



Of makeup hauls and holy grails: Examining the conceptions of beauty in an online discussion thread

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Abstract: This paper explores on the discourse of makeup in the Philippines and its implications on the ideals or standards of beauty in the country. It examines the language of an online community of makeup enthusiasts and how they negotiate and construct the meaning of beauty. These constructions of ideals are products of the combination of the members' diverse backgrounds and the real-time and interactive nature of the internet, along with its wide reach and mobility. Such factors create a specialized language that enable the community to interact with each other more effectively, creating a community of practice (CoP) founded on common interest. Thus, along with the uncovering of the definition of beauty, it also attempts to unravel new forms of language that are characteristic of the CoP. The corpus of the study is composed of online interactions among members of the CoP, along with individual

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online interviews. Through these, the paper discusses the CoP's definitions of beauty that are also anchored on their preferences in beauty products and ideal facial features.

Keywords: sociolinguistics, community of practice, digital communication, digital culture

Introduction

The concept of what is beautiful has always been subjective and relative from culture to culture. Aside from cultural considerations, mass media also influences one's idea of beauty as it idealizes beauty as a source of desire, credibility, and even inspiration (Solomon et al., 1992). The desire to be beautiful, based on Dove's study about "Real Beauty" in 2004, stems from the perception that physical attractiveness is becoming increasingly socially mandated and rewarded. This means that most of the respondents believed that those considered to be physically attractive hold certain advantages over those who are not (Etcoff et al., 2004). These advantages may be in the form of better opportunities or better treatment from others.

The image of the "ideal" beauty is being reinforced not just in conventional media such as magazines and television, but also in non-conventional media—social media. Social media, with its interactive nature, serves as venues for peer-influenced co-construction of the standards of beauty (Meier & Gray, 2014). The Philippines is referred to as the social media capital of the world (Soriano et al., 2016) with the amount of time its 53.9 million users (as of 2018) spend online (Müller, 2019). The reinforcement of ideal beauty constructs online is manifested in the popularity of beauty and make up vlogs on YouTube, make up and outfit posts on Instagram, discussions in Facebook groups, and Reddit. Certain personalities, not necessarily actors or actresses, gain popularity and influence with their large followings on their social media accounts. A number of these contents are dedicated to share information on how to achieve certain looks or how to make a certain facial feature look bigger or smaller. It is also notable how these "how to" contents often feature looks from celebrities, both local and international, that were seen during particular events or outings, movies, television shows, or posts that have gone viral. Not only do these posts construct images of beauty, but also serve as means to promote certain products since these posts, whether paid or not, feature and specify or enumerate beauty products specifically, makeup and skin care products used to achieve the said looks.

Through the promotion of certain looks and products online, it seems that the most affordable and accessible way to achieve what is perceived to be beautiful is through the manipulation or alteration of facial features through makeup. The fascination with makeup could be traced as early as 25,000 B.C. (Long, 2010). The popularity of cosmetic products has propelled the makeup industry to an estimated worth of \$445 billion in sales worldwide (Sorvino, 2017). Makeups go hand-in-hand with skin care. In the Philippines, one of the most obvious indicators of the fondness in skin whitening is the variety of papaya, kojic acid, glutathione, and *malunggay* (moringa) soaps readily available in supermarkets and pharmacies.

While different cultures have different standards of beauty, beauty products from multinational brands blur national boundaries or differences in these standards through the global marketing of their cosmetics (Yan & Bissell, 2014). And as people from different cultures and of different races use the exact same beauty products, regardless of the differences in their skin color and physical features, their culture's standards of beauty tend to be forgotten as it merges with others forming a universalized set of criteria (Yan & Bissell, 2014). With the blurring of cultural differences when it comes to the perceptions of beauty comes the question, whose standards are being followed? Whose physical features are considered 'ideal'? How are these 'ideals' proliferated online? Even more so, what is the role of language in the formation and reinforcement of these standards? In this paper, I investigated the exclusive language used in the community of practice. It is my aim to discuss and illustrate the community of practice's ideals or standards of beauty, based on this specialized language that emerge from their interactions.

Theoretical framework

This paper contextualizes the gathered data in accordance with Blommaert's sociolinguistics of globalization (2010), as well as his theory of light and social groups (2017). Language, through the lens of globalization, is seen as a mobile resource that can have different values, functions, and ownership (Blommaert, 2010). This further illustrates how language is used in group interactions in negotiating power and creating meaning through the use of different levels and domains of their linguistics and other resources. Blommaert (2010) emphasizes three concepts in the discussion of globalization: scale, orders of indexicality, and polycentricity.

