Chapter 1

An Introduction to Language Anxiety, Proficiency and Online Communication

1.0 Introduction

Internet and electronic devices have changed the modes of human communication on the recent times. New styles of writing and oral communication have evolved with an advance in the technology and it is evident across all major languages of the world including English. Web platforms with their specific limitations and possibilities have resulted in an electronic convergence of the usage of various dialectal as well as idiolectal varieties of different languages spoken in the world today. The dynamism of the words owing to technological intervention has made languages more context-sensitive and relatively lax in terms of the application of the rules. This transition of the focus from the rules of language to the appropriateness of the context dominates the written and oral modes of communication today. It has also contributed significantly to forming web-based communities, in which the users bond with each other instantly on the basis of their understanding and interpretation of the context.

1.1 Language of the Internet

The term, 'internet linguistics,' was coined by David Crystal in the year 2005. He defines it as a 'synchronic analysis of language' (Crystal, 2005) which incorporates new linguistic styles and forms arising out of the Web Mediated Communication (WMC) such as e-mail, Internet Relay Chat (IRC), Instant Messaging (IM), and electronic mode of communication as texting, etc. The CMC in general and Internet and web, in particular, are instrumental in 'revolutionizing the way people communicate' (Crystal, 2005) both orally and in the written form. Crispin Thurlow in 'Internet and Language' (2001) presents five related areas where the impact of the internet on language is discernible, viz., electronic emergence and acceptability of multilingualism, language change, oral discourse, stylistic diffusion with a concomitant de-compartmentalization of jargons, and the emergence of metalanguage and folk linguistics. Considering its

impact on such fundamental areas of language as grammar, vocabulary, spelling and pronunciation, and the emergence of it as a genre, a proper 'internet management' (Crystal, 2010) and monitoring is required. The institutionalization of the genre in the recent time has generated much debate about the formal nature and correctness in the use of language. Linguists and educators differ over the merits of the medium. Linguists like Eleanor Johnson opines that while there are mistakes in writing and verbal discourse is strongly connected to internet usage, Crystal, on the other hand, attributes it to the 'notion of [contextual] appropriateness' (Crystal, 2010) over the emphasis on grammatical correctness as is the norm today and cite the findings of a research conducted by Coventry University, which in a testing situation, found that more the students involved in texting, the better their literary scores are. The research convincingly states that the 'best texters are [usually the] best spellers' (Crystal, 2010). This has also been revealed in one of the recent studies published in the British Journal of Developmental Psychology which states that the students who texted regularly displayed a more extensive range of vocabulary and orthographic creativity (BBC, 2009).

Such contradictory perspectives have raised quite a few pertinent questions regarding emergence and broader acceptability of the medium and contributing factors thereof. One of the primary factors for the same is the creation of a multiple-activity based digital habitat (Pohjola, 2011) incorporating 'a gigantic global network of desktops, applications, communication channels, web pages, photos, songs, and other digital objects' (May and Kristensen, 2004). To this is added the ever-expanding scope of mobile communication with high-end features and apps, resulting in what Mark terms as 'ubiquitous computing' where the computers and other electronic devices, in general, may 'disappear from people's awareness' (Mark, 1999).

Secondly, the dynamic nature of the medium has resulted in its greater acceptability and broader appeal. Unlike the written medium, the electronic medium facilitates framing, hypertexting, options to start instant threads in discussion groups and forums,

multimedia incorporation, etc. The economy and the effectiveness of the medium necessitated a medium, which is economically more effective and also 'cool and fashionable' (Crystal, 2010). Thus, the new language became a 'medium of bonding' (Crystal, 2010) with its 'artistic and innovative dimensions' (Crystal, 2010). The need of abbreviated language with alpha-numerals is further accentuated with the demands of certain portals, like Twitter, which imposed a character limit of 140, with virtually no scope for 'concatenated texting' (Crystal, 2008) as we have in case of the textese. The limitations of cyberspace communication have resulted in the designing of the emoticons too, albeit at the cost of 'emotivity' (Cicognani, 1998). With the advent of multimedia texting, blogs, instant messaging, this new medium has received the necessary impetus to grow exponentially. This vibrancy and openness is amply reflected in syntax, vocabulary, and style.

While this has addressed the question of information technology impacting language use, but at the same time, it has also raised several other queries pertaining to its use by students whose L1 is not English. Some of the prominent issues include the extent to which it impacts and influences their use of language for formal discourse, developing their levels of awareness and sensitization towards contextual appropriateness and strategies they adopt for '*bonding*' with a select few members of the 'groups' they form online. These are further related to their social behaviour and offline relationships, attachments and offline bonding, issues pertaining to internet addiction and anxiety, privacy and other social and ethical issues.

