

Remediating Tabe' Politeness in Digital Interactions among Bugis Youth

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Abstract: This study investigates the remediation of the Bugis cultural expression “Tabé” within digital communication practices among Bugis youth in Indonesia. Traditionally, Tabé’ represents a verbal and nonverbal politeness practice expressed through bodily gestures symbolizing humility and respect. However, the transition from physical interaction to virtual communication has transformed Tabé’ into a symbolic linguistic strategy embedded in digital micro-interactions. This research aims to analyze how Bugis youth reconstruct and negotiate cultural politeness through social media and instant messaging platforms. Using a qualitative netnographic approach, data were collected from WhatsApp groups, Instagram comments, Telegram communities, and Facebook interactions involving Bugis-speaking youth between January and March 2026. The findings reveal that Tabé’ functions as a digital face-saving mechanism used to request permission, soften directives, reduce interpersonal tension, and preserve collective identity in online environments. The study further demonstrates that digital technology does not eliminate indigenous cultural values but instead facilitates their symbolic adaptation into virtual communication practices. The research contributes to intercultural communication and digital culture studies by proposing the concept of symbolic politeness remediation in computer-mediated communication.

Keywords: Tabé’; digital politeness; Bugis culture; netnography; face negotiation

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital communication technologies has fundamentally transformed human interaction patterns across social, educational, and cultural contexts. Social media platforms, instant messaging applications, and online communities increasingly mediate communication among younger generations, replacing many forms of face-to-face interaction. According to Nancy Baym (2015), digital communication has reconstructed interpersonal relationships through technologically mediated interaction patterns. Similarly, Sherry Turkle (2011) argued that individuals increasingly rely on digital platforms to negotiate identity and social connection.

Despite the globalizing influence of digital technology, local cultural values continue to survive and adapt within virtual communication spaces. One notable example is the Bugis cultural expression known as *Tabé’*. In Bugis society, Tabé’ traditionally functions as a marker of politeness, humility, and social respect. The expression is commonly accompanied by bodily gestures such as bowing slightly, lowering one’s gaze, and positioning the hand respectfully while passing in front of older individuals or addressing respected persons. Thus, Tabé’ is not merely a linguistic expression but also a performative social ritual embedded within Bugis cultural ethics.

However, digital communication environments eliminate the physical dimensions of traditional politeness practices. The disappearance of bodily gestures raises important questions regarding how local cultural values are maintained within computer-mediated communication. Interestingly, Bugis youth continue to utilize the expression “Tabé” in virtual interactions such as WhatsApp conversations, Instagram comment sections, Telegram groups, and online academic discussions. Expressions such as “Tabé Bu, izin bertanya,” “Tabé bantuannya,” or “Tabé mohon maaf” illustrate how traditional politeness practices are reconstructed into textual symbolic forms.

Previous studies concerning digital communication primarily focus on online politeness strategies, cyber pragmatics, and communication behavior within social media environments. Susan Herring (2013) explained that digital discourse creates new communication conventions shaped by technological

mediation. Recent Indonesian research likewise demonstrates that politeness in digital spaces is shaped by platform context, interactional purpose, and digital literacy (Purwantiningsih et al., 2022; Firdaus et al., 2025; Rahmani, 2025). Furthermore, David Crystal (2011) emphasized that online communication develops hybrid linguistic forms combining traditional language practices with digital symbolic expressions.

Several Indonesian studies have discussed Bugis cultural identity and traditional politeness; however, most remain focused on offline cultural practices and interpersonal interaction in physical environments. Recent research increasingly shows that social media can become a space for the preservation, adaptation, and circulation of indigenous languages and cultural practices (Minhas & Salawu, 2024; Ajani et al., 2024; Musawir & Sabir, 2026). In this context, the digital preservation of Tabe' should be understood not only as the continuation of a traditional expression but also as a form of cultural sovereignty. Cultural sovereignty refers to the capacity of a cultural community to maintain, represent, and develop its own cultural values within changing social and technological environments. The continued use of Tabe' by Bugis youth in digital interactions demonstrates their agency in determining how Bugis cultural values are expressed in contemporary communication spaces. Rather than simply adopting dominant global communication practices, Bugis youth actively incorporate local linguistic and cultural norms into digital interaction. Therefore, digital spaces can function as arenas for cultural preservation in which the continuity and representation of Bugis language, politeness, and cultural identity remain under the agency of the community itself (Qureshi et al., 2025).

The concept of remediation proposed by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin (1999) explains how older cultural forms are reconstructed within new media environments. In this context, traditional Bugis politeness practices are not erased by digital technology but transformed into symbolic textual expressions adapted to virtual communication mechanisms.