In congruence with globalization, the theory of "light groups" (Blommaert, 2017, p. 11) is used in understanding the mobility of language used in the interaction of the CoP and the negotiation of power within and among its members. Light groups are communities that that are formed based on certain commonalities such as hobbies,

interests, celebrity following, brand preference and other affinities that are non-formal or non-institutionalized; on the other hand, thick groups are communities that are formed based on traditional societal demarcators like race, language, religion, class, etc. (Blommaert, 2017). It is important to note that memberships in light groups are by choice, unlike in thick groups where memberships are almost automatic and permanent. So, members in light groups tend to be active in interactions because of their bond over common interests. Moreover, members feel like these interactions that take place in these communities have become part of their routines and seem to be indispensable for them. Thus, their activity in these sites have become a habit and are viewed as necessary. Moreover, members in these communities can be seen as modern day “hipsters” who share similar “lifestyle imageries,” “consumption ethos,” and most applicable to this context, “outfit and commodity orientation” (p. 9).

Both theories explain the negotiation of power in the interactions of a particular group. The interaction in the group will be viewed using three lenses scale, order of indexicality, and polycentricity. Looking at scales entail looking at them as tiers that have their own “forms of normativity” where there are definite sets of language that are within that tier. Thus, people who are at different tiers would have different sets of language that may be seen in the “pattern of language use” (Blommaert, 2010, p. 36). Thus, the responses of the participants are looked into as and analyzed on how the tier they are in influence their contribution to the discourse of beauty. These differences would be looked at in explaining how power is negotiated among the members. With orders of indexicality, the registers and the value system that are attached to these registers are examined. Power struggles when it comes to registers often arise with differences in access to these registers. Similar to scales, what could be seen here is how a person defines a particular word say like “expensive”. For someone who may have more income, the word “expensive” would entail a higher amount than someone who earns less. Meanwhile, polycentricity looks into what are considered as authorities in a particular discourse (Blommaert, 2010). Each topic of discussion entails different authorities (who may be individuals, groups, or ideals) and that the role of an individual may change along these (Blommaert, 2010). Lastly, the polycentric nature of the interactions in the CoP are examined by looking at instances where authority or power is asserted or conceded in the discourse of beauty.

Alongside these three lenses, the CoP is viewed as a light group that identify with each other over common interests. The specificity of their affinity allows for the fluidity of language and meanings of language particular to their group. Thus, the study will examine the formation of jargons and specialized terms of the CoP along with their renegotiated meanings and value attachments.

Methods

Research design and procedure

This paper uses a discourse analysis as the method guided by Blommaert's Sociolinguistics of Globalization and Theory of Light Groups. It involves the gathering and interpretation of a corpus. The corpus of the study was gathered from a subReddit that talks about makeup and beauty products. The subReddit is moderated by individuals based in the Philippines. By the time this paper was written, there are 1,149 members who are mostly female. This particular CoP was chosen in order to understand how makeup enthusiasts in the Philippines define beauty through their discussion of cosmetics and makeup trends. The new forms of language in the interactions were observed and were noted, as well the salient themes that go along with this specialized language. Screenshots of actual posts were also taken for documentation purposes.

Online interviews through private messages were also conducted to ten of the users or readers of the forum. Some of the unconventional language observed emerged from these interviews. Full disclosure was given to the participants that the information that they were about to give will be used for this paper. All of them gave their consent and agreed to answer the questions given to them. Pseudonyms were given instead of their actual usernames. Screenshots of the interview or conversation were also taken for documentation purposes.

Subjects and participants of the study

An online community of makeup enthusiasts were the subjects of this study. The term enthusiast is also interchangeable with the word 'junkie' as some members refer to themselves as such. Makeup junkies or makeup enthusiasts are individuals who show great interest and invest much time and resources in acquiring makeup products. In this sense, makeup junkies are individuals who go beyond whatever is considered basic or essential, and not necessarily individuals whose everyday lives are affected by their compulsion to buy or know about makeup. Instead, they are the ones who follow and subscribe to news about the latest types, trends, and techniques in makeup. This online group will be referred to as Community of Practice (CoP).

