English terms used in codeswitching, particularly on the intrasentential level, tended to be positive words (e.g., openminded, neutral, Sir, bow, potential to be a leader) indicative of politeness strategy use. However, since they had already been accounted earlier, they were not counted anymore as cases of positive politeness use. It is notable that many of the English words appropriated by the interactants are gradually penetrating the Bikolanos' language repertoire as these words become regular discursive features, particularly of the young generation's oral discourse. Hence, these codeswitching instances may be construed as manifestations of language hybridity or language truncation brought about by the combined force of globalization and internet technology (Blommaert, 2010).

Another significant finding is that a statement classified as a collaborative speech act in one context may become a conflictive one in another, highlighting the salient role of membership category analysis for a more effective application of conversational analysis, particularly on establishing the types of face threats encountered by participants in a discourse and the corresponding politeness strategies deployed to mitigate them. Moreover, the study also reveals that assertions, accompanied with factual evidence, warrant their illocutionary force. Another strategy is keeping the talk aligned to the transactional target so that the discourse will not be derailed or digressive and will avoid face-compromising incidents along the way.

Overall, the findings resonate earlier research (Burke & Kraut, 2008; Carlo & Yoo, 2009; Kiyama et al., 2012; Labor, 2009; 2010; Olazo, 2012; Regala-Flores, 2008; Simmons, 1994; Suarez, 2012; Victoria, 2012), validating B&L's (1987) politeness models from theory to practice. The results highlight the applicability of B&L's theory in the Philippine context not only in FtF encounters but also in computer-mediated communication, affirming its universal elements while delineating certain cultural nuances that make Filipino, specifically Bikol, politeness distinct by itself. Finally, just like Simmons' (1994), the findings fortify the SIP theory (Walther, 1992) that in time, people show resilience in adapting to the challenges posed by

the web-based channel as they successfully deploy politeness strategies in this “faceless” medium.

#### 4. Conclusion

In relation to Social Information Processing Theory (Walther, 1992), the results clearly support the theoretical stance that individuals effectively deploy not only discursive strategies but politeness strategies as well to maintain the equilibrium between the functional and the interpersonal use of language even in computer-mediated discourses believed to be limited by the absence of nonverbal cues and other feedback systems. Apparently, the Bikolano participants have proven their flexibility as interactants even in the fast-evolving technology-based communication channels.

The findings also have important theoretical implications for B&L’s (1978, 1987) politeness theory. First, these results highlight the applicability of B&L’s theory in the Philippine context not only in FtF encounters but also in computer-mediated communication. Second, the results also underscore the value of examining both linguistic and nonlinguistic aspects of politeness theory, particularly as applied in online interaction using conversational analysis as a research tool. A third contribution is that some aspects of the usage of politeness strategies seem to be universal, whereas others appear to be culture-specific. One cultural indicator revealed by this study was the predominant use of kinship markers, a possible manifestation of the Filipinos’ spirit of familism or *magkamag-anak na pananaw* (Jocano, 1999). Similarly, the preponderance of politeness strategies employed by the Bikolano interactants may reflect the value they place on relationships and exhibit their general concern for others (Jocano, 1999; O’Brien, 1993; Realubit 1983). Cultural practices and cultural differences indeed are displayable in any forms of discourse.

The study also highlights the importance of revolutionizing the globalized language classrooms in the Asian region. In the era of transnational education, students from divergent cultural backgrounds intermingle with one another either in traditional classrooms or virtual ones, providing venues for productive discussions among students regardless of variances in geographical settings, time zones, motivations, and goals for language learning. It is in this light that CMC and cultural studies like the present study become not an option but a responsibility of every language educator who desires to contribute to “developing a sustainable quality language education” (emphasis added) in

the region. Collaborative research teams are highly encouraged to engage in scholarly ventures to produce a language curriculum that transcends limiting national and geographical frames of reference.

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## Appendix A

### *Taxonomy of politeness strategies based primarily on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory*

Politeness Strategies (sample coded data)	CTA	CTB	CTC	CTD	CTE	TOTAL
<p><b>Bald on-record (No mitigation done)</b></p> <p>B42 F14: C so you admit that your father and brother belong to the corrupt.</p> <p>C48 C8: purely incessant talks....</p>		1	1			
<p>In CTB line 42 turn 14, F in using C's prior statements went bald on-record as he pushed C to admission that her father and brother both belonged to the "corrupt" politician." Cornered, C opted out and did not supply the expected pair to this assertion.</p> <p>In CTC line 48 turn 8, C went bald on-record as she provided a personal evaluation of all the talks done hurled at the mayoralty candidate she was supporting.</p>						
<p><b>Opting Out (No communication done)</b></p> <p>C's decision not to rebut F's statement at B42 turn 14 can be seen as a face-saving gesture on her part since she did not have to tell a lie to rebut F's assertion, thus, saving her own positive face; nor directly attack her opponents and ruin their interpersonal relationship in the process, thus, preserving their respective positive faces.</p>		1				
<p><b>Off-Record (Indirect criticism or hint)</b></p> <p>B23 A2: It will be unfortunate to miss the opportunity of meeting a sincere man willing to help <i>Paraiso</i>. I keep hearing stories in <i>Bathala</i> about his capacity to be a leader of <i>Paraiso</i> and I am convinced of your choice, <i>Pay</i> (uncle).</p>	1					
<p>A's utterance at CTB line 23 turn 2, which refers to a new mayoralty candidate, indicates an indirect criticism of the incumbent mayor, who was also running for re-election, as it highlights category-bound qualities such as sincerity and capacity to be a leader of the town of <i>Paraiso</i> found to be deficient in the elected mayor.</p>						
<b>Positive Politeness</b>						
<i>Claim Common Ground</i>						