This study also employs Face-Negotiation Theory developed by Stella Ting-Toomey (1988) to analyze how individuals maintain interpersonal harmony and social image within online interaction. According to Ting-Toomey, collectivist cultures tend to prioritize harmony, respect, and indirect communication strategies in social interaction. Therefore, the use of Tabe' in digital interaction can be interpreted as a face-saving strategy intended to preserve positive face and reduce communicative threats.

In this study, symbolic politeness remediation refers to the process through which a culturally embedded politeness practice is reconstructed into symbolic forms within digital communication while retaining its core relational meaning. The concept consists of three interconnected dimensions. First, linguistic transformation occurs when the traditionally spoken and performed expression of Tabe' is transferred into written digital communication. Second, semiotic compensation occurs when the absence of bodily gestures is compensated through lexical choices, sentence structure, punctuation, emojis, and other digital cues that communicate respect and interpersonal sensitivity. Third, relational-cultural continuity refers to the preservation of the social functions underlying Tabe', including respect, humility, permission seeking, apology, and the maintenance of interpersonal harmony. This concept differs from cyberpragmatics, which broadly examines how meaning and pragmatic strategies operate in internet-mediated communication, and from mediatization, which concerns the broader influence of media and media logic on social and cultural processes. Symbolic politeness remediation specifically focuses on how an existing cultural politeness practice is reconstructed into digital symbolic forms while maintaining its cultural and relational functions.

The urgency of this research lies in the increasing dominance of digital communication among younger generations, which may potentially weaken traditional cultural values if adaptive mechanisms are not understood. This study therefore aims to examine how Bugis youth negotiate, preserve, and transform Tabe' politeness practices within virtual communication spaces. Furthermore, the research contributes theoretically to intercultural communication and digital culture studies by introducing the concept of symbolic politeness remediation in online interaction. This study addresses three research questions:

- How do Bugis youth use Tabe' as a politeness expression in digital interactions?

- How is traditional Tabe' transformed into symbolic textual forms across digital communication platforms?
- How does the digital preservation of Tabe' contribute to the continuity of Bugis cultural identity and cultural sovereignty among youth?

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design using a netnographic approach. Netnography, introduced by Robert V. Kozinets (2020), is an adaptation of ethnography specifically developed to investigate online communities, digital cultures, and virtual interaction patterns. Kozinets explained that netnography enables researchers to observe naturally occurring digital interaction while preserving contextual and cultural meaning.

The research was conducted between January and March 2026. The primary data sources consisted of digital interactions among Bugis youth aged 18–25 years who actively used social media and instant messaging platforms. Data were collected from:

- 8 WhatsApp group conversations,
- 5 Instagram discussion threads,
- 3 Telegram community groups,
- and 2 Facebook community forums.

A total of 126 digital interaction excerpts containing the expression “Tabé” were documented and analyzed. Participants and digital communities were selected purposively based on their relevance to the research focus. The study focused on Bugis youth aged 18–25 years who actively participated in digital communication and demonstrated familiarity with the use of Tabe' in everyday interaction. The observed communities were selected because they provided naturally occurring interactions in which Bugis language and politeness expressions were used. Access to community interactions was conducted with appropriate permission from relevant community administrators or participants, particularly for interactions occurring in restricted or private spaces.

The researchers' participation was limited to the extent necessary for observation and contextual understanding, while naturally occurring conversations were not manipulated for research purposes. Before data were documented, participants or relevant community representatives were informed about the research purpose, the type of data to be observed, and the protection of their identities. All usernames, personal identities, contact information, and other potentially identifying details were anonymized. The researchers also avoided reporting information that could reasonably lead to the identification of individual participants. Ethical procedures were applied throughout data collection, documentation, analysis, and reporting.

Data collection techniques included participatory observation, digital screenshot documentation, textual transcription, and field notes. The researcher observed naturally occurring interactions without manipulating participant behavior. Ethical considerations were maintained by anonymizing usernames, personal identities, and sensitive information from all digital data sources.

The analytical process employed thematic analysis techniques. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis allows researchers to identify recurring patterns and social meanings embedded within qualitative data. Therefore, the data were categorized based on communication functions, including:

1. permission requests,
2. assistance requests,
3. directive softening,
4. apology expressions,
5. and social relational maintenance.

The interpretation process utilized Face-Negotiation Theory to examine how Tabe' functions as a face-saving mechanism within online communication. Additionally, the concept of remediation was applied to analyze the transformation of traditional bodily politeness into symbolic textual expressions.