1.2 Theoretical Overview and Literature Review

While the studies on the impact of social networking on the English language are relatively recent with significant works starting from 2004 onwards, the social networking sites gained prominence and broader acceptability primarily after the emergence of Web 2.0 standards in the late 1990s. The abbreviated forms of language, which later morphed into textese, which are generally based on the emoticons and alpha-numeric styles of writing, however, dates back to the times of Lewis Carroll and

Queen Victoria (Crystal, 2013). One of the earliest examples of social networking happens to be ARPANET designed by the US Military in the 1970s, followed by MUDs (Multi-User Dungeons), BBS (Bulletin Board Systems) and chat rooms dealing with a range of topics and subjects (Barnes, 2001; Turkle, 1995). Web 2.0, on the other hand, has redefined connectedness and created a platform for seamless convergence of the online and offline social selves. It has also resulted in masking the real *self* while assuming several other *selves* catering to distinctive audiences and serving multiple purposes. The creation of content and sharing of the same too have undergone a tremendous change, with the same material being dished out separately to different identities who are connected with a user through different domains. Some of the major social networking sites created with the Web 2.0 architecture include Orkut (which was later acquired by Google and discontinued in September 2014), MySpace (created primarily with the purpose of sharing music online), Friendster, Bebo, Habbo, Facebook, and Google +_; hypermedia sites like YouTube and Flickr; micro-blogging sites like Tumblr, Twitter and Weibo (the Chinese micro-blogging site); location-based networking like Foursquare and interest and photo sharing sites like Pinterest, Flicker and Instagram. Web 2.0 has also facilitated branching out of networking sites from purely social to professional and academic networking through sites like LinkedIn and Academia.edu along and personalized blogs hosted by domains like Wordpress and Blogger, etc.

The roots of philosophical engagement with social networking sites can be traced back to Martin Heidegger's theory of technological determinism in which he views technology as a massive force that can impact and influence reality and other aspects of human relationships (Heidegger, 1954/1977). But the most significant push in the philosophical approach of computer-mediated communication which has its bearing on the language comes from Albert Borgmann's approach to the same wherein he considers technology as '*device paradigm*' (Borgmann, 1984) within which all our interactions take place and roll out for a wider reach of audience. Borgmann in his later works uses '*device paradigm*' specifically in the context of social networking sites

(particularly MUDs) by stating that these platforms create *'hyperreality'* (Borgmann, 1992) by offering "one another stylized versions of themselves for amorous or convivial entertainment" (Borgmann, 1992). He further terms web-mediated sociality as a 'virtual fog' (Borgmann, 1999) that blurs the offline social bonds with the 'glamour of virtuality' clouding the 'hardness of reality' (Borgmann, 1999).

The language used online also operates within a similar framework. The openness of the medium has given rise to the notion of *anything goes*. With a lack of proper check in the language used online, coupled with a lack of required internet management seen particularly in context of the target group of the present study, the factors for forming a 'convivial bonding' ranges from pretty mundane issues like bunking classes to something apparently serious like a bandh call, etc. However, the 'glamour of virtuality' operates in the language that one uses to form a bond where the distinction between an intentional use of a particular lingo and lack of knowledge of proper rules get blurred. Any attempt at putting checks or correcting the same result in getting snide remarks from proxy accounts, unfriending or blocking the person out of the group altogether. Such a tendency shows that no user is 'commandingly present' (Borgmann, 1992) in the social network platform. Instead, says Borgmann: "those who become present via a communication link have a diminished presence since we can always make them vanish if their presence becomes burdensome. Moreover, we can protect ourselves from unwelcome persons altogether by using screening devices…[Unfollowing/Unfriending/Blocking]…The extended network of hyperintelligence also disconnects us from the people we would meet incidentally [Offline]…"(Borgmann, 1992).

The latter part of the first decade of twenty-first century shifted the focus of study from ethical issues of social networking sites to issues like privacy, data mining, sharing of data, third-party applications and the changing styles of language in tune of the portal specific demands. It is during this period that the term social networking has gone beyond the erstwhile limited scope of Computer-Mediated Communication. The web

mode has been instrumental in converging the PC and mobile modes together. Instead of an 'immobile attachment' (Borgmann, 1992), mobility and instant connectivity have become a reality. Online interaction is no longer restricted to the billboards and private messaging of chat rooms, but it has become an essential requirement in the mobile mode. The launching of messenger applications like WhatsApp, Hike and Line, with its multimedia incorporation features and user customizability has become integral to being social and networked. This has also resulted in a near decline of the concatenated messaging that dominated text messaging for almost a decade. The subsequent launching of social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, video interaction apps like Skype and Viber etc. in the mobile mode have bridged the traditional physical gaps between devices and platforms. With the recent launching of 'connectivity' feature in Apple devices, which is likely to be followed by Microsoft's Windows 10 platform, convergence and a seamless sharing of data across devices and multiple users has become possible which will redefine the scopes of privacy and sharing rules in the days to come.

