Linguistic Politeness and Face-Work in Computer Mediated Communication, Part 2: An Application of the Theoretical Framework

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Analysis of sociointerpersonal communication patterns among discourse participants is essential to understand the manifestation of and the interpersonal-communication features realized in online social interaction. The linguistic politeness theory provides an effective framework for such an analysis of sociointerpersonal communication features employed by online language users to maintain and enhance their public self-image, or *face*. The qualitative data analysis of this study, drawn from the real-time, online discussions of K–12 students, makes evident that interpersonal-communication features appear in the form of politeness tactics. The results of the study show that there is decreased use of deferential linguistic forms; on the contrary, a variety of verbal and nonverbal devices that denote positive politeness and bald-on-record (i.e., direct speech acts) frequently occur. The commonality of positive politeness and bald-on-record lies in the fact that both tactics are grounded in the nature of the close interpersonal relationships between participants. Such a communication pattern in the real-time, online discourse of K–12 students signifies that cognitive assessment of sociointerpersonal and contextual variables undertaken by speech participants underlies the realization of linguistic politeness. Employment of such politeness tactics indicates that effective and fully realized interpersonal communication plays a vital role in the development of online social interaction.

Introduction

The development of communication technologies has enabled dynamic social interaction through the computer-mediated communication (CMC) channel. Accordingly, there has been rapid growth in multiple genres of social interaction through the CMC channel. The use of electronic mail, a type of CMC genre, is today widespread and common in daily communication, social interaction that implicates linguistic politeness. That is, as in face-to-face (FtF) interaction,

online discourse participants interact among themselves in the process of presenting arguments, asking for clarification of misunderstandings, displaying disagreement, and the like. Such interaction may pose a threat to discourse participants' *face*, or public self-image. Discourse participants therefore converse with each other while engaging in face-work (i.e., a linguistic politeness strategy) based on a cognitive assessment of contextual and interpersonal variables such as power difference and social distance among discourse participants.

The analysis of communication and sociointeractional patterns among online discourse participants is essential in understanding the manifestations of social interaction and the interpersonal communication features realized in online discussion. The linguistic politeness theory provides an effective framework for such an analysis of sociointerpersonal communication among speech participants. However, as described in the first part of this study (Park, 2008), interpersonal communication patterns over the CMC have been relatively unexplored in the LIS domain (Mon, 2006; Park, 2007; Radford, 2006; Westbrook, 2007).

This study aims to examine the ways in which online-discussion participants express their sociointerpersonal stance while presenting thoughts and arguments in group-discussion forums. Towards this end, the first part of the study examined the linguistic politeness theoretical framework in depth and the way the framework has been used within the CMC context (Park, 2008). The second part of the study aims to apply the linguistic politeness theoretical framework to a text-based, synchronous, online-discussion forum. The following research questions are explored:

1. What methodological merits does the linguistic politeness theoretical framework bring to the analysis of sociointeractional patterns within the CMC context?
2. How do online-discussion participants engage in group discussion to present their thoughts, clarify misunderstandings, and seek information from other participants?
3. What types of interpersonal communication features are realized in online discussion?

Prior to presenting the data and research methods for this study, some of the key aspects of the linguistic politeness theoretical framework are briefly reiterated in the following section.

Brief Recap of Linguistic Politeness

Linguistic politeness can be seen as a strategy for reducing interpersonal friction and conflict and as a device that speech participants use to facilitate smooth social interaction (Lakoff, 1973; Leech, 1983). The Brown and Levinson (1987) politeness theoretical framework, which prominently shaped the state of the art of linguistic politeness theory, is constituted with politeness principles and strategies for maintaining and enhancing one's *face* (i.e., public self-image) during social encounters. In everyday language use, such strategic devices can be easily observed in various verbal and nonverbal expressions and rituals.

For example, in a job setting, a subordinate may be discussing work-related matters in her supervisor's office. The subordinate feels cold and wants to have a window closed. In this context, the utterance by the subordinate for making a request to her supervisor ("It's cold in here.") is realized as an indirect speech act by hint together with a nonverbal gesture; a direct command such as "Close the window!" would likely vitiate smooth social interaction considering the asymmetrical power relationship between subordinate and supervisor.

In other words, a direct speech act would likely pose a threat to the speech participant's *face*. In this sense, indirect verbal and nonverbal behaviors reflect the use of linguistic politeness as a strategic device for facilitating social interaction; it can be said that linguistic politeness underlies the interpersonal and interactive function of language use during social interaction.

There are two interrelated aspects of *face* desire. One is the *positive-face* desire that is rooted in involvement, connection, and proximity with others. Scollon and Scollon (1983) used "solidarity" in lieu of *positive face*. The other is the *negative-face* desire that is rooted in the independence and autonomy of individuals. According to Scollon and Scollon, "deference" is in line with *negative face*. There are a variety of politeness strategies that attend to the *positive-face* desire to be liked and appreciated. These include verbal and nonverbal forms encompassing the claiming of common ground such as shared interest and knowledge with the other speech participant, seeking agreement and avoiding overt disagreement, delivering compliments, showing interest, approval, or sympathy, and using in-group identity markers such as a nickname.

On the other hand, *negative-face* desire can be realized by giving others options, independence, and freedom of action and freedom from imposition. Accordingly, it brings forth a certain degree of social distance between interlocutors and maintains personal space and territory. Politeness strategies for realizing *negative-face* desire encompass verbal and nonverbal expressions and rituals conveying indirectness and/or hesitation, avoidance, apology, deference, self-effacement, and formality.