To ensure data credibility, data credibility was strengthened through several complementary procedures rather than relying solely on cross-platform triangulation. First, selected excerpts were

independently reviewed and coded by members of the research team to compare interpretations of the communicative functions of Tabe'. Differences in coding were discussed and resolved through reference to the interactional context and the operational definitions of each category. Second, where possible, interpretations of selected interactional patterns were checked against participants' or community members' understanding of the intended meaning of Tabe'. Third, the researchers maintained reflexive notes documenting decisions made during data selection, coding, interpretation, and the development of thematic categories. These notes were used to identify potential researcher assumptions and to ensure that interpretations remained grounded in the observed digital interactions. Cross-platform comparison was therefore used as one component of credibility assessment, complemented by coding comparison, participant validation, and reflexive analytical documentation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that the Bugis cultural expression Tabe' remains actively utilized within digital communication practices among Bugis youth. However, the form and mechanism of politeness expression have undergone substantial transformation from bodily gestures into symbolic linguistic communication.

Table 1. Forms of Tabe' Usage in Digital Interaction

No	Interaction Context	Example Expression	Communicative Function
1	Requesting permission	"Tabe Bu, izin bertanya"	Respectful opening
2	Requesting assistance	"Tabe bantuannya kak"	Softening requests
3	Delivering directives	"Tabe tolong dikumpul hari ini"	Reducing communicative pressure
4	Apologizing	"Tabe mohon maaf terlambat"	Face restoration
5	Group interaction	"Tabe semuanya"	Maintaining social harmony

The data demonstrate that Tabe' functions as a linguistic politeness marker within computer-mediated communication. Although traditional bodily gestures are absent, users compensate through respectful diction, textual structure, and communication tone.

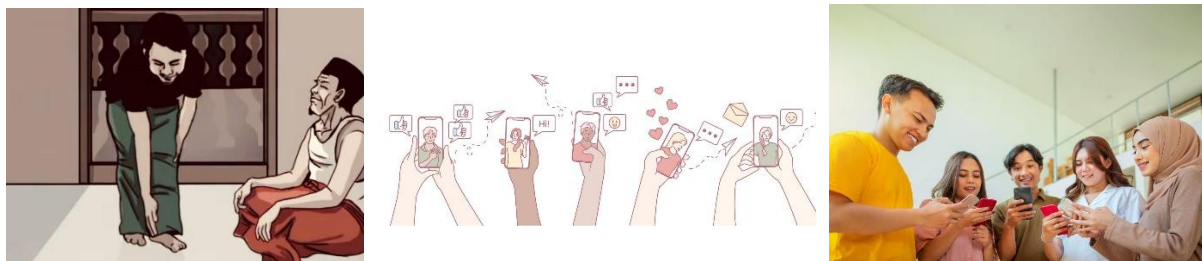


Figure 1. Symbolic Transformation of Tabe' in Digital Communication

Tabe' as a Digital Marker of Cultural Identity and Politeness

To illustrate the patterns identified across the 126 excerpts, representative anonymized interactions are presented across the four platforms examined. The excerpts below are selected to show variation in platform context and communicative function rather than to imply that a single example represents all interactions. Across the dataset, WhatsApp interactions most commonly illustrated respectful openings, Instagram interactions illustrated assistance or clarification requests, Telegram interactions illustrated collective requests and directive softening, and Facebook interactions illustrated apology and relational maintenance. This cross-platform presentation makes the empirical basis of the thematic interpretation more transparent.

Representative Cross-Platform Evidence

Platform	Communicative function	Representative anonymized excerpt	Analytical interpretation
WhatsApp	Requesting permission	"Tabe Bu, izin bertanya terkait tugas minggu ini 🙏"	Tabe' works as a respectful opening that reduces imposition before addressing a

			person with higher perceived status.
Instagram	Requesting assistance / clarification	"Tabe bantuannya kak"	Tabe' softens the request and frames the interaction as respectful rather than demanding.
Telegram	Directive / collective request	"Tabe tolong dikumpul hari ini"	Tabe' mitigates the force of a directive by adding a culturally recognizable politeness marker.
Facebook	Apologizing	"Tabe mohon maaf terlambat"	Tabe' accompanies an apology and supports face restoration after a possible social or communicative lapse.
Telegram / group interaction	Relational maintenance	"Tabe semuanya"	The expression marks a respectful group opening and supports social harmony among participants.