Canagarajah (2013) discusses the models of Community of Practice (CoP) from Lave and Wenger (1991), and Wenger (1993), and its appropriateness in translingual practice. CoPs, Canagarajah (2013) explains, are communities that are not formed by shared race, ethnicity, language, and religion. Rather, these communities are formed because of their common goals that are attained through the practices they engage in. Eckert (2000) and Wenger (2000) also defined CoP as a continuous negotiation

among people who collectively define and redefine a set of competencies that constitute the community. As such, these communities group themselves not by any other set formal institutions such as the state or the church.

Therefore, CoPs constantly negotiate meanings and power among themselves. However, in becoming a member of any CoP, one must possess a particular set of competencies which other members of the community also possess. One's ability to learn these competencies creates their mark and place in the community. But, at the same time, the meanings of competence or competencies are constantly evolving and negotiated. Thus, within these communities also lie a play of power among its members. This power determines the set of competencies that are valuable or applicable in the community of practice.

For the purposes of this paper, the term CoP will refer to a group of makeup junkies online who find community in a sub-page hosted by a forum's website. This forum provides a venue for people, mostly women, to discuss the latest trends and techniques in applying makeup, share their 'go-to' skin care products and makeup, solicit advice and critique when it comes to their FOTD posts or 'face of the day' posts. It is moderated by six individuals and each day is dedicated to a particular topic: Monday Hauls and Reviews, Rants and Raves; Tuesdays 1st and 3rd Tuesdays of the month, no buy/low buy support group, and 2nd and 4th Tuesdays of the month hair, nails, bath, and body; Wednesdays random beauty chat; Thursdays makeup questions and discussions; Friday off-topic chat; Saturdays skincare questions and discussion; and Sundays are reserved for random topics assigned by its moderators. Topics or questions are posted on a daily basis but are kept as threads weekly. Members are expected to post their reactions in the comments sections. Other members may upvote or downvote these comments depending on whether they think that the comments are helpful to the discussion at hand or not.

The moderators have listed rules for the members to follow. As a general rule, those who interact in the forum are expected to be polite and respectful at all times. Members are expected to be cordial. Thus, this CoP serves as a support system for makeup enthusiasts or junkies. It is meant to trade information and inside knowledge on everything about makeup. Members are also refrained from creating their stand-alone posts. The moderators have listed reasons or conditions that warrant such posts. Those who deviate from the rules are removed from the group.

Users who chose to subscribe to the forum and interact with other members of the CoP are asked to modify their flairs or give details about themselves. These flairs serve as tags not just to the members, but also to posts that might be helpful for the given characteristics. The moderators explicitly asked that those who interact in the forum should at least state their skin tone and skin type so that other users could give

them advice that is best suited for their complexion and skin type. For example, a user can identify his or herself as “Username A (username) 26 (age) | NC25 (skin tone) | medium oily, sensitive, acne-prone (skin type)” or “UsernameB (username) 20 (age) | normal to combi (skin type) | still haven't found my perfect shade (skin tone).” Based on those who have edited their flairs, the members of the CoP are between 19 and 32 years old.

The language of the CoP

There are 181 living languages used in the Philippines (Bravante & Holden, 2020). Typically, a Filipino who was raised outside the Tagalog speaking regions or who was raised by parents who are from outside these regions would speak at least three languages: their regional language, the national language (i.e., Filipino), and English. In everyday, face-to-face interactions, peers are expected to speak their common language, whether it be English, Filipino, or one of the regional languages in the country. Should they have the same regional language, it is likely that they would be using this language. However, in the case of the CoP, since the members come from different locations and could be speaking different first languages, there is a need to find a common medium of interaction.

English is the primary language used of the CoP. According to one of its moderators, Moderator A, most of the users tend to use English in interacting because they acknowledge that the forum is a small fragment of a bigger online and international community and that while all of the subscribers are presumed to be Filipinos, they recognize that there may non-Filipinos who might be reading the threads. Moreover, given the predictive and auto-correct features of gadgets, it is sometimes easier to communicate in English, the default language of most computers in the Philippines. Meanwhile, another user, User A, says that she is not really conscious of the language she uses while interacting in the forum. According to her, she uses the English language in all her social media accounts; thus, she feels that the forum is a similar domain, so it was rather automatic for her to use English.