Brown and Levinson (1987) delineated four major categories of politeness strategies: bald-on-record (e.g., direct speech act), positive politeness (e.g., solidarity), negative politeness (e.g., deference), and off-record (e.g., hint, the most indirect speech act). The realization of politeness strategies is dependent on the cognitive assessment of sociointerpersonal variables in a given sociocultural context. According to the politeness assessment formula of Brown and Levinson, there are three variables: *power*, *distance*, and *imposition*.

Data and Data-Analysis Method

The Virtual Math Teams (VMT), managed by the Math Forum at Drexel University, investigate issues related to online collaborative problem solving. For this, the VMT conducted an experiment called *powwow*, an extension of the Math Forum's *Problem of the Week* (*PoW*) service. The experimental *powwow* project explores small-group collaborative learning with minimal support in terms of software. The project aims at investigating the issues surrounding the pedagogy of online collaborative learning of mathematics and software design. Data for this study were directly derived from the experimental *powwow* project.

The VMT conducted the *powwow* project using AOL's Instant Messenger (AIM) software. For group discussion, each participant received his or her screen name through the official AIM Web site (http://dashboard.aim.com/aim). Participants in the chat forum were able to see the screen names of their counterparts, which have been de-identified for the purposes of the article. The chat forum runs approximately 1 to $1\frac{1}{2}$ hr with math questions from algebra and geometry.

The mathematical discourse data of each *powwow* session are recorded as chat logs. The originally recorded chat logs consist of the screen name of participants, the time stamp of the posting (e.g., 8:00:16 PM), and utterance (e.g., Hello). The following excerpt from a *powwow* session is illustrative:

You are now in chat room "powwow1."
Pee1 has entered the chat room.
Shk has entered the chat room.
Azn has entered the chat room.
Life has entered the chat room.

Shk (8:00:16 PM): Hello
Sunshine has entered the chat room.
Life (8:00:23 PM): hey
Pee1 (8:00:27 PM): hello there old chap
Sunshine (8:00:27 PM): hi
Azn (8:00:31 PM): hi
Mdr (8:00:39 PM): Let's go around and have everyone share a greeting with the group. I'll start by saying that I'm really looking forward to seeing you talk about math tonight!
Pee1 (8:00:51 PM): Im ready!!!
Life (8:01:09 PM): ohk
Azn (8:01:09 PM): same here
Pee1 (8:01:12 PM): iight
Shk (8:01:14 PM): M 2
Mdr (8:01:15 PM): great!

For the purposes of this study, the numbered discourse lines are added to the original chat logs; time stamps of postings are not relevant to the discussion for this study and thus are deleted. An utterance or message pertinent to the discussion of the section is in boldface throughout the article.

Overall, 15 chat logs, as illustrated earlier, are randomly sampled from a larger set of *powwows*. Each *powwow* session comprises approximately 90 min of online interaction. The collected random sample is examined based on the linguistic politeness theoretical framework. The politeness strategies are identified and extracted from online chat transcripts to examine the way in which online-discussion participants promote public self-image during small-group interaction. The qualitative data analysis addresses the applicability of the linguistic politeness theoretical framework to the analysis of sociointeractional patterns in an online-group-discussion setting.

The unit of analysis is based on coherent sequences of utterances realized through adherence to turn-taking rules. In FtF interaction, speech participants mostly unconsciously follow turn-taking rules through employment of various verbal and nonverbal devices. Thus, there exists conversational coherence in talk in FtF interaction, even though there are sometimes overlaps and interruptions among speech participants.

However, there is noticeable disruption in turn-taking and discourse coherence in text-based, real-time, online chat (Herring, 1999; Park, 2007, discussed this in detail in presenting mechanisms employed by online discourse participants to overcome such disruptions). This is largely owing to the fact that turn-taking in real-time, online chat is realized through transference of keyboarded messages between speech participants. The transference is then relayed by a remote server, engendering a time-lag. In addition, multiple party interactions through the text-based, online communication channel may create disruptions of coherent sequences of talk inasmuch as the sender's text is presented in chronological order as it is transferred to the receiver.

Unrelated turns without coherent sequences frequently appear in text-based, real-time, online communication. This creates difficulties in interpreting ongoing talk. Thus, for the purposes of the study, turns irrelevant to the given discussion are deleted. Any deletion is indicated in the transcripts for the discussion.

The contextual ground of the sample data underlies the text-based, synchronous communication channel. The spatial-temporal setting, the discussion topic for a given online chat session, and the small-group participants constitute the contextual variables. The text-based, synchronous communication channel reflects the spatial and temporal context for the online chat. That is, a participant's own work station set the spatial context; real-time sets the temporal context. Seen another way, the extent of space and time shared by participants is 100% in time and 0% in space. Discussion topics are related to solving math problems. The online discussion occurs in real time; thus, misspellings and other typographical errors frequently appear in the surveyed transcripts.

Groups are composed of 3 to 5 students in Grades 6 to 11 and a moderator/facilitator from the VMT project. The role of the moderator is akin to that of a third-party observer; in the transcript, this is indicated through the screen name for purposes of this article. Moderators do not participate in solving the math problem. A member from the VMT project moderates and logs in each session without imposing any structure for the group discussion. They post introductory and closing messages. At the end of the group forum, moderators also solicit feedback on the group interaction.

