



**DLSU**  
**RESEARCH CONGRESS**  
BUILDING IMPACT ON FIRM FOUNDATIONS:  
From Basics to Applications

**20**  
**18**

Presented at the DLSU Research Congress 2018  
De La Salle University, Manila, Philippines  
June 20 to 22, 2018

## Interface of Agreement, Disagreement and Code-Switching in Computer Mediated Interaction

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**Abstract:** The computer-mediated communication (CMC) platforms have been of great interest to many linguistics researchers. The fast-changing linguistic environment of CMC challenges many researchers. This paper would like to fill in some void in interfacing CMC with agreement, disagreement and codeswitching. Exploring on code-switching occurrences and how it happens in agreement and disagreement, results revealed that the politeness framework of Brown and Levinson (1987) is supported. Commentators in the corpus generally use polite expressions in doing their agreement and disagreement, taking care of the 'face' wants of both the speaker and the hearer. This implies that communication among people, be it face-to-face or CMC, is more than just an exchange of thoughts, ideas or information, but of relational work too. In general perspective, interactants in the study are said to be able to use smooth code-switching, which could be dictated by social-psychological factors. Collectively, this study concludes that code-switching is an additional communicative repertoire such that CS is utilized by commentators to express their agreement and disagreement.

**Key Words:** pragmatics; CMC; agreement and disagreement, politeness strategies

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Politeness gains a great deal of interest in the past twenty-five years and much has been written on politeness principle and theories. The politeness theory postulated by Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson (1978; 1987) is considered the most important theory that almost all the linguists depend on in their writing on this subject. Brown and Levinson's (1987) work consists of two parts. The first part is their fundamental theory concerning the nature of 'politeness' and how it functions in interaction. The second part is a list of 'politeness' strategies. In the theoretical part of their work, Brown and Levinson introduce the notion of 'face' in order to illustrate 'politeness' in the broad sense. That is to say, all interactants have an interest in maintaining two types of 'face' during interaction: 'positive face' and 'negative face'.

Examining (im)politeness in interaction is a complex task, since perceptions of (im)politeness vary from one individual to another and there are multiple gradations of more- or less-(im)polite behavior. Watts notes that the bases of (im)politeness judgements need to be unpacked and asserts that a politeness model "must allow us to account for why individuals agree or

disagree on what is and is not '(im)polite' language" (Watts, 2003).

Previous research has shown that disagreement and verbal hostility are frequent in online environments (Angouri and Tseliga, 2010; Kleinke, 2008; Moor et al., 2010; Upadhyay, 2010). Expressions of conflict seem to be especially prevalent in online polylogues, such as online forums and news groups (Kleinke, 2008; Weber, 2011), comments in personal blogs or You Tube (Bolander, 2012; Moor et al., 2010) or responses to articles in online media (Neurauter, 2011). These online polylogue contexts enable people to vent their negative feelings to large audiences "to which they normally have no access outside the virtual world" (Kleinke, 2008, p. 419). The expression of conflict in these online polylogues ranges from disagreement (Bolander, 2012; Graham, 2007) to sarcasm and stronger negative language, such as personal attacks (Neurauter, 2011; Weber, 2011). This suggests that the expression of politeness or conflict is not only genre-specific, as previous research has shown (Hyland, 2000; Salager-Meyer, 2001; Salager-Meyer and Alcáraz, 2011), but is also influenced by medium factors.

One of the most popular and highly syndicated media portals in the country today is Rappler. This media portal has been a venue to discuss national, local, and even trivial issues participated in by all people from

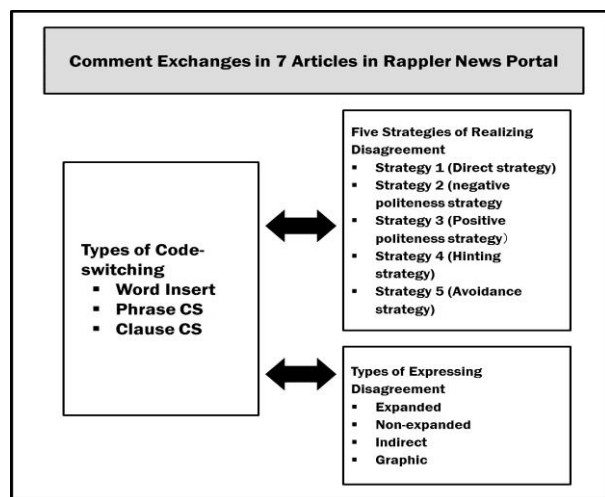
all walks of life. The experience that Rappler provides lends spontaneity as the participants adopt a free style of exchanging of ideas. In general, it could be said that CMC helps to promote social interaction among people far and wide. These possibilities on use of CMC allow people to express themselves freely in the language they want to (Lawley, 1992). In this sense, exchange of opinions through Rappler seems to be the perfect venue to identify cases of agreement, disagreement, and code-switching.