While majority of the interactions are in English, there are instances when users would use Filipino in their posts, especially when trying to lessen the distance among interactants or to create a feeling of intimacy among the users. Moderator A says that she personally uses Taglish (hybrid of Tagalog and English) in her posts to make the interaction less formal and that other users would feel as if they were just talking to a friend, sharing their kikay (vanity) secrets. For User A, however, there are just things that are better expressed in Filipino. She cites the use of ‘graaaaaabe!!!’ (‘extreme’) when a mere ‘OMG!!!’ (‘oh my god’) would not suffice, no matter how much exclamation points are used. Such deviations from conventional spelling, orthography,

and punctuation are necessary to convey emotions and express emphasis that are otherwise absent in plain texts.

Members of the CoP use limited kinds of emojis such as the smiley faces and heart emojis. While the thread is highly interactive, animated images are not available in the platform. Members share photos of products they use, sell, or the effects or outcomes of using such products.

Results and discussion: The 'ideal' beauty

The corpus for this study was collected in order to examine new forms and how do these new forms reveal the CoP's ideals or standards of beauty. The new expressions and word appropriations were analyzed in order to give context to the ideologies these members have when it comes to beauty and the use of beauty products. Language that suggests definitions or characteristics of a "beautiful face" were noted and interpreted. At the same time, consumer behavior and preferences were also noted to gain better understanding on how the CoP perceives local and imported products and how this relates to how they think beauty is achieved.

The use of makeup and proper application techniques are deemed necessary in achieving the features that is seen as ideal. When asked what the ideal beauty is, User B defined a beautiful face as having a clear, English rose complexion, an oval face structure, full, bushy eyebrows, huge puppy dog eyes, a straight nose and plush, pouty lips. In describing herself, she gave the following descriptions and how she uses makeup in order to achieve what she thinks is by definition beautiful:

I have the typical Asian eye, made worse because one is a monolid and the other is a double lid, so I use makeup to make my eyes look bigger and more even and to look like I have *aegyo sal* (eye bags, which in Korea, are desirable since they make a person look more youthful). I also have a squarish jaw, so I use contouring techniques to slim down my jawbone. I also use highlighter to make my cheekbones look higher and shimmer bronzer on my cheekbones to make me look tanned when I have no time to hit the beach. I use brow primer, pencil, pomade, and colored fiber gel to make my spare brow look fuller and straighter. I also struggle with texture on my face, freckles, and enlarged pores, so I use blurring primer and illuminating foundation to simulate smoother and *glowy-er* skin. (User B, personal communication, 2018)

From her description, it could be deduced that User B sees makeup as

“corrective.” Describing herself as having “the typical Asian eye” which was made “worse” by their asymmetry entails her preference of having bigger eyes, which she tries to create using makeup. By using the word “worse” she implicitly says that having “the typical Asian eye” is not at all attractive. The desire to have bigger eyes is not unique to the Philippines but in other parts of Asia as well. In Japan and South Korea, the preference of having bigger eyes and double eyelids led to the popularity of eyelid tapes that could be bought in convenience stores (Bates, 2013). User B has a clear image of what a beautiful face looks like and that through her self-description, she has already made comparisons between these standards and her own facial features.

High regard given to people with the “ideal” features that were described by User B above could be traced back to the Spanish colonial era in the Philippines. Because the country was colonized for centuries by the Spanish, hierarchical values where members of the upper classes in the country (i.e., the colonizers) were viewed as the epitome of what is beautiful were developed; and in turn associating these physical features with beauty because of the image of power and prestige they suggest (Chen, et al., 2017). Immediately after the 333 years of Spanish colonization, the Philippines went under the American rule for 48 years. Years of colonial rule has led to the high regard towards the foreign while dismissing local culture and heritage as inferior (David & Nadal, 2013). While there are more campaigns on appreciating diversity, such beauty standards are still deeply rooted in the Filipino consciousness. There is still preference of having fairer skin, taller noses, rounder eyes, and oval-shaped faces. Below are some of the terminologies that connote the CoP's ideal or standard of beauty:

Contour and highlight

For the CoP, contouring and highlighting are techniques that are used alongside each other by playing with shadows and illumination in order to ‘re-shape’ the face. Contouring is done by applying darker make up in areas that one wants to appear hollow while highlighting is done by applying lighter, sometimes luminous makeup in order to make certain areas stand out or attract attention. These techniques are usually done to make the face look smaller, cheeks hollower, cheekbones more prominent, noses more pointed or ‘slimmer,’ hairline lower, and so on. Thus, to contour and to highlight is to create an illusion of a more chiseled face, based on what is perceived to be beautiful.