Amidst all these technological advancements, the language (to be) used in these portals *required* a change as well. The prompts and limitations of each of the portals need appropriation and innovation in language use. Each of the internet output has influenced the English style; the style used in one portal, Facebook, for instance, is indeed not the style used for Twitter or blogs or messages sent through WhatsApp, etc. Similarly, examples can be cited of text messaging through a carrier network and tweeting with the former having a scope of 160 characters and the latter, 140. While text messaging is generally private in nature with the flow of information restricted between two individuals or in some cases, between a group, tweets, on the other hand, involves texting through the web but to a broader audience across the globe. This implies that in case of the former, one can afford to be lax with regard to the use of language, the same cannot be true in case of the latter wherein the person who is sending out the message has to compose the message taking into consideration the

appropriateness of the content as well as the limitations of the portal. Likewise, the prompts in these platforms equally influence the style of the language used. For instance, Twitter used to prompt as 'What are you thinking?' or Facebook prompts as 'What's on your mind?' Such promptings make the user *look within* their own *selves* and post a glimpse of his personal thought or activity in words or in photographs using a style which is intensely personal. But when Twitter changed its prompt from 'What are you thinking?' to 'What's happening?' in 2009, it required a user to *look around* his surroundings and tweet about the same to be read, commented, favourite or re-tweeted by his followers on Twitter. The tenses in the prompts have altered along with the style of inputting the information. Technologies and software behind the same have impacted the way the users think and use language in specific ways.

While the issue of privacy remains central to the ever-increasing domains of social networking sites, the problems of language, ethics and management of content online have become equally relevant and intertwined with the evolution of a convergent and connected habitat. It is in this respect the theory of Contextual Integrity becomes all the more important. Contextual Integrity (Nissenbaum, 2010) requires respect for online privacy by sharing information in a manner that is contextually appropriate and sensitive. The 'context' in this sense includes not only the general categorization of the *public* and the *private* spaces, but it incorporates a wider range of social issues, values, ethics and norms. The theory of Contextual Integrity is based on four primary variables:

i. context or the frames of reference within which the data flow, where context could imply social, cultural, religious, academic and others

ii. the nature of response and positioning of the sender and the receiver of the data

iii. the content and type of data generated and transmitted

iv. the principle of transmission.

These four variables of the theory have a direct bearing on the language that is used to communicate or share information online. Unless the user is aware of the context in

which the posted or uploaded information, which may be in the form of text, picture or a video, is going to be received, interpreted and responded to by the followers or friends online, if the language used to share the same does not conform to the context-specific demands, the communication will fail as there would be a deviation from the contextual integrity norms resulting in gaps between the intended and the conveyed meaning of the information shared.

1.2.1 The Communication Accommodation Theory

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 analysing the same under the framework of Communication Accommodation Theory. The Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles and Coupland, 1991) posits that in order to make communication successful, the sender and receiver 'converge' their communicative behaviour in terms of verbal, paralinguistic and nonverbal features. The CAT operates by categorizing interactions into four characteristic parameters, namely:

(i)   In-groups, implying affiliation and a sense of belonging with a group

(ii)   Out-Groups, implying disaffiliation to a group

(iii)   Convergence, implying adaptive and altering communication behaviour, conforming to a group and thus getting social approval

(iv)   Divergence, implying a difference in communication behaviour between the conversation partners.

It has been observed among the target group that there is a conscious attempt on the part of the users to converge, particularly in the interpretation and responding to the posted information online. Further, the users are found to adopt different communicational strategies to remain affiliated, or 'in-grouped' and any discordant voice or divergent behaviour gets 'out-grouped.' The propensity to 'out-group', ignore, unfollow or unfriend the divergent conversational partners stem from anxiety which is social, cultural and linguistic. This explains their resistance to correct and accept what

is lexically or grammatically correct as the users felt that would result in having their lack of knowledge exposed and *de-exclusivize* their position.

