

Conclusion

The present study focused on identifying the communication strategies adopted by the students of engineering while using social media sites and other electronic mediums of communication and situating the same within the context of the established communication strategies. The principal objective of the study was to find the creative ways and strategies adopted by the users to involve in a Web Mediated Communication and the extent to which such communication strategies help masking the lack of knowledge of the rules of English language on the part of the users while communicating in the written and oral modes. The second objective of the study was to find the localization of strategies while communicating online. It has been observed during the research that as the students are unaware of the nature of the mistakes while communicating online and as their updates and posts get ‘liked’ or ‘shared’ by their followers and friends, coupled with no intervention to get their errors checked, they consider this as a validation of their content and style and thus, they form their own ‘*notions*’ of correctness in terms of the use of language and style.

Further, it has been found that in the event of a corrective intervention, the in-groups and out-groups of communication conforming to difference and divergence as outlined in the Communication Accommodation Theory comes to the fore. When an instructor intervenes with the necessary corrections online, the students are found to restrict the access to the content without unfriending him implying a difference. The action is severe in case of a peer correction in that the communication gets restricted among a select few and in-groups get formed. Another common strategy to form an ‘in-group’ as found in the social network portals is by communicating exclusively in their respective L1s using their native script (wherever available as in the cases of Assamese, Bengali, Hindi, etc.) or the Roman script (as in the cases of the dialects of Arunachal Pradesh or Nagaland or Mizoram, etc). Further, it has been found that the tendency to ‘out-group,’ ignore, unfollow or unfriend the divergent conversational partners stem from anxiety which is social, cultural and linguistic.

Three hundred students across different modules and branches of engineering have been surveyed in the current study. The composition of the sample is highly heterogeneous in that the students belong to different tribes and communities of the eight states of Northeast India along with students from the rest of the country. Permissions have been sought from each one of them for accessing their Facebook timelines, Twitter feed, and blogs, wherever available. Further, each one of them has been asked to share ten texts and WhatsApp messages. Some of them have been drawn to converse in a synchronous chat mode using the Facebook messenger application. Video calls have been used sparingly. These apart, permissions have also been sought from the users to make screenshots wherever possible to provide an example. However, this has been done in conformity with the privacy laws by pixelating the image and the username and the user id that is allocated to each Facebook user.

The study hypothesized that a majority of the students in technical institutions lack the knowledge of the proper application of the grammatical rules and use the electronic mode of communication to mask their lack of knowledge of the same. One of the major reasons for the same is the emphasis on the communication aspect of language only rather than channelizing the focus towards teaching and application of rules of grammar and style. The second important reason for the same lies in a lack of a proper methodology of teaching grammar and language in the feeder level institutions. It has been found that the students were asked to learn the rules of grammar by rote and questions in the examinations were asked about the areas which have been pre-identified. Contextually appropriate application of the rules is seldom practiced in the classroom. As a result, it has been found in the research that the students are not able to make a distinction between the grammatical rules of their respective L1 vis-à-vis L2, i.e., English.

In the study, it has been found that the Foreign Language Anxiety profoundly impacts the students towards oral and written English communication. The reasons for the same

varies with every individual, but the most common reason for the same happens to be the anxiety of being exposed to the lack of knowledge of the grammatical rules of the English language in front of the peers and the teacher. Other reasons for anxiety include the failure of meeting the expectations of the English language teacher in the classroom, the fear of erroneous articulation of sounds and pronunciation of words, the conflicting desires on the part of the student to imitate better speakers and accents but falling short in terms of actual performance, lack of adequate and contextually appropriate vocabulary, a psychologically overwhelming classroom set up in terms of devices and gadgets and physical hierarchy, fear of responding in the English language class sans cohesion and logic.

