ABSTRACT

Errors and Communication Strategies in Web and Electronically Mediated Communication with reference to Facebook, Twitter, and Textese

The focus of the present study is to locate the central argument that the English language used online masks the lack of knowledge of grammatical rules, within the field of Communication Studies by analyzing the same under the framework of Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT). CAT apart, the study examines the communication behavior of the respondents by classifying the responses under the frames of Tarone's Taxonomy of Communication Strategies and Interaction Hypothesis.

The objectives of the study are to explore the communication strategies adopted by the users online to hide their lack of knowledge of the grammatical rules, to identify the local factors which have contributed in creation of newer forms and styles in web-mediated communication, to study the impact of foreign language anxiety on acquiring proficiency for a non-native speaker of English, and to identify the reasons for the overlap of e-lingo on the formal modes of oral and written communication.

A sample size of 300 undergraduate students of engineering at NERIST belonging to the eight states of northeast India has been surveyed for the current study. The following three questionnaires have been used:

      (i) The English Language Classroom Anxiety Questionnaire (ELCAS)

      (ii) The Language Proficiency Questionnaire

      (iii) Web and Social Media Proficiency (WeSoMP) Questionnaire.

5 point Likert Scale has been used on a range of 1-5, with 1 indicating 'Strongly Disagree' and 5 'Strongly Agree.'

The thesis is divided into five chapters.

The first chapter provides a detailed overview of the topic, methodology, objectives, hypothesis and literature review. It also provides the theoretical frameworks on which the current research is based.

The second chapter assesses the English Language Anxiety of the L2 learners in the classroom. The assessment is based on the interpretation of the data collected from the ECLAS questionnaire. Summation of each aspect of anxiety is tallied with their use of English language in various contexts and testing in classroom conditions.

The third chapter assesses the students' level of proficiency using the Language use and Proficiency Questionnaire.

The fourth chapter analyses the data collected through the Web and Social Media Proficiency Questionnaire which has been used to assess the level of the students' comfortability in navigating through different portals. The data has been further tallied and justified with the data derived from the ELCAS and Language Proficiency questionnaires. The chapter also analyzes the Communication strategies used by the students while communicating online.

The concluding chapter provides a summation of the findings of each chapter and the justification of the objectives of the research.

It has been found in this study that there is a significant amount of foreign language anxiety towards English which is attributed to the lack of knowledge of proper rules of English as an L2 learner along with the problems of vocabulary and pronunciation. The anxiety impacts negatively on the proficiency acquisition of English. The users form their own notions of correctness and negotiate with the errors through appropriated communication strategies. They depend on the internet sources and devices. The result is an overlap of e-lingo on the formal and informal modes of communication.

Further, it has been found from the research that 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, generally the Roman or the Devanagari scripts are used, and hence, the contextual appropriateness of the meaning is difficult to ascertain as the transcription of the intonated sounds in these dialects are difficult.

It has also been established that the students are exposed to English as a medium of instruction and Hindi as the medium of oral communication rather than their mother tongue during their formative years of education. Due to improper articulation of sounds and gaps in the process of learning of the rules 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, there is a device dependence and excessive reliance on web portals and social media sites even for communication.

This is the first study of its kind to explore the communication strategies adopted by the L2 users of the northeast India on the social networking sites. The findings could be extended further to study the communication practices adopted online by the users belonging to specific communities of the region and their impact on the process of understanding and application of the rules of English in written and oral modes of communication.