Rhinoplasty or nose lift is the fifth most popular cosmetic surgery procedure worldwide in 2013, with over 900,000 individuals who underwent the procedure (International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (ISAPS), 2014). While such

measures are extreme, not to mention too expensive for the average person, women resort to a cheaper, non-permanent way to make their noses appear pointer or smaller. Darker shades of makeup are applied at each side of the nose for it to look slimmer and create an illusion of a more prominent nose bridge. Highlighter is also applied at the tip of the nose in order to make the nose look pointier.

For some members of the CoP, the desire to have a "straight" or "button" nose does not end with makeup. In fact, in one of the random chat posts, a user crowd sourced for information about rhinoplasty or a nose job. This user was asking about the cost of the procedure and the best place where she could get it done. There were those who because of the relative anonymity online, it could be easier to admit undergoing such procedures than in face-to-face interactions.

Oily, shiny, dewy, and glowy

All of the ten participants mentioned the importance of having good skin in order to achieve desired makeup results. According to User C, a professional makeup artist, "the best makeup is having the best skin" (personal communication, 2018).

In discussing what the "best skin" is, the participants defined four different skin types as follows: 'oily' is a skin type or condition with excess oils in certain parts of the face; 'shiny' is said to be a result of being oily; 'dewy' is an effect that gives the appearance of a certain amount of 'wetness' which is for making one look youthful; and lastly, 'glowy' is an effect of a product which is not dependent on shimmer to make one look 'lit from within.'

Of the four terms, the words oily and shiny have negative connotations as they pertain to an undesirable characteristic of being unpolished. Meanwhile, dewy and glowy exude a healthy and youthful look. Seven of the ten participants of the study thought that while having perfect skin is the ideal, it is not always achievable, so, makeup products are needed in order to make the skin look more even and polished.

I have a lot of "sins" on my skin enlarged pores, blemishes like pimples, scars, and whiteheads. In order to cover these "sins", I use foundations, BB creams, concealers and the likes. I always use matte variants as my skin could get really oily. I also tend to use setting sprays and setting powders in order to make sure everything stays in put, but it usually needs retouching every few hours or so. These products give the face a more polished look and make it more presentable. (Moderator A, personal communication, 2018)

Moderator A used the term "sins" in referring to the imperfections on her skin.

The word “sin” connotes wrongdoing and that it is something to be ashamed or embarrassed about. With this line of thought, it is but normal for someone to feel that these “sins” should be hidden, and that the use of proper makeup in order to keep these at bay is necessary. In popular Filipino slang, the word *sumpa* (curse) is often used to describe pimples. While the term *sumpa* refers particularly to pimples, both terms (*sumpa* and sins) are descriptions of the state of not having perfect skin. Thus, the primary criteria for having the “perfect skin” is it being free of blemishes, as User D believes. For her, perfect skin equates to “blemish-free skin; *chok-chok*, is *ata* (I think) Korean for like plump and moist skin” (personal communication, 2018).

It could be noticed that two different participants used Korean terms in describing certain features that they want for themselves *aegyo sal* and *chok-chok*. The term *chok-chok*, which is entailed by having a youthful glow and skin plumpness, has been repeatedly mentioned in the forum where complexion is concerned. The use of these terms are clear indicators of the influence of Korean standards of beauty in the Philippine culture as well. The introduction of the K-dramas (Korean dramas) to Philippine free television in the early 2000’s sparked the popularity of anything Korean (food, music, beauty products, fashion, etc.) in the country (Igno & Cenidoza, 2016). The fascination of Filipinos with K-dramas sprung the interest in Korean beauty products as the actors were perceived as youthful, having clear and plump skin (Igno & Cenidoza, 2016). The appreciation of the more natural looking, make-up free visage is a departure from an adherence to mostly American makeup techniques.

‘Kilay is life’

Indeed, media often calls eyebrows “the beauty obsession of the decade” (Cochrane, 2016). Cochrane (2016) reports through the interview with Victoria Anderson, a researcher at Cardiff University that the word ‘eyebrow’ is from the Latin word ‘supercilium’. Supercilium is also the root of ‘supercilious’ which means “a way to be superior and look down on other people” (para. 12). The obsession with fuller, more natural looking brows started in the 2010’s with celebrities like the Kardashians are seen sporting such looks (Aghajanian et al., 2019). Moreover, the same article cites how the term “brows on fleek”, used by Viner Peaches Monroe, became viral in 2014 which eventually led to Youtube and Instagram makeup gurus using the term to describe perfectly groomed or drawn eyebrows (Aghajanian et al., 2019).