In terms of code-switching, the current study finds similarity in earlier studies done in code-switching as it happens in CMC, although through e-mail. The closest study done locally on codeswitching using the internet as a venue for communication and interaction was the one done by Bautista (1997), where e-mail from seven siblings was used as corpus for the work. Among observations gathered were the use of smooth CS, tag expressions and nonce borrowings, which were well grafted into syntactic boundaries of the two languages. Conclusion of the study pointed to Filipinos as having communicative competence to use both languages.

Even though code-switching (CS) online attracted the attention of linguists as early as the mid-1990s (Georgakopoulou 1997; Paolillo 1996), it remains less well researched. The topic is equally under-researched in contact linguistics and multilingualism studies (Dorlein and Nortier 2009). Given the importance of multilingualism and the pervasiveness of digital media worldwide, it seems safe to assume that digitally-mediated communication (via both networked computers and mobile networked devices) offers opportunities for written CS at an unprecedented scale.

The computer-mediated communication (CMC) platforms have been of great interest to many linguistics researchers. The fast-changing linguistic environment of CMC challenges many researchers. For one, this research would like to fill in some void in interfacing CMC with agreement, disagreement and codeswitching, utilizing the Theory of Politeness.

### 1.1. Conceptual Framework



The study's focal premise is the occurrence of code switching through CMC via comment threads of the Rappler Online Media Portal. The variables' interplay affects but not necessarily exclusive to one, code switching. The framework then shows that within the CMC via Rappler Portal, there are groups of people, males and females who interact with one another. The commentators post their messages asynchronously as signified by the arrow that points to the boxes containing them to the types of code-switching that occur in the articles, as found in the left box. The left box then describes the type of code-switching used which are: word insert, phrase CS, and clause CS.

The interplay between types of code-switching and disagreement and agreement are illustrated in the left box interacting with the right-most box. It is assumed that agreement and disagreement strategies are practiced by the commentators. The right-most box describes the (dis)agreement strategies used. Since the assumption in the study is that codeswitching is a way by which (dis)agreement is expressed, the arrow that points to the last box serves to connect the kinds of code-switching with the types of politeness.

### 1.1. Statement of the Problem

- How do the participants show agreement and disagreement?
- What are the types of code-switching utilized in expressing agreement and disagreement among the participants?
- What is the link between (dis)agreement and code-switching?

## 2. MATERIAL AND METHODOLOGY

### 2.1. Source of Data

The data are from English news articles in Rappler. As this site is part of the public domain, the researcher considers it ethically acceptable to use the data for analysis.

### 2.2. Data and Data Analysis

For analysis, the researcher randomly chose seven (7) topics that promised to be highly discussed by commentators. All articles were published in 2014. From the comments thread for each article, the first 20 posts were included in the data set. The researcher analyzed the 140 comments on the seven newspaper articles in terms of the overall argumentative thrust of the posts. The argumentative contributions of the posts were classified into three general categories: agreement, disagreement and extension. The first two categories were established by taking into account the general gist of the post in that the posts were analyzed by three

inter-raters (including the researcher) whether the contributor voiced agreement or disagreement with the newspaper article or a previously posted contribution. Expressing agreement with one aspect or one previously posted comment might imply disagreement with another position previously raised. This means that potentially many posts could be categorized as both agreement and disagreement at the same time. The inter-raters' methodological decision was to allow this double labeling. For example, when a disagreement on one aspect only implicitly contained an agreement with a previously voiced opinion, the post was only categorized as disagreement. The third category 'extension' refers to those posts that, while being related to the topic as such, do not support or contradict a position previously voiced in the article or the comments. Both authors rated independently and achieved a reliability rating of 80%. The cases of different categorization were resolved after discussion.