It has been found in the study that Foreign Language Anxiety has been the primary reason for the students to become device dependent as far as the communication is concerned. Other causes include a lax requirement to adhere to the rules of grammar and style, apart from the comfortability of the users in the use of the devices. Further, the interactive features provided by the portals and apps, the possibility of remaining connected 24x7, dismantling of geographical barriers, the multimodality of communication, and the instant transference of the message and the resultant feedback are some of the compelling reasons for the students to prefer electronic communication rather than the F2F mode of communication. It is evident from the fact that while the students have been found to be active in communicating with the teacher over synchronous or asynchronous chats, yet they show reticence to complete avoidance towards having a F2F communication with the same person. One of the reasons for the same is the lack of any checking or restrictive mechanism for faulty communication online, and secondly, it also offers the students an excuse that since it is an informal mode of communication, hence, no particular care has been taken to edit or correct the mistakes before hitting the send button.

It has also been found in the research that for the students, fluency in spoken and written English is essential. However, due to the anxiety, the process of learning and communicating in English gets impacted. To mask the inadequacies about the use of

English in oral and written modes, the students resort to the electronic communication and frequently adopts the strategies of code-switching, primarily from English to Hindi creole, and at times, code mixing by using words and expressions from their respective L1s by re-appropriating the contexts. Such strategies of code switching and code mixing make their language *cool and fashionable* as is evident from instant sharing and liking with the friends and followers resorting to these strategies in their respective posts and updates. Such online behavior of sharing, liking and reusing help in validating the strategy and the same gets reflected in the oral mode of communication as well as the formal mode of writing.

The current study shows that the communication strategies adopted by the students help them in negotiating with the gaps that emerge between the intended and the conveyed messages. Apart from the immanent anxiety towards the English language, and the language teaching method followed in the feeder levels of education, one of the major reasons for the gaps between the intended and the conveyed message is the discord of the frames of reference between the sender of the message and the receiver resulting in an erroneous feedback. The framework of Tarone's Taxonomy has been used in the current study to analyze the communication strategies adopted by the students. While the studies conducted in the West shows that the user preference for the L1 is higher (as in the cases of Chinese, Korean, Thai, and Japanese), the reverse has been found to be true in the case among the surveyed respondents in that they prefer to use English for communication over their respective L1s. The reasons for the same include having a uniformity in the medium of instruction at the feeder levels, lack of a proper script and available literature of many communities of the region, lack of a homogeneous language for communication, community and dialect dynamics, interface familiarity of the devices and portals, and the notion of social acceptability and greater visibility that comes with English. Combined with the factors stated above, and the anxiety towards the L2, the electronic mode of communication has helped in negotiating with the gaps that the student face while communicating in English. A lack of proper internet management and the content check compounds the problem of believing whatever they

write on social media, with support from the third-party applications as the correct form of English and this makes them insular to the prescribed rules of the language.

To conduct the study, three instruments have been used, viz.,

- (i) The English Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (ELCAS) Questionnaire
- (ii) The Language Proficiency Questionnaire
- (iii) The Web and Social Media Proficiency Questionnaire

The ELCAS is an appropriated form of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) questionnaire. The Language Proficiency Questionnaire is designed taking the Language Experience and Proficiency Questionnaire (LEAP-Q) and Language History Questionnaire as the base. The Web and Social Media Proficiency Questionnaire has been indigenously developed taking into account the indicative behavior of the respondents and their presence and range of activities in the social network media.

The research was conducted with an objective to explore the communication strategies adopted by the students while communicating online to hide their knowledge of English grammar and style. Further, an attempt has been made to identify the local factors which prompt newer styles and strategies in the web-mediated communication. Another important objective of the study was to analyse the foreign language anxiety of the students and the challenges they face in acquiring proficiency in L2. The research has also attempted at identifying the reasons for the overlap of the e-lingo on the formal modes of speaking and writing English.

This study hypothesized that the web-mediated communication had helped the students to mask their ignorance of the rules of English grammar and style. Further, the students are found to negotiate with the lack of rules of English by extensively communicating online and getting their strategies of incorporating the local dialects and languages validated and used the same in both the formal and informal modes of communication. There is a lack of control and curation as far as the use of web-mediated communication is concerned. The dependence on the web and electronic mode of communication has also helped in masking their anxiety towards the English language and the use of the

same in the formal styles of speaking and writing. The result is an overlap of the formal and the informal styles, and the boundaries between the two get blurred.