Three specific social and interpersonal variables (i.e., *power*, *distance*, and *imposition*) for face-work of Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness framework can be realized differently depending on the genre of CMC.[1] In a synchronous peer-group collaboration for solving math problems, power and distance between participants are symmetrical and low ($-power$, $-distance = egalitarian\ power\ and\ close\ social\ relationship$) inasmuch as participants are members of the same peer group; on the other hand, the power difference between moderator and students is asymmetrical owing to differences in roles in the discussion forum. The power difference also is in part derived from the difference in age: Each online chat session is facilitated by a VMT project member who is an adult. One of the primary goals in synchronous-peer-group collaboration for the solving of math problems is to exchange ideas and thoughts during information seeking and sharing. Thus, it is safe to state that the degree of *imposition* in the online-peer-group discussion setting is lower than that of other CMC genres such as virtual reference.[2]

Other variables also may be at play in social interaction. Such variables include gender, social distance, age, and ethnic characteristics among students who participate in the online chat sessions; however, this type of information is not readily available in the chat transcripts, even though there are instances in which participants freely disclose such information during group interaction. Lack of such information limits the study in terms of identification of sociointeractional patterns in relation to these variables.

Data analysis demonstrates the way in which speech participants employ verbal and nonverbal devices for face-work dependent upon cognitive assessment of interpersonal variables such as social *distance* and *power* difference between the interlocutors and the weight of *imposition*. It also will show how other contextual variables such as spatial-temporal setting and the discussion topic play a part in the use of politeness strategies.

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[1]In dyadic interaction between a librarian and a user in a virtual reference setting, the social variables between participants would be different from those in peer-group collaboration in an education context. In other words, social variables of power and distance in interpersonal relations between a librarian and a user might manifest as asymmetrical ($+power$, $+distance = vertical\ power\ difference\ and\ distant\ social\ relationship$) in that a librarian equipped with educational credentials for advising and guiding an information seeker has a certain degree of power over users in their interpersonal relationship.

[2]In a virtual reference setting, one of the primary purposes of the interaction can be found in the information transaction between librarian and user.

Data analysis, in the following sections, follows the four categories of linguistic politeness strategies put forth in the theoretical framework of Brown and Levinson (1987): *bald-on-record* (e.g., direct speech act), *positive politeness*, *negative politeness*, and *off-record* (e.g., hint, the most indirect speech act) (see the details of these strategies in Part 1 of the study, Park, 2008). These four categories of linguistic politeness strategies are applied to sociointeractional features employed by online-discussion participants.

Face-Work in a Real-Time, Online-Discussion Forum

Bald-on-Record: Direct Speech Act

Unlike indirect speech acts, direct speech acts for seeking request, clarification, and refusal engender a potential threat to the *face* of speech participants. On the other hand, direct speech acts contribute to close and uninhibited interpersonal relationships between participants. One of the most prominent characteristics of social interaction in the data is the fact that the K–12 students frequently employ the direct speech act during their peer-group discussion.

The frequent use of direct speech acts results from several factors. First, the real-time setting contributes to this phenomenon, as participants need to follow the dynamic flow of conversation as it occurs in this synchronous communication channel. That is, the participants need to accommodate their speech style to follow the stream of the real-time conversation. This contributes to more frequent use of direct speech acts, which are concise, clear, and brief.

In addition, the text-based communication channel might delay the speed of exchange of the message. Keyboarding is slower than speaking; thus, to compensate for the slowness of keyboarding and to follow the real-time conversational flow, speech participants tend to use direct speech acts. Another factor can be found in the characteristics of the discourse genre. Note that language use in a discussion forum for math problems is different from that of a discussion forum on controversial issues. Unlike dealing with controversial issues, solving a math problem through group discussion, especially through a real-time, synchronous communication channel, demands a direct, clear, and brief conversation style.

In addition to these external factors, peer-group interaction tends to be direct in that there is little or no power difference with low social distance. As mentioned, the bald-on-record strategy (i.e., direct speech act) signifies close and uninhibited interpersonal relations among interlocutors.

On the other hand, when K–12 peer-group participants interact with the moderator, who is an adult, they utilize politeness strategies other than bald-on-record, as shown next:

[Transcript 1]

| 1 | a group member [K–12 student] | Ya, help us out **:-)** |
| 2 | Moderator [adult] | No comment, sorry**:-)** |

TABLE 1. Positive politeness strategies (adapted from Brown & Levinson, 1987).

(1) Seeking common ground and shared interests or background (e.g., *You're not alone. I'm also confused.*)

(2) Use of informal speech style and use of informal in-group markers through employment of nickname and/or first name

(3) Seeking agreement and using partial agreement prior to disagreement (e.g., *I like your idea but in this case we don't have an option for that.*)

(4) Use of small talk, humor, and compliments (e.g., *I think this is a great idea!*)

In this excerpt from the ongoing group interaction, a group member asks the moderator for help by employing a bald-on-record strategy, which is a direct speech act (i.e., "help us out"). Due to the direct speech act, without the use of other verbal and nonverbal devices such a bald-on-record strategy tends to threaten the speech participant's *face*. However, in this asymmetrical interaction between a K–12 student and an adult moderator, the group member tactfully utilizes other politeness strategies: the direct request (i.e., "help us out") is preceded by a discourse marker (i.e., "ya") that functions to appeal to the speech participant, followed by the "smiley face," which conveys a friendly tone of request. Such verbal (i.e., discourse marker "ya") and nonverbal (i.e., "smiley face") elements mitigate and soften the force of the direct request, thus still attending to the moderator's positive-face desire.

The shift of speech style from bald-on-record towards positive politeness shows that the cognitive assessment of social interpersonal variables such as social distance and power difference between the interlocutors and the weight of imposition underlies speech participants' employment of verbal and nonverbal devices for face-work. In the aforementioned case, the participant discerns social distance stemming from the age gap and power difference resulting from role differences in the chat forum between herself and moderator. This cognitive assessment is then the basis for the deployment of politeness strategies to the moderator accordingly.