“Eyebrows on fleek” has the equivalent phrase, ‘*kilay* (eyebrows) is life,’ in the Philippines. It has circulated well on the Internet and is often used by makeup junkies to tag or refer to their pre-occupation with the grooming of their brows. It has now become a source of memes and jokes among makeup junkies. When taken literally, it means that having well-groomed brows is necessary to one’s life.

According to User B and User C, similar to having good or good-appearing skin, having well-groomed eyebrows also denotes presentability and even professionalism because it shows that a person has taken time to make herself up before facing others.

Aside from going for a more polished look, User G and User J create certain looks or certain impressions on people by changing how they apply make up on their eyebrows.

I always work on my eyebrows and eyes. I love playing with different eye looks and eyebrows. It can make me look girl-next-door to catty vixen in a matter of an eyeliner flick haha! (User G, personal communication, 2018)

I always work on my *kilay*. As the millennials say it, *kilay* is life. Well, *kilay* brightens up your face. It can make or break your facial features. Having a Korean-like *kilay* [having less arch] can make you look younger, while a one-liner *kilay* can make you look older. Wrong arch can make you look sad or *mataray* [peevish]. (User J, personal communication, 2018)

While both User G and User J emphasize how a different eyebrow can make someone look different, User G's answer pertains to the manipulation of these features to achieve a certain persona. User J, meanwhile, elaborates on how a mistake in doing one's eyebrow could make a person look differently. With User J, there is already a presupposition that makeup users would not want to look *mataray*.

In the Philippines, *kilays* are often associated with being *mataray*. Most often, being *mataray* is being associated with someone who raises her eyebrows when being critical or disapproving of other people. However, the word does not only pertain to being peevish, strict or rude; the expression *ang taray* ("the;" the root word of *mataray*) nowadays is used to refer to someone who is fierce. So, when someone says "ang taray" it could either be a literal description of an expression of appreciation or expression of awe. Thus, the basis for how the eyebrows are groomed and reshaped through makeup depends on the intention of the person, whether to wow or to be subtle or look kind, young, etc.

Holy grail, social stratification, and foreign bias

One of the most commonly used terms in the CoP is holy grail or HG. Traditionally, holy grail refers to the cup that was used by Jesus Christ during the Last Supper as the Arthurian legends would have it and was sought for many years by the knights. Hence, the term holy grail has been associated with being hard or next to impossible

to find.

Similar to the connotation tied with HG, in the CoP, this term refers to the elusive 'perfect' product for a person, be it skin care or makeup. Each of the participants have their own criteria set for determining her HGs. User D and Moderator B, respectively, define HG as follows:

Holy Grail means it is the best one you've tried and satisfied with the results that you are no longer searching for any alternative. My criteria for Holy Grail are that the items worked for my skin (did not cause any breakout/saw or felt improvements) and that even with the price (if it is something expensive), I still repurchase it. (personal communication, 2018)

HG normally connotes that you've tried and tested a whole bunch of different things. I've been playing with makeup for over a decade, and factors such as availability, changing functionality needs, changing skin needs, pricing, have all affected how I (personally) consider something to be my HG. (Moderator B, personal communication, 2018).

Different people have different skin types and different issues with their skin, thus, choosing the right products that would best help address their needs involves a certain process of trials and errors. As mentioned by both User D and Moderator B, the search for these HGs involve a lot of testing products that are available. User C defines HG as a "no fail product" and that she has not found the perfect product for her yet (personal communication, 2018).

Regardless of their criteria, HG products are considered as the keys to achieving what is perceived to be beautiful. Moreover, having a HG for any type of makeup entails that (1) one has tried several brands before proclaiming one as the most effective for her or him and (2) one buys that product regularly. Therefore, the brand of the HG product can also entail one's leanings or biases, and one's financial capability. For example, for some users of the forum, their HG products are drugstore makeup or the makeup brands that are available in the supermarket, department stores, pharmacy, and convenience stores. These makeup brands could be either international like Maybelline, L'oreal, Revlon, and more, or local brands like Ever Bilena, Fashion 21, and so on. Drugstore makeups are significantly less expensive compared to the highend makeup brands like Urban Decay, MAC, Anatasia Beverly Hills, Burberry, and so on.