Table 1. The first 20 comments for 6 articles (N = 120)

Title of Article	Number of Posts	Number of Contributors	Number of words	Average per post
1. Ang makatotohanang State of the Nation ng mga Pilipino	20	15	1163	58
2. Aquino asks supporters to wear yellow ribbon	20	19	318	16
3. Caught on video: Man points gun at taxi driver	20	14	2234	112
4. Cebu priest apologizes, seeks forgiveness of unwed mom	20	19	959	48
5. INC and the mentality of exclusivity	20	20	740	37
6. MRT-3 train derailed, injuries reported	20	16	772	39
7. Plunder complaints vs Estrada, JPE, Revilla	20	18	608	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>6186</b>	<b>49</b>

Table 2. The general argumentative contribution of the 120 turns (double counting allowed)

Function	Total	State of the Nation ng mga Pilipino %	Aquino asks supporters	Man points gun at taxi driver	Cebu priest apologizes	INC and the mentality	MRT-3 train derailed	Plunder complaints vs Estrada, JPE, Revilla
<b>Disagreement</b>	99	58.93	12	18	16	18	13	1
<b>Extension</b>	15	8.93	1	2	3	1	0	3

Agreement	54	32.14	10	11	3	6	12	2	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>

In categorizing the various types of strategies, the following five strategies of realizing disagreement were used (Brown and Levinson, 1987):

Table 3. Strategies for Realizing Disagreements

Types of strategies	Definition	Code
<b>Strategy 1: Direct Strategy</b>	Expressing disagreement directly, boldly without redressive Action, having the most serious face threat, like counterattack, Sarcasm, direct disagreement, contradiction and so on.	DRS
<b>Strategy 2: negative politeness strategy</b>	Oriented to the hearer's negative face, like accounting Mitgating, and rhetorical questions	NPS
<b>Strategy 3: positive politeness strategy</b>	Oriented to the hearer's positive face, like partial agreement, pseudo-agreement, and conditioned agreement	PPS
<b>Strategy 4: hinting strategy</b>	Implicitly expressing disagreement, like hints, and positive comment	HTS
<b>Strategy 5: avoidance strategy</b>	Make non commitment on the others opinions	AVS

For labeling types of agreement, the following researcher-developed framework was used.

Table 4. Labels for Types of Agreements

Type of Strategy and Definition	Code
<b>Expanded agreement: agreement with explanation or with emphatic expressions: "I totally agree with you"; "I strongly agree with you"; "I absolutely agree with you".</b>	EXA
<b>Non-expanded agreement: agreement without explanation or emphatic expressions: "I think you are right"; "I agree with you"; "Yes, you are right".</b>	NEA
<b>Indirect Agreement: Posting something that is positively related to the topic and/or substantiates another post, like posting a quote, a bible verse, to express opinion about the discussion thread</b>	IDA
<b>Graphic Representation of Agreement: agreement using symbols, graphics, emoticons such as ☺, ;), ☹, etc.</b>	GRA

In terms of identifying code-switching occurrences in the data set, the study made use of Bautista's (1997) framework of labeling code-switches, as follows:

Table 5. Labelling Codes for Code-Switching Occurrences

Types of Code-switching	Description	Code
<b>word insert CS</b>	Word inserts include Nonce borrowings like culture bound terms. Other word inserts expressive of solidarity are 'in-group terms' like 'tayo,' 'natin,' 'namin' like in utterances "Grand Reunion natin." The most formal expression of politeness is through the word insert 'ho' and 'po.'	WCS
<b>Phrase CS</b>	A sample of a phrase CS are tag expressions like in the utterance "Do you remember, we were classmates tama ba? (... right?)."	PCS
<b>clause CS</b>	Clauses in the study are smooth switching similar to what was described by Bautista (1997) where switches happen between clauses (p.15) : 'Wow,	CCS



thanks for the birthday greetings, / nakakatawa kayo talaga' (...you are all really funny).

Since no parsing of sentences or phrases was done in this study, the code-switching utterances were counted and identified per turn. The researcher called this unit analysis as "thread unit" (i.e. one thread unit is equivalent to one post of a person in a strand of comment thread). Say for example, one thread unit (or 1 posted comment), could be labeled the appropriate code-switching per sentence occurrence within the thread unit, so that in one thread unit, two or more code-switching labeling may be coded. If there is no occurrence of code-switching in one thread unit, the thread unit is labeled AF, which means "All Filipino", or AE, which means "All English".