Positive Politeness Strategies: Seeking Common Ground

There are a variety of strategies for attending to the speech participant's desire for positive-face. I will highlight just a few of the most commonly occurring positive politeness strategies in the data. Table 1 illustrates some of the most prominent examples of positive politeness strategies.

First, positive-face desire is reflected in the language use of the interlocutors through claiming common ground in accordance with Brown and Levinson's (1987) positive politeness strategy. By seeking common ground, speech participants aim to reduce social distance. Speech participants seek common ground by expressing shared background in knowledge, interests, or experiences. This tactic contributes to a decrease in social distance and the building of common and mutual understanding between speech participants.

Transcripts 2 and 3 are illustrative:

[Transcript 2]

1	Moderator	That's their job:-) Secondly, we used AOL's Instant Messenger because we know that a lot of people already have it. Do you think that was a good choice?
2	EAR	**HECK YEAH**
3	EAR	**this is a popular sys**
4	INO	**YA!!**
5		[6 turns deleted]
6	CIL	**If it hadn't been AIM, I couldn't have been here.**
7	EAR	**Diddo**
8	INP	**Same**

Toward the end of the online-peer-group discussion, the moderator seeks comments on some issues in relation to the VMT chat forum, such as system, evaluation of the forum, and desired features for improving the forum. The previous excerpt centers on AOL's Instant Messenger (IM), which VMT utilizes for the online chat discussion forum. As shown in Lines 2 through 4, peer-group participants EAR and INO express agreement regarding the moderator's question posed in the first line concerning IM. Both participants agree that the chat system is a good choice for VMT's group discussion.

In addition, in Lines 6 through 8, 3 group participants (CIL, EAR, and INP) express their common experience regarding IM: It enabled them to participate in the online chat discussion. Such interaction contributes to enhancement of positive interpersonal relationships and atmosphere, and accordingly increases social proximity and solidarity among the interlocutors.

The following illustration also shows the seeking of common ground among speech participants:

[Transcript 3]

1	Moderator	How was this different from solving problems on your own?
2		[14 turns deleted]
3	AEL	**I like this way of sharing ideas**
4	NIP	**ya im all for it**

This excerpt is towards the end of the discussion of a math problem. Following the moderator's question in the first line, Participant AEL expresses thoughts on solving math problems within the group rather than singly by commenting on the merits of sharing ideas (Line 3). To this, in the next line, NIP agrees with AEL with use of the discourse marker "ya," which functions to index his or her common experience on the merits of solving math problems within the group. Additional affirmation and reinforcement of positive common experiences on sharing ideas through group discussion are followed by the discourse marker (i.e., "im all for it").

Positive Politeness Strategies: Informality

While examining the role of language in social interaction, Irvine (1979) adduced a concept of linguistic formality from the perspective of sociocultural anthropology. She noted that a formal situation displays the use of seriousness, politeness, and respect; thus, the use of "respect vocabulary" and "formal etiquette" can be seen as hallmarks denoting a formal setting and situation. Formality increases the use of deference-oriented linguistic forms. Formality also increases social distance between interlocutors. This attends to the interlocutors' negative-face desire to be free from imposition and to be able to keep personal space and territory.

Wierzbicka (1991) noted that " ... the essence of 'informality' lies in the purposeful rejection of any overt show of respect, with implications of familiarity, friendliness, and equality." Informality increases the use of solidarity-oriented linguistic forms including informal speech style. Informality decreases social distance and accordingly facilitates positive interpersonal relationships among speech participants. This attends to interlocutors' positive-face desire to be liked, appreciated, and approachable.

For instance, linguistic forms of address illustrate the difference in forms centering on formality versus informality (Park, 2001). For instance, in a formal situation such as a discussion forum on world economics that is broadcast, the moderator may address discussion participants by using a title followed by a last name (e.g., *Dr. Park, Mr. Donn*); on the other hand, in informal situations such as "small talk" in everyday language use, people may address each other by employing a first name or endearment terms (e.g., *honey, dear*). In this illustration, deference-oriented linguistic forms concern address forms such as last name or title followed by last name for the formal setting; on the other hand, solidarity-oriented forms concern forms such as endearment terms or first name for the informal setting.

In this sense, speech styles can be noticeably different when comparing social encounters dependent on the setting. The speech style in formal meetings such as an organizational group meeting or a presentation in a conference tends to be a more rigid, neutralized individual voice, with suppressed interpersonal affect. On the other hand, the speech style in informal settings such as small talk is familiar and solidarity oriented.

Transcript 4 illustrates the manner in which informality informs a group-discussion session:

[Transcript 4]

1	ORB	i don't like having to write up my solution
2	MEA	**m 2**
3	IIL	**me 3**
4	MEA	I do this for extra credit for school
5	ORB	**lol**
6	IIL	same here
7	OOH	oh, really
8	MEA	The PoW-Wow is my choice
9	OOH	**cool!**
10	MEA	but i submit for extra credit
11	OOH	I found this site myself
12	IIL	**i c**
13	OOH	and still enjoy exploring it

14		[10 turns deleted]
15	MEA	So what level math are you guys doing in school
16	OOH	I am quite old and stupid. . . compared to you guys. . .
17	OOH	I am in Geometry
18	MEA	1?
19	OOH	Yes

This interaction occurs in the middle of a discussion forum for solving a math problem. In Lines 1 through 3, discussion participants share their common dislike of text-based communication in the context of having to write up their math solution. As well, in the subsequent lines (4–13) ORB, IIL, MEA, and OOH share their common experiences on using *powwow*. In addition, they share their motivation on using *powwow* for earning extra credit for school work and how they found *powwow*.