To illustrate this further, User B lists her HG products as Giorgio Armani Maestro in 5 (foundation), MAC Pro Longwear Concealer in NC20, MAC Extra Dimension

Skinfinish in Shaft of Gold (highlighter), NARS Orgasm and Benefit Dallas (blush), Kevyn Aucoin The Sculpting Powder in Light (contour palette), TooFaced Chocolate Soleil Matte Bronzer, Anastasia Beverly Hills Brow Wiz in Light Brown, and Charlotte Tilbury K.I.S.S.I.N.G. Lipstick in Bitch Perfect. The products User B has listed are high-end brands which are not accessible to most individuals. Some of these brands are bought in particular premier malls in Metro Manila, some from actual and online stores abroad such as Sephora. As a comparison, a MAC Pro Longwear Concealer costs over a thousand pesos whereas a Maybelline Fit Me Concealer is below three hundred pesos. Thus, these are considered luxury products for some. So, we could say that User B belongs to the either Class A or B crowd or the higher or upper-middle income group. Meanwhile, other individuals like Moderator B, have found their HG's in drugstore makeup.

In their identification of their HG's above, User D and Moderator B both mentioned pricing and expense of the product. Meanwhile, User B simply enumerated the products that she uses. The mentioning of price or expense entails one's consciousness and demarcation as to what is and expensive product and not. On the other hand, the lack of mentioning of expense could entail that the price of a product is not an issue for the member. Thus, the identification of the HG's suggests the stratification of the members of the CoP. Although not directly, mentioning of higher-end products assert one's financial capability to buy such products. Blommaert (2010) discusses scaling and the role of power and inequality in the language used by an individual. In this case, the products are leveled based on their expense. A lot of the expensive products are specialized and are rarely seen in usual malls. Therefore, knowledge of these products and having the ability to buy them puts a person to the higher end of the scale. Meanwhile, those who are not knowledgeable of these products are put on the opposite end of the scale. So, when one mentions this specialized language (high end products), he or she performs that identity of being the higher tiers of the group. Therefore, having power over those who are at the lower tiers.

In a light group such as the CoP at hand, having knowledge of these products and the ability to buy them are sources of power. However, because dynamics such as those present in the CoP are as Blommaert suggests, polycentric, power does not reside at a particular end or subgroups within the CoP. This can be shown in the reclaiming or power of those who are not able to buy these high-end products by searching for "dupes" or duplicates. These dupes are "steals" because they achieve similar effects with the "splurges" high end products, but for a much cheaper price. For example, Colourpop in the shade Bumble is sold at around 300 Php (6 USD) is a dupe for the much expensive Kylie Cosmetics liquid lipstick in the shade Kristen

which retails at about 2000 Php (29 USD). Finding these duplicates accept the idea that these products are good, but at the same time, rejects the concept of having to spend much money in order to achieve a certain look. Aside from asking from naming dupes, some members of the CoP explicitly ask for product recommendations that are on the drugstore bracket, as according to them, are the only ones they can afford or accessible to them. From here, it can be observed that some of those in the lower tiers of the stratification outright assert their identities, appealing to those who can relate with them. The mere mention of their HG's paves the way for inclusion and exclusion in the stratification between high end and drugstore makeup junkies.

Apart from social stratification, the members of the CoP's bias towards Western makeup brands can be seen in the products they recommend to other users. In fact, for the duration of the study, there was only one mention or recommendation of a Philippine drugstore makeup, Ever Bilena, in the makeup discussion threads. Mostly, users talk about Western brands like Too Faced, Benefit, Anastasia Beverly Hills, Colourpop, MAC, Maybelline, L'Oreal, among others. Based on the forum, Western brands continue to dominate the beauty market in the Philippines, especially among those who belong to the middle class. However, users also mention Korean skin care brands in the forums quite a lot. The rise of the popularity of Korean products, as mentioned previously, may be attributed to the introduction of Kdramas on Philippine television. What is clear is that whether users prefer Western or Asian (mostly Korean) makeup brands. The lack of the mentioning of Philippine makeup brands reflect a kind of thinking that is present among the members of the CoP. Local makeup brands are often underestimated as low-quality products because of their relatively low-price points. Usual social media contents that make use of local products are in the form or challenges in creating a look for a given amount say 500 Php (roughly 10 USD).