It has been established that there exists a strong link between foreign language anxiety and the reliance on the web-mediated portals and devices for communication. The anxiety towards the English language stems from two significant facts:

- (i) English grammar is never taught in the feeder levels by applying it to usage and showing the differences between the respective L1s vis-à-vis English. This is problematic because in some of the states of the region, like Arunachal Pradesh, where there is a tribe diversity. Further, due to the lack of scripts, the literature of the region in their native dialects aren't available. As a result, the written mode of communication in these regions are non-existent and to write in their native dialect, the Roman or the Devanagari scripts are used. This is complicated further by the fact that since most of the dialects have intonated sound structure, it is difficult to transcribe the same using the Roman or Devanagari scripts to distinguish between different contexts and meaning.
- (ii) Due to the fact stated above, the students are exposed to English as a medium of instruction and Hindi as the medium of oral communication. However, due to the improper articulation of sounds and gaps in the process of learning of English at the feeder levels, the students are hesitant in communicating orally. This feeling of anxiety gets compounded once they are exposed to better speakers or during testing and evaluation. So instead of speaking orally, to deal with the anxiety, the web portals and the social media sites facilitate an easy communication as adherence to the rules of communication are rarely imposed or can be overruled. Hence, even for daily and mundane communication, devices and portals are preferred over the oral mode of communication.

As there is no systemic or meaningful academic intervention, the students are found to rely on these devices and web generated results to deal with the problems about the use of the English language. In case of too many checks and divergent views, it has been found in the research that such voices are easily outgrouped or unfollowed, unfriended, or in extreme cases, blocked. Further, it has been found in the research that there is a desire to get the posts and updates and the writing styles validated. This is made possible by sharing and liking such posts and updates by the friends and

followers on the social media sites. But due to the lack of proper management of the internet and web generated results, the students cannot make a distinction between the formal and informal modes of communication, and in the process, an overlap of the two is seen in academic writings and presentations. The emphasis on developing communication skills in professional courses as demanded by the market and the industry too is responsible for getting the focus deflected from learning a language and its use in a contextually appropriate manner.

From the responses in the questionnaires and the analyses, the objectives of the study have been fulfilled, and the hypotheses stand validated.

5.1 Limitations of the Study

The major limitation of the study was the lack of data uniformly over multiple Social Network platforms and the differences in the behavior of the online presence of the students. While all the users are on Facebook, the number of users on Twitter are less in number, and the blogs too are not frequently written by the students. Regarding texting and chatting, most of the students resort to WhatsApp which allows longer texts, unlike Short Messaging Service that uses the process of concatenated messaging. Moreover, the access to the chat archive of the students and sharing of text or WhatsApp messages and the content therein too was varied in terms of length, which created difficulties in adopting a uniform approach to the study of the same. The observation of the online communication behaviour too has been disrupted at times due to faulty network and lack of access to the internet due to locational factors.

As far as the observation of the oral modes is concerned, while the presentations of the students have been videographed, yet the presence of a camera made the students conscious and nervous, and more so when they were informed that their presentation would be analyzed for checking the errors. This, coupled with their prevalent language anxiety, further impacted their performance and, in turn, didn't generate enough data for study and research.

As far as the sample is concerned, students from some communities drew a blank, like Jaintia, Bodo, Mishmi, etc., as none of the students got enrolled for the courses during the time of the study. Hence, the strategies unique to these communities couldn't be recorded.

5.2 Further Scopes of the Study:

The scope of the study could be extended further to incorporate the sound, and specific grammatical structures unique to these communities and the same can be analyzed vis-à-vis their communication online and its impact on the process of understanding and application of L2, i.e., English in written and oral modes of communication. Instead of all the major communities taken together as in the case with the current study, specific communities could be targeted, and their use of L1 and L2 could be studied, particularly in the electronic or web-mediated communication. Community or dialect specific communication using the native script or the Roman script and the gaps in the contextual understanding of the message on account of the use of these scripts could be further investigated.