As shown, all these interactions constitute small talk not directly related to the activities for solving the math problem. As indicated in Line 14, the participants return to the discussion for solving the math problem. These turns are deleted. However, as shown in Lines 15 to 19, the participants revert to more small talk; MEA and OOH discuss the math and geometry level they are assigned to in school.

As can be seen in the previous transcript, jokes and small talk are frequently used during group-discussion sessions for solving math problems. Small talk and exchange of jokes during group discussion functions to index informality. Small talk brings forth intimacy and solidarity, and thus attends to the speech participant's positive-face desire to be liked and approachable. In addition, subsequent group interactions can be facilitated by small talk in the sense that discussion participants express their shared experiences and seek common ground through small talk.

Informality increases the use of informal speech style. As illustrated in the aforementioned interaction, online-discussion participants frequently utilize informal speech style. This includes verbal shorthand as in Lines 2, 3, and 12 (i.e., "m 2," "me 3," "i c"). The use of shorthand (in this case, informal abbreviation) also is observed in Line 5 (i.e., "lol:" laughing out loud). Informality also is realized through contractions of linguistic forms (see Park, 2007, 2008). The contraction is one of the stylistic characteristics of informal language use. The contextual variable in relation to real-time conversational flow triggers use of both contractions, verbal shorthand, and informal abbreviations.

Phonological and morphosyntactic contractions appear frequently in the data. Table 2 illustrates just a few examples.

Such informality also is realized in linguistic forms such as frequent use of discourse markers (e.g., "you know," "well"), informal address forms (e.g., "hey," "hi there"), and colloquial terms. In-group language use also is an instance of linguistic informality. These linguistic elements appear very frequently in the sampled data for this study.

Transcript 5 illustrates only a few instances of these elements. The use of discourse markers appears in Lines 2, 7, 11 (i.e., "ok," "well"); the use of colloquial terms appear in Lines 18, 21, and 23 (i.e., "yup," "ya," and "hey").

TABLE 2. Linguistic contractions (adapted from Park, 2007).

1. Phonological contraction:
   them > 'em
   and > an > 'n (e.g., rock and roll > rock an' roll > rock 'n roll)
   you > yo > u
   because > 'cause
   okay > ok > 'k

2. Morphosyntactic contraction:
   My way is *a whole a lot* simple! > My way is *hella* simple!
   So, (do you) *want to* hear my way? > so, *wanna* hear my way?
   See you Sunday > *Cya* Sunday
   All right > alright

[Transcript 5]

1	OOH	substitute : r^2 = 4^2 + (8−r)^2
2	IIL	**Ok**
3	ORB	Uh
4	OOH	and simplifying: never mind. . .
5	MEA	R^2 = 16 + 64 + r^2 − 16r
6	OOH	I am too lazy to type out my whole thing
7	MEA	**Ok**
8	IIL	right
9	OOH	**wow . . .**
10	ORB	**jeez**
11	MEA	**Well** does everyone get it
12	OOH	cancel r^2 from both sides
13	IIL	16r = 80
14	IIL	?
15	OOH	Yes
16	IIL	R = 80/16
17	OOH	cool!
18	MEA	**yup**
19	IIL	=?
20	MEA	R = 5
21	IIL	**Ya**
22	IIL	I knew that
23	OOH	**hey!**

As shown, informality increases the use of solidarity-oriented linguistic forms including informal speech style. Informality at the same time decreases social distance and accordingly facilitates positive interpersonal relationships among speech participants. This attends to the interlocutors' positive-face desire to be liked and appreciated.

Positive Politeness Strategy: Seeking Agreement

Speech participants attend to the positive-face desire of others through expression of agreement and by avoiding overt disagreement through the use of partial agreement prior to disagreement. In the sampled data, explicit agreement frequently appears during group interaction. Some of the most frequently occurring linguistic elements for explicit agreement are the following: "I agree," "that's true," "indeed," "you said it," "I also . . . ," "ditto," "yes," "I did notice that too."

In the same way as in FtF group interaction, disagreement or rebuttal among online discourse participants is inevitable; this engenders a potential threat to the positive-face desire of other participants. In the sampled data, explicit disagreement rarely occurs; instead, online discourse participants utilize a nonconfrontational argument strategy through mitigated disagreement. The interaction in Transcript 6 is illustrative:

[Transcript 6]

1	HOK	**I know you got the right answer, but** your way is **kinda** wrong...
2		[12 turns deleted]
3	CAL	My way is fine
4	CAL	Its works
5	CAL	If the answer is right than what gives?
6	HOK	**well . . . ok . . .**
7	HOK	All goes well that ends well
8	HOK	**but I need explaination . . .**
9	CAL	**Ok**

This interaction occurs among group members HOK, CAL, and others in the middle of solving a math problem. In the first line, HOK points out that CAL's math solution is incorrect. For this argument, HOK employs a variety of linguistic devices such as acknowledgment, a discourse marker, and a pause. These devices of linguistic politeness all contribute to softening the force of disagreement. Absent these devices, as in an overt bald-on-record (i.e., direct speech act) "your way is wrong," there would be a significant threat to the *face* of CAL.

Instead of expressing overt disagreement, HOK employs partial agreement and acknowledgment (i.e., "I know you got the right answer"). By prefacing her or his utterance with the partial acknowledgment, HOK manages to express a hesitant stance concerning the upcoming disagreement with CAL's math solution. HOK also utilizes a hedge (i.e., discourse marker): "kinda." The use of the hedge *kinda* also contributes to downgrading the illocutionary force of the utterance (i.e., your way is *kinda wrong* . . .). In addition, HOK completes the statement with a pause indicated by an ellipsis marker. The pause indexes the speech participant's hesitant stance on the disagreement; accordingly, this also contributes to softening the force of the utterance.