<p>1. Notice, attend to H (his/her interests, wants, needs, goods).</p> <p>B10 A3: <u>Good afternoo[n]</u> to you brother  <b>D!</b> Would you mind sharing your brilliant insights....</p> <p>E17 H2: IF YOU ARE SURE ABOUT THE VERACITY OF WHAT YOU ARE SAYING, THE BEST MOVE THAT YOU SHOULD DO, FILE A PROTEST IN THE COMELEC.</p>				1		
<p>2. Exaggerate (interest, approval, sympathy with).</p> <p>C183 A48: It's good to know that brother Poncio Palitopito consistently upgrade his capabilities; look at that, he has trained again in English.</p> <p>C195 K51: hahahah... you are indeed an expert brother in English! I'm learning from you.</p>			5	1		
<p>3. Intensify interest to H.</p> <p>D19 H3: IT'S GOOD THAT YOU ALARM PEOPLE Anna David PARTICULARLY THOSE WHO ARE HERE IN THE <i>TAMBAYAN</i> (HANGOUT).</p> <p>D39 H8: ALL OF YOU WHO ARE HERE, <b>LET'S GIVE IMPORTANCE TO THIS</b> BREAKING NEWS OF ANNA.</p>	1		1	1		
<p>4. Use in-group identity markers.</p> <p>C21 A2: I wish I could meet this Mr. Roxas in <i>tubaan</i> (tuba drinking spree)</p> <p>D221 J60: It seems that the population of the <i>maligno</i> (supernatural beings) in <i>Paraiso</i> is increasing</p>			2	3		
<p>5. Seek agreement.</p> <p>D113 N27: PEACE ^^</p> <p>E13 C1: He is showing no confidence in himself because he has to cheat even if he hasn't started yet[?] Right?</p>	1		1	2 1 3	7	1

<p>6. Avoid disagreement. No to debate.</p> <p>B36 C13: If we keep on debating on that <i>po..</i> you will only go crazy <i>po ..</i></p> <p>D152 C41: !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!</p> <p>D161 C45: ??????????????</p>	1			4	7	
<p>7. Presuppose/raise/assert common ground.</p> <p>A1 A1: LET`S TALK ABOUT A <u>NEUTRAL TOPIC</u> THIS TIME, MY TOWNMATES:</p> <p>D23 I5: Premature move <i>amigong</i> (friend)</p> <p>P.P. It is unfair for the election registrar to be accused [of] electioneering</p>				1	8	
<p>8. Joke/laughter.</p> <p>E22 N21: ahahaha ^_^</p> <p>D208 J56: hehehe...</p>				7	1	
<p>Convey that S and H are co-operators</p>						
<p>9. Assert or presuppose S's knowledge of and concern for H's wants.</p>						
<p>10. Offer, promise.</p> <p>D38 H8: DON`T WORRY ANNA, I WILL SEND SPIES TO MONITOR MR.</p> <p>D136 H33: OR IF YOU WISH, I`LL JUST EXPLAIN IT TO YOU</p>	1					
<p>11. Be optimistic.</p> <p>E1 AA1: Truth like the rays of sun cannot be hidden even by tempestuous weather. It may be veiled momentarily but not eternally.</p> <p>E237 A67: You`re right <u>J</u>, even the young <i>tawong lipod</i> (unseen beings) will now come out to see the light... just wait and see</p>						
<p>12. Include both S and H in the activity.</p> <p>A1 A1: <u>LET`S TALK ABOUT A NEUTRAL TOPIC THIS TIME, MY TOWNMATES:</u></p> <p>E105 H25: <u>WE</u> SHOULD HAVE ALSO EXPLAINED WELL <u>OUR</u> POSTING IN ENGLISH.</p>				9	2	1 1

<p>13. Give (or ask for) reasons. A16 B5: perhaps those interested in answering this question are still reflecting... E124 L33: Pacify him <i>tabi</i> uncle PP; he may be drunk again.</p>				4	1	
<p>14. Assume or assert reciprocity.</p>						
<p>Fulfill H's wants</p>						
<p>15. Give gifts to H (goods, sympathy, understanding, cooperation). E127 C27: thanks for the comments... E224 J61: hahahaha.. may apology <i>tabi</i> Sammy Corpuz the truth is I am not familiar with the meaning of numbers in <i>jueteng</i>.</p>	1			2	3	
<p><b>Total Number of Positive Politeness Strategies</b></p>						

Legend: E224 J61 = Comment Thread E Line 224 Speaker J at Turn 61