### 2.3. Limitations of the Study

For clarification, the current paper is not a grammatical study where location of code-switches was considered more important than the sociolinguistic meaning of language. It does not also look at code-switching on psychological mechanisms. This study does not identify the patterns and constraints of code-switching and are analyzed only in relation to expressing agreement and disagreement among the participants. This study placed more emphasis not on where the switches happened but that polite or impolite CS may be significant to create meanings and effects in computer-mediated communication. At most, code-switching was only categorized as clause, phrase and word inserts. The current work limits its findings based on the samples gathered.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This part is organized in relation to the three research questions cited earlier. In view of the fact that this study endeavored to determine the interface between (dis)agreement and code-switching, the congruence of current thoughts with computer-mediated communication and expression of agreement and disagreement are investigated.

**PROBLEM 1:** How do the participants show agreement and disagreement?

Table 6. Summary of All FTA Strategies in Disagreement

FTA	State of the Nation ng mga Filipino	Aquino asks supporters	Man points gun at taxi driver	Cebu priest apologizes	INC and the mentality	MRT-3 train derailed	Plunder complaints vs	Total	%
DRS	5	7	6	10	3	7	3	41	39.05

NPS	2	3	4	0	0	4	1	14	13.33
PPS	3	5	1	1	0	2	0	12	11.43
HTS	3	2	3	5	6	3	1	23	21.90
AVS	5	1	2	2	4	1	0	15	14.29
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Table 6 shows that Direct Strategy which expresses the most serious face threat in disagreement is the most used strategy among the commentators in the data set (39%). Majority of the turns that shows disagreements in the data set are expressing disagreement directly, boldly without redressive action like counterattack, sarcasm, direct disagreement, contradiction, name calling, among others. The second most used in realizing disagreement in the data set is the Hinting Strategy. Many of the commentators chose to implicitly express disagreement, through giving hints and positive comments. Negative Politeness Strategy is the second least used in realizing disagreement in the data set. Some commentators in the data set are oriented to the hearer's negative face, by using mitigating devices. The least used strategy in realizing disagreements is the Positive Politeness Strategy in which the commentators are oriented to the hearer's positive face, by expressing partial agreement, pseudo-agreement, and conditioned agreement.

Table 7. Summary of FTA Strategies in Disagreement With Code-switches

Disagreement Strategy	State of the Nation ng	Aquino asks supporters	Man points gun at taxi	Cebu priest apologizes	INC and the mentality	MRT-3 train derailed	Plunder complaints	Total	%
DRS	3	1	4	3	0	3	1	15	45.45
HTS	1	1	0	2	0	1	0	5	15.15
NPS	0	0	3	0	0	1	1	5	15.15
PPS	2	0	1	0	0	1	0	4	12.12
AVS	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	4	12.12
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>100.00</b>

At least half (15 out of 32 or 45%) of all occurrences uses code-switching to express Direct Strategy, followed by both Negative Politeness Strategy (NPS) and Positive Politeness Strategy (PPS), and lastly Hinting Strategy and Avoidance Strategy. This shows that generally, commentators in the set of data practices more frequency of code-switching when they are expressing their direct disagreement in the discussion thread in computer-mediated communication platform.

Other than disagreement, types of agreement strategies were also identified in the study (Table 8).

Table 8. Summary of All Strategies in Agreement



TYPE OF AGREEMENT	State of the Nation ng	Aquino asks supporters	Man points gun at taxi	Cebu priest apologizes	INC and the mentality	MRT-3 train derailed	Plunder complaints	Total	%
EXA	10	10	3	4	7	2	2	38	70.37
NEA	0	2	0	1	4	0	7	14	25.93
IDA	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1.85
GRA	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1.85
Total	10	12	3	6	11	2	10	54	100.00

Almost three-fourth (70.37%) of the agreement expressed in the data set are Expanded Agreement which means that generally, the commentators would like to elaborate whenever they agree on a particular comment or the article itself. Some commentators opted to just express that they agree without further elaboration (Non-expanded agreement, 26%) and rarely uses Indirect Agreement and even a Graphic Representation of agreement.

Table 9. Summary of Strategies in Agreement With Code-switches

TYPE OF AGREEMENT	State of the Nation ng	Aquino asks supporters	Man points gun at taxi driver	Cebu priest apologizes	INC and the mentality	MRT-3 train derailed	Plunder complaints vs	Total	%
EXA	5	0	1	2	1	1	0	10	90.91
NEA	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	9.09
IDA	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
GRA	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Total	5	0	1	2	1	1	1	11	90.91

Ninety-one percent of all occurrences of code-switching happen in Expanded Agreement. Obviously, when a commentator elaborates on his or her opinion, the lengthier the post and the higher the chances of code-switching occurrences.