In reaction to HOK's disagreement, in the following lines (Lines 3–5) CAL argues for and justifies her or his solution by using a rhetorical question (i.e., "If the answer is right than what gives?"). In the subsequent lines (Lines 6–8), HOK responds to CAL's argument by employing linguistic politeness tactics. In Line 6, by utilizing the discourse marker "well," HOK initiates a turn by drawing attention from CAL. The discourse marker "well" also indexes HOK's hesitant stance on the disagreement with CAL concerning justification of his or her math solution, along with a concomitant request for clarification of CAL's solution (i.e., "but I need explaination [sic]. . ."). This also is followed by the discourse marker "ok." The marker "ok" functions to index initial agreement

TABLE 3. Negative politeness strategies (adapted from Brown & Levinson, 1987).

(1) Being conventionally indirect and being hesitant (e.g., *Well*, *er*, I think it would be much better to be a bit warm in here. *Can you please close the door?*)
(2) Giving deference (e.g., *Dr. Park, sorry to bother you again, but would you mind if I ask you another question?*)
(3) Being apologetic
(4) Use of formal words and/or speech style

prior to the statement of rebuttal marked by the discourse marker "but" in Line 8.

This in consequence softens the overall illocutionary force of the disagreement. As well, by prefacing with the discourse marker "well" prior to the requestive speech act of asking an explanation, the interlocutor delivers a hesitant stance regarding her or his upcoming utterance (i.e., asking for an explanation). Doing so contributes to attenuation of the impact of the requestive illocutionary force. In this sense, the discourse marker "well" functions as a positive politeness marker, redressing the face-threatening act of disagreement and request.[3]

As can be seen in Line 9, CAL acknowledges HOK's request (i.e., "ok") and provides further explanation of the solution. The subsequent interaction in this chat session shows active collaboration in solving the math problem among group members. This indicates that the linguistic politeness tactics of seeking agreement and avoiding direct disagreement contribute to the maintaining of a positive interpersonal relationship with the other participant, in turn engendering a positive atmosphere for furthering involvement and collaboration among group members.

Negative Politeness Strategies

Negative politeness tactics serve to meet and attend to the negative-face desires to be unimpeded, autonomous, and free from imposition. There are many tactics employed to attend to the negative-face desire of other participants. Table 3 illustrates some of the most prominent examples of negative politeness strategies.

One of the most frequently used tactics in our daily lives concerns indirectness: Speech participants express their intention and thoughts indirectly by employing verbal and nonverbal devices such as hedges (discourse markers), circumlocution (lengthy explanation, preface prior to primary

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[3]The Korean discourse marker *ceki* and Japanese *ano* are roughly correspondent to the English *well*. In the same way as the English *well*, the Korean *ceki* and the Japanese *ano* also function as positive politeness markers. In the case of Korean, the discourse marker *ceki* "well" contributes to softening the effect of the illocutionary force of these speech acts in making excuse, apology, disagreement, and request (for details, see Park, 2001, 2004). The Japanese discourse marker *ano* similarly functions as a positive politeness marker, creating interpersonal rapport between speech participants (for details, see Cook, 1993).

message), and touching of the head in some cultures (e.g., Asian).

The following illustrations show some of these tactics:

[Transcript 7]

1	Moderator	How was this different from solving problems on your own?
2	OCR	this is **awsk**
3	OCR	Sorry
4	OCR	i meant
5	OCR	**k**
6	NIN	**btw. . .**did any of you get this weeks POW?
7	CMP	the parallelogram?
8	NIN	ya
9	CMP	Yes
10	Moderator	**I am sorry, could you please answer my question?**
11	OCR	**k**
12	CMP	**That's what I thought this would be like, but this was more challenging.**
13	CMP	**I like having the helpline handy in this chat**

In the excerpt, towards the end of the group discussion, the moderator seeks feedback on group discussion for solving a math problem versus singly solving the problem. In Lines 2 to 5, OCR responds to this by employing shorthand (i.e., "awsk") and the phonological contraction "k" (i.e., "okay"). As illustrated in the earlier section on positive politeness tactics, shorthand and phonological contraction together with in-group terms are prevalent in this peer-group online chat forum. These are all devices for conveying informality, which contributes to the building of solidarity among speech participants.

Interestingly, in Line 6, NIN changes the topic by utilizing the discourse marker "by the way" in shorthand form (i.e., "btw") instead of responding to the moderator's question. To this interruption, through employment of negative politeness tactics in Line 10, the moderator appeals to the participants to pay heed to the original solicitation of feedback. Specifically, the moderator's utterance in Line 10 is composed of several linguistic devices for attending to the negative-face desire of the participant: The moderator begins with an apology (i.e., "I am sorry"), followed by conventional indirectness (i.e., "could you. . .") and a discourse marker/hedge (i.e., "please"). All these negative politeness devices contribute to attending to the participant's negative-face desire to be autonomous and free from imposition. In this case, the participants' negative-face desires concern freedom from the imposition of responding to the moderator's question and the autonomy to seek their own inquiries and discussion topics.

An utterance lacking such politeness tactics, for instance, "answer my question," would come across as rude, resulting in a threat to the participant's *face*. Through the employment of such *negative politeness* tactics as in Line 10, the moderator mitigates and redresses the force of interruption of the participants' interaction by redirecting their attention to the original solicitation and successfully elicits the participants' responses, as in Lines 11 through 13.