Taken together, these excerpts demonstrate that the form of Tabe' is stable at the lexical level while its pragmatic realization varies with interactional purpose and platform context. The evidence therefore supports the interpretation of Tabe' as a flexible digital politeness resource rather than as a fixed formula. This pattern is consistent with recent research showing that digital communication can transform local language practices through hybrid forms, multimodal cues, and context-sensitive choices (Musawir & Sabir, 2026; Rahmani, 2025).

The first finding reveals that Bugis youth continue to preserve Tabe' as a cultural marker of politeness and identity within digital communication. The expression frequently appears in interactions involving older individuals, lecturers, teachers, community leaders, and formal group discussions. This suggests that local cultural values remain socially meaningful despite technological modernization.

The following interaction excerpt illustrates this pattern:

"Tabe Bu, izin bertanya terkait tugas minggu ini 🙏"

The use of Tabe' at the beginning of the sentence functions as a communicative buffer intended to minimize imposition upon the recipient. This finding supports Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, which argues that indirect linguistic strategies are commonly used to reduce face-threatening acts in communication. The addition of respectful emojis further reinforces politeness and emotional sensitivity. Within Face-Negotiation Theory, this strategy reflects an effort to preserve positive face by demonstrating humility and social respect.

The findings also indicate that Tabe' operates as a symbolic identity marker among Bugis youth. According to Arjun Appadurai (1996), cultural identity in globalization processes does not disappear entirely but often transforms into adaptive symbolic forms. Even within highly modernized digital environments, users continue to incorporate local linguistic expressions to maintain cultural belonging and interpersonal solidarity.

From Bodily Gesture to Symbolic Textual Practice

The second finding demonstrates that digital media have transformed Tabe' from a performative bodily gesture into symbolic textual communication. Traditionally, Bugis politeness depended heavily on physical movements such as bowing, lowering one's gaze, and respectful hand positioning. However, within virtual interaction, these bodily dimensions disappear entirely.

This process reflects what Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin (1999) conceptualize as remediation, whereby older cultural forms are reconstructed within new technological environments. In this case, the cultural meaning of politeness is retained while its communicative medium changes.

The transformation also illustrates the emergence of symbolic politeness, where communication effectiveness depends not upon bodily gestures but upon lexical choice, textual arrangement, and emotional signaling. This finding aligns with Couldry and Hepp's (2017) argument that digital media increasingly shape social reality through mediated symbolic practices. Consequently, politeness becomes increasingly linguistic and semiotic in nature within online interaction.

Tabe' as a Face-Saving and Relational Strategy

The third finding indicates that Tabe' functions strategically to reduce communicative tension and maintain relational harmony in online interaction. In digital communication, textual messages often lack emotional nuance, potentially increasing misunderstanding and interpersonal conflict. Therefore, the insertion of Tabe' serves as a mitigating device that softens directives, criticism, or requests.

For example:

The findings further reveal that Bugis youth strategically combine traditional politeness expressions with modern digital symbols such as emojis, abbreviations, and internet discourse conventions. According to Crystal (2011), online communication frequently produces hybrid language forms that combine traditional linguistic structures with digital symbolic expression. Recent studies of Indonesian digital discourse similarly show that politeness is negotiated through linguistic choices and platform-specific interactional conditions (Firdaus et al., 2025; Rahmani, 2025). This demonstrates that cultural preservation within cyberspace is adaptive rather than static. Instead of disappearing, indigenous cultural values evolve into hybrid communicative forms compatible with contemporary digital environments.

In this interaction, Tabe' minimizes the threatening effect of corrective communication. Rather than appearing confrontational, the message becomes collaborative and respectful. This finding aligns with Ting-Toomey's (1988) explanation that collectivist societies prioritize relational harmony and indirect communication strategies to avoid social conflict.

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CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the Bugis cultural expression Tabe' continues to survive and evolve within digital communication practices among Bugis youth. Through processes of remediation, traditional bodily politeness practices are transformed into symbolic textual expressions functioning within online micro-interactions. The findings demonstrate that Tabe' serves as a face-saving mechanism used to maintain interpersonal harmony, soften communication, and preserve collective cultural identity in virtual environments.

Furthermore, the study confirms that digital technology does not eliminate indigenous cultural values but instead facilitates their adaptation into new communicative forms. The emergence of symbolic politeness within computer-mediated communication reflects the dynamic relationship between culture and technology. The research contributes theoretically to intercultural communication and digital culture studies by proposing the concept of symbolic politeness remediation as a framework for understanding cultural adaptation in virtual interaction spaces.

Future studies are encouraged to explore comparative analyses between different Indonesian ethnic groups and investigate how local politeness systems evolve across various digital platforms and generational contexts.

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