**PROBLEM 2:** What are the types of code-switching utilized in expressing agreement and disagreement among the participants?

Table 10 shows the types of code-switching by type in relation to expressing disagreement.

Table 10. Summary of Code-switching Types In Disagreement

TYPE OF CODE SWITCHING	State of the Nation ng	Aquino asks supporters	Man points gun at taxi	Cebu priest apologizes	INC and the mentality	MRT-3 train derailed	Plunder complaints	Total	%
Word Insertion	Article 1: 5	Article 2: 1	Article 3: 15	Article 4: 4	Article 5: 0	Article 6: 4	Article 7: 1	30	55.56
Clause CS	5	1	2	1	0	2	2	13	24.07

Phrase CS	4	0	7	0	0	0	0	11	20.37
Total	13	2	24	5	0	6	3	54	100.00

In expressing disagreement, more than half of code-switching occurrences were word-insertions (WCS). There are occurrences of WCS in all articles except the article 5 (“INC and the mentality of exclusivity”), where in a very special case, all 20 thread units did not produce occurrences of code-switching. This particular article tackles on the issue of religion.

Moreover, WCS is followed by Clause Code Switching (CCS) with 24.07%, also occurring in all articles except article 5. Phrase Code Switching (PCS) also occurred but only in two articles (1 and 3).

Table 11. Summary of Code-switching Types in Agreement

TYPE OF CODE SWITCHING	State of the Nation ng	Aquino asks supporters	Man points gun at taxi	Cebu priest apologizes	INC and the mentality	MRT-3 train derailed	Plunder complaints	Total
WCS	2	0	1	2	1	1	1	8
PCS	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	2
CCS	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Total	5	0	2	2	1	1	1	12

In agreement, WCS is also the most frequent type of code-switching that the commentators use. Rarely that PCS and CCS were utilized. Taken in general, there is only a small number of data for agreement in this study because the selected articles elicit more on disagreement than agreement.

Over-all, the code-switching type that is most frequently present in expressing agreement is consistent with the same code-switching type used by commentators in expressing disagreement. This would mean that online interactants in a Filipino news media platform would limit their code-switching style on a minimal level, such as the word.

**PROBLEM 3:** What is the link between (dis)agreement and code-switching?

Half (50%) of all the code-switching occurrences were produced using Direct Strategy. This projects an assumption that the commentators in the CMC platform employs more code-switching in connection to their composition of their expression of disagreement with another in the discussion thread. This would be attributed to some social-psychological factors that are at play in code-switching. It could be that the insertions of English words, phrases, or clauses, would create a more powerful effect on their delivery of direct disagreement to another, such as using English to impose power onto another. In terms of agreement versus code switching, a large chunk of occurrences of code-switching are expressed in Expanded Agreement, which is already expected since commentators ‘enlarge’



their agreement by explaining their point, which would practically create more spaces for code-switching occurrences, in comparison to Non-Expanded Agreement, which only uses short expressions such as “I agree,” “That’s right,” “Very well said.” and “Tama ka.” and no explanations are given.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study support the politeness framework of Brown and Levinson (1987). Commentators in the data set generally use polite expressions in doing their agreement and disagreement, taking care of the ‘face’ wants of both the speaker and the hearer. This implies that communication among people, be it face to face or CMC, is more than just an exchange of thoughts, ideas or information, but of relational work too. In general perspective, interactants in the study is said to be able to use smooth code-switching. Also, these cases of code-switching could be dictated by social-psychological factors, that is, users code-switch to wield power and authority, or to express solidarity. Within the perspective of computer mediated communication (CMC), Rappler’s comment function is a fruitful avenue for social exchange of ideas. Collectively, this study concludes that code-switching is an additional communicative repertoire, such that CS is utilized by commentators to express their agreement and disagreement. Expressing oneself is complemented by being able to use all linguistic resources, including being able to code switch. Further, this simple research could contribute on understanding the dynamics of how Filipino bilinguals handle agreement and disagreement in an online media.

The researcher recommends that this study could be conducted using a larger set of data to gather more occurrences of code switching and instances of agreement and disagreement. Moreover, it is recommended that the grammatical and social reasons for code-switching using a bigger population, as well as demographic factors, be also considered in analysis.

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