The interaction below illustrates other tactics for achieving negative politeness:

[Transcript 8]

1	Moderator	What sort of functionality **would you wish to** have. For instance, **would it be good if you had** a shared whiteboard?
2		[3 turns deleted]
3	PCM	Yes, because I couldn't Paint" like the others wanted me to.
4	ARE	I can't draw
5		[two turns deleted]
6	PCM	I could have shown a drawing with a shared whiteboard.
7	PPN	cool
8	PCM	As is, can't
9	ARE	**maybe, moderator, you could set up a drawing station with built in shapes**

In the excerpt, towards the end of the online peer-group discussion, the moderator solicits feedback on the desired functionality of the VMT's online chat forum. In this solicitation, as in Line 1, the moderator's utterance is rather formal in the sense that instead of asking "What sort of functionality do you want to have," the moderator asks "What sort of functionality would you wish to have." In contrast to informal language use, formality increases the social distance between interlocutors and has the effect of respecting the participant's autonomy and independence. Another tactic used by the moderator concerns the subjunctive syntactic construction in his or her subsequent utterance: ". . . would it be good if you had a shared whiteboard?" Subjunctive syntactic construction allows an option for the other speech participant to refuse or disagree to the interlocutor's request or suggestion; accordingly, it empowers the participant to be freer from imposition. Interestingly, in this K–12 peer-group online chat forum, negative politeness strategies are mostly employed by the moderator, who is an adult. This indicates that the role of speech participants may affect the style of language use. In addition, there might be some difference in language use involving face-work between children and an adult. This needs to be confirmed with more data.

Even though online-chat participants (K–12 students) rarely utilize negative politeness strategies, they do employ these strategies when appropriate. As in Line 9, Participant ARE responds to the moderator's solicitation of feedback by employing the discourse marker (i.e., hedge) "maybe" followed by a subjunctive marker (i.e., "you could . . ."), which redresses the force of advice or suggestion to the moderator.[4] As stated earlier, speech participants employ verbal and nonverbal devices for face-work dependent upon the cognitive assessment of social variables such as social distance and

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[4]In analysis of transcripts derived from a chat reference, Westbrook (2007) noted that advice of librarians to users that mitigates any potential face-threat is more valuable than that which is given without such mitigation.

power difference between the interlocutors and the weight of imposition. In the previously mentioned case, social interaction between the moderator and participant (K–12 student) underlies power difference owing to discrepant roles in the chat forum and social distance owing to age difference.

The following excerpt takes another look at negative politeness tactics:

[Transcript 9]

1	CPM	CPM has entered the room.
2	ARE	never mind about the two ideas
3	PPN	k
4	Moderator	Hi CPM. **Could you guys help cpm to catch up?**
5	PPN	sure
6	ARE	k
7	CPM	I just read the prob and got a diagram.
8	PPN	**well,** we got the 2 triangles congruent

This excerpt takes place during the ongoing interaction; as indicated in the first line, Group Member CPM has newly joined this ongoing discussion forum. In Line 4, the moderator asks the other members to help the new member (CPM); the moderator does this through the employment of mixed politeness strategies: conventional indirectness (i.e., "Could you") that attends to negative-face desire, followed by informal term use (i.e., "guys"), which promotes proximity between interlocutors and attends to the participant's positive-face desire.

In Line 7, CPM attempts to participate and contribute to the group discussion by sharing a diagram that he created for the math problem. To this, in Line 8, PPN responds by opening with the discourse marker "well," followed by a comment on how far their discussion has advanced, implying that CPM's contribution is irrelevant to the current stage of the group discussion. In this statement, the function of the discourse marker "well" is significant in that "well" indexes hesitation of the interlocutor and functions to redress the force of the implication, accordingly contributing to preservation of the participant's negative-face desire.

Off-Record

An *off-record* strategy is the most indirect speech act in the sense that the interlocutor gives full option to the other speech participant to ignore the illocutionary force without threatening the interlocutor's *face*. In so doing, the participant has freedom from imposition without losing *face*. The following interaction is illustrative:

[Transcript 10]

1	Moderator	CPM, you can view our image at http://mathforum.org/pow/vmt/feb1204/powwow1.1.gif
2	ARE	It uses two variables
3	PPN	x and y
4	ARE	And just so you know PPN, if we can equate x and y

5	CPM	Ok. My diagram has B as a rather obtuse angle, to match the bisect condition, if that helps
6	ARE	We would only need one equ
7	ARE	we got that
8	ARE	**try posting ur picture on the URL**
9	CPM	**I'm too new at that.**
10	ARE	**K**

In this excerpt, occurring towards the beginning of the *powwow* session for solving the math problem, the peer-group participants discuss a diagram they have drawn for a math problem. As shown in Transcript 9, CPM joins this group discussion in the middle of the session. In Line 5, CPM shares his or her diagram with the rest of the members. To this, in Line 8, ARE asks CPM to post the diagram at the URL the moderator presented in the first line so other group members can see it.

To this request, CPM employs *off-record* politeness strategy in Line 9 by giving a hint of refusal to ARE's request. In other words, CPM indirectly indicates not having the ability to comply with ARE's request because CPM is a new member of the group discussion. Such *off-record* tactics save the participant's *face* in the sense that freedom is given to either respond to it, as ARE does in Line 10 by indicating understanding of the implied meaning of CPM's utterance, or to ignore it.

Conclusion

To understand the manifestation of online social interaction and to foster successful interaction and collaboration through the CMC channel, analysis of sociointerpersonal communication patterns among online discourse participants is critical. For this, the first part of this study examined the linguistic politeness theoretical framework in relation to its methodological applicability for analyzing communication patterns and the manner of social interaction among online-discussion participants (Park, 2008). In the second part of the study, the theoretical framework is applied to real-time online chat data to examine the social interactional features employed by online-discussion participants to maintain and enhance public self-image, or *face*, in presentation of their arguments.