This is a clear manifestation of colonial mentality. Rondilla (2012) argues that Filipinas in the country and in the United States prefer whiter or fairer skin because of years of being colonized by the Spaniards, Americans, and even the stature Chinese mestizos occupy in the society. Moreover, according to her, being white is associated with being clean, pure, and morally upright. On the other hand, being dark is associated with being savage and dirty. It has, therefore, been in the mentality of Filipinos to desire whiter skin. However, members of the CoP are not much keen to whitening their skin. Instead, they prefer having clear, healthy, and young-looking skin. And, in achieving this, mostly, they turn to foreign skin care brands. Although there is now a shift in the skin color preference, the preference in skin care product brands still reflect the notion that anything from outside the country is better than those produced locally.

Bulloch (2013), in her 18-month-long ethnographic study in Siquijor, observes

that Filipinos often devalue their bodies or their physical features. As she is a Caucasian female, she notes that locals would also contrast themselves with her in terms of physical appearance. Moreover, according to her, her informants perceive having 'white' skin, 'long' noses, 'heartshaped' faces, and 'slim' bodies as being beautiful or desirable. Compared to the Malay features (having *morena* (brown) skin, 'flat' noses, 'square' or 'round' faces, and either 'skinny' or 'fat' bodies) a number of Filipinos have, Caucasian features are perceived more attractive among her informants. Moreover, she discovers that these perceptions on Caucasian features are often associated with the U.S. as locals label Caucasians as the collective "Amerikano" even when they are not from the United States.

In as simple as the storing of canned goods, bias towards the imported products can be seen. In the same study, Bulloch (2013) notes that families of overseas Filipino workers proudly display their imported canned goods on cabinets with glass doors while local goods are kept in cupboards with wooden doors, away from the sight of guests and the visitors. Bulloch's study shows how some Filipinos see more value or worth what is from the "Amerikanos". Having connections to the "Amerikanos" or Westerners by being married one of them, by having relatives live in their country, or even by possessing goods produced in their lands, give someone a sense of superiority among others who have no connections whatsoever with them (Bulloch, 2013). Thus, following this mindset, someone who uses Western products, which are considered to be better than locally manufactured makeup, may have a feeling of advantage over the others who do not have these products.

Clearly, what are considered as 'good' makeup and skin care products are those that are expensive. However, some members of the CoP do not want to compromise the effects that may be achieved with the use of makeup without having to spend much. Thus, in one of the no buy or low buy threads, some of the users tipped others that instead of buying "SG authentic" also known as "fake" or "class a" cosmetics, other users may opt to buy "decals or *takals*". These decals or *takals* are retail makeup products sold by milliliters or grams as the seller would divide a product into small containers. Some of the products sold by *takal* are liquid foundations, makeup removers, serums, perfumes, and other. What can be deduced here is that makeup junkies would prefer to buy these expensive products by the ml or by the gram instead of buying other local or cheaper makeup brands.

Bloomaert (2017) mentions that self-representation online may not be congruent with the offline self. People tend to present themselves in the "best day mode" (Baron, 2008; boyd, 2004 in Blommaert, 2017, p. 5). This "best day mode" is achieved by presenting one's self in the best way possible. This could be evident in the gained popularity of camera filters and effects which are commonly used on social media. As

what we have established earlier, there is a preference over foreign, more expensive makeup products. Therefore, the mention of these more expensive brands in products used for FOTDs, regardless whether one bought it by *takal* or by the whole, also allows the exhibiting of power and prestige brought by these brands.

Conclusion

The discourse of beauty in the country, as seen on the CoP, has slightly departed from strictly adhering to Caucasian standards. The influence of other cultures, particularly as Korean, has led to this slight shift in beliefs. With this shift, it was seen that the CoP is less concerned with having whiter skin which is contrary to the findings of Rondilla (2012). Members of the CoP are not pre-occupied with being white or having fairer skin. The concern has become to achieve a more natural, youthful skin brought about by these new influences. These new influences, however, echo a persisting theme of inferiority complex among Filipinos through the lack of confidence and preference to local products. The favoring and epitomizing of more expensive foreign beauty products paved for the power shifts and renegotiations in the discourse of makeup and beauty where the expense of the product is seen determinant of its effect and desirability.

While this paper contextualizes how a particular CoP expresses its conceptualization of beauty through online discussions, several angles could still be looked at in order to enrich studies in this topic. Most of the respondents in this paper belong to the middle-middle to upper-middle class. Thus, their choices on beauty products, or their perception of beauty may differ from other CoPs. Moreover, a similar study of online CoPs juxtaposed with prevalent television and print ads may be done in order to give more context to the topic at hand.

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