The qualitative data analysis of this study makes evident that the use of politeness strategies is prevalent in social interaction through real-time, online chat forums. The social interaction during the online-discussion forum for solving math problems shows that the realization of linguistic politeness is dependent upon speech participants' cognitive assessment of contextual variables as well as interpersonal variables such as power, distance, and imposition. In K–12 peer-group collaboration for solving math problems, power and distance between participants are symmetrical and low ($-power$, $-distance = egalitarian\ power\ and\ close\ social\ relationship$). The degree of imposition is relatively low in the sense that the peer-group interaction occurs to share ideas and thoughts during the process of group collaboration

and information seeking. In this context, interactions vis-à-vis face-work strategies among peer-group participants tend towards high involvement (i.e., positive politeness).

Data analysis shows that interpersonal communication features are realized in online discussion in the form of politeness tactics. In other words, participants pursue positive-face desire by reducing social distance, resulting in creation of close and solidarity-oriented interpersonal relationships. Accordingly, positive politeness and bald-on-record (i.e., direct speech acts) strategies are frequently used. A variety of devices are employed in realizing positive politeness tactics. The most frequently occurring tactics include the seeking of common ground and agreement and the use of informal speech style, in-group language use, jokes, and small talk. These tactics engender a positive atmosphere for furthering interaction and collaboration among group members.

As well, peer-group interaction tends to be direct in that there is little or no power difference together with low social distance. The bald-on-record strategy (i.e., direct speech act) may convey close and uninhibited interpersonal relations among interlocutors. The frequent use of direct speech acts suggests that in addition to the aforementioned interpersonal variables, contextual variables such as real-time setting and discourse topic also play a part in employment of verbal and nonverbal devices for face-work. That is, the participants need to accommodate their speech style to the real-time conversational flow. This contributes to more frequent use of direct speech acts, which are brief and clear. Unlike with a controversial discourse topic, solving a math problem through a real-time communication channel also triggers the frequent use of direct speech acts.

Note that there is a shift of speech style from the direct speech act in the symmetrical peer-group discussion to other politeness strategies when there is an asymmetrical interaction such as with adult moderators. Even though online chat participants (K–12 students) rarely utilize negative politeness strategies, in this asymmetrical context, they tactfully utilize these strategies. For instance, the K–12 student utilizes either negative or positive politeness strategy from the direct speech act through the use of verbal and/or nonverbal devices. Such verbal (e.g., hesitation through discourse marker, deference through subjunctive marker) and/or nonverbal (e.g., the smiley face ☺) devices function to redress the illocutionary force of the direct speech act and accordingly contribute to attending to the moderator's positive- or negative-face desire. The shift of speech style indicates that the deployment of linguistic politeness strategies is based on speech participants' cognitive assessment of interpersonal variables such as social distance and power difference between them.

Use of off-record in conjunction with negative politeness strategies rarely occurs in the K–12 peer-group interaction. The commonality of off-record and negative politeness strategies lies in the fact that both tactics are grounded in indirectness and deference.[5] In contrast to the infrequent use of off-record tactics, as stated, there is the frequent use of bald-on-record (i.e., direct speech acts) tactics in conjunction with positive politeness strategies in this K–12 peer-group interaction. The commonality of bald-on-record and positive politeness strategies lies in the fact that both tactics are grounded in proximity. Accordingly, they bring forth close interpersonal relationships between participants. Employment of such politeness tactics indicates that effective interpersonal communication plays a vital role in the enhancement of group discussion.

As evinced in the qualitative data analysis for this study, linguistic politeness theory provides a framework for an analysis of social interaction undertaken through online-discussion forums. The politeness theoretical framework is particularly effective in analyzing the sociointerpersonal communication strategies that online discussion participants employ to maintain and enhance each other's *face*. Thus, analysis of social interaction based on the linguistic politeness theoretical framework seems well positioned to contribute to the development of a benchmark for the evaluation of group discussion in an online educational context. The decreased use of deferential linguistic forms and frequent use of verbal and nonverbal forms that denote a positive politeness strategy and bald-on-record (direct) speech acts in this K–12 real-time, online-discussion forum signify that linguistic politeness is indeed a social phenomenon and is therefore filtered through a given social context. It also signifies that sociointerpersonal variables among speech participants as well as contextual variables underlie the realization of linguistic politeness.

This study limited the applicability of the findings to other CMC genres in the sense that the linguistic politeness theoretical framework is applied only in a synchronous online-discussion forum dealing with mathematics. Utilization of the small number of transcripts for qualitative data analysis also limits the findings of the study. Thus, there is ground for future studies regarding the application of the theoretical framework to other CMC genres such as virtual reference and other subject domains (Barnes, 2003; Kummar, Novak, Raghavan, & Tomkins, 2004; Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht, & Swartz, 2004). Quantitative analysis utilizing a sizable number of transcripts in conjunction with qualitative discourse analysis will contribute to a fuller assessment of the distribution of certain politeness tactics across CMC genres and subject domains.

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[5]In dyadic interaction between librarian and user in a virtual reference setting, face-work strategies would in general be geared towards *independence* rather than *involvement*. In other words, the information seeker tends to attend to the librarian's negative-face desire by maintaining social distance and by respecting the librarian's personal territory and right to nondistraction and freedom from imposition. Thus, in this context, *negative politeness* strategies may frequently occur. The disparity in social interaction between librarians and users in the virtual reference setting noted by Radford (2006, p. 1050) illustrates this: According to the comparison of librarian and client relational facilitators, client utilize *deference* foremost in interaction with librarians. *Deference* can be seen as correspondent to the *negative politeness* tactic of politeness theory.

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