1.3. English as L2 and FLA among the students of Arunachal Pradesh

Apart from masking the lack of understanding of rules, English used by the students of the target group for communicating online also helps in concealing their Foreign Language Anxiety as is observed from their learning and use of English. The causes of anxiety are deeply rooted in the socio-cultural and linguistic background of the students, particularly the students of various Arunachalee communities. There are twenty-six major tribes in Arunachal Pradesh with their unique beliefs and traditional customs. The Tibeto-Burman language family serves as the root of the dialects spoken in the state. Though the major dialects like Adi, Galo, Tagin, Nyshi, Apatani, etc. fall under the *Tani* group and share a common root, yet each dialect is different in terms of structure, semantics, phonetics and other linguistic features. Most of the communities, barring do not have a written script except for the Tibetan and Tai-Khampti script used for Buddhist religious texts in the districts of Kameng and Lohit. (Elwin, 1957). The Galo community has, however, recently developed their own script and the Adis too are developing a script which would be keyboard friendly. A majority of the dialects spoken in the state do not have such grammatical markers as personal pronouns, gender or number. Due to the lack of such markers, it has been found in the research that the performance of the students while using L2, i.e., English, gets impacted severely by their respective L1s. Having a distinctive sound pattern unique to different dialects coupled with an absence of certain sounds have a marked influence on their orthographical skills in English.

There are twenty-six major tribes in Arunachal Pradesh, and each tribe is marked by distinctive rituals, customs, traditions, costumes, and dialect. Although a majority of the tribes belong to the *Tani* group of families, yet there exist significant differences in articulation and language structure. The diversity of dialects and communities in the

state has impacted the adoption of a common language. As the dialects spoken in the state do not have a script, dictionaries (though some of these have been compiles only in the recent times) and written forms of literature, the stories and the traditions followed in the state have passed on from generation to generation orally. This, along with the geographical remoteness of the region has resulted in the delayed development of education in the state. As there was no common language across the state, Assamese was the medium of instruction, and it also served as a *link language* between the hills of the state and the plains of the neighbouring Assam. It was only in 1971 that English became the medium of instruction in schools and official language of the state. Though there have been attempts at digitizing and archiving the traditional and indigenous knowledge systems in the recent times along with works of fiction based on the myths and customs of different tribes in English, yet the transfer of the same mostly continues to be done orally across generations.

It is against this backdrop that Foreign Language Anxiety of the Arunachalee students has to be seen. While many private schools have come up with English as a medium of instruction in the recent years, yet a creolized form of Hindi is primarily followed in these schools for education and oral communication. Similarly, NEFAmese and Assamese are generally preferred by the masses, apart from Hindi, for general and inter-tribe verbal communication. Though the government schools made English mandatory as a medium of instruction, yet due to the lack of adequately trained teachers and language teaching infrastructure, the desired outcome has not been positive thus, impacting the entire process of teaching as well as the acquisition of English as an L2 by the students. In the schools, it has been found that the students are rarely taught the application of grammatical rules in English vis-à-vis their differences with the grammar of their respective L1s. Instead, the students were made to cram the rules of grammar more from the perspective of examinations rather than using the same in a contextually appropriate manner.

However, of late it has been observed that the same has been the norm in most of the schools in the region. But the severity of the impact is most seen in the state of

Arunachal Pradesh which houses twenty-six major tribes and a number of sub-tribes and each having different traditions, customs, rituals and linguistic differences. This is because of the fact that there is no uniform language, no uniform script and the mode of communication among different communities is primarily oral and no written literature in the native dialects. The only available literature based on customs and myths are published using the Roman or Devanagari scripts. The same is true in case of online communication as well where the users have no choice but to use either of the two scripts to communicate in their native dialect and many a time, the means get lost as nasal, nasalized and the varying degrees of the stressed and intonated sounds are difficult to transcribe. Due to the lack of proper learning of the rules or any other academic intervention, the students devise their own strategies to negotiate with the problem, and in the process, they develop notions about being *correct*. As they don't have the skills to identify the errors they commit in both oral and written forms of communication, the students rely heavily on the uncurated and non-standard web-based resources and translation services offered by Google and Bing. Further, it has also been found that the students while composing something on the screen, in case of an error in spelling or structure as highlighted by the squiggles, they opt for the first option that is suggested by the software instead of applying reason in terms of the application of the rule. As the students cannot distinguish between the *offer* and *propositional* mode of writing and meaning, there is a significant reliance on web-based tools and the same is reflected in both written and oral modes of communication with an overlap of the formal and informal modes of communication.

The study takes into consideration the convergence of electronically mediated and the web-mediated modes of communication in tune with the devices and synergized language platforms used across these devices. With appropriate use of communication strategies, the gaps in the F2F communication can be minimized. However, the strategies have to be devised taking into account the limitations of the respective portals and devices. Designing such a strategy have become more straightforward with the creation of a 'digital habitat' (Pohjola, 2011) which has become possible because of 'ubiquitous computing' (Mark, 1999)**.** Adaptability to such a device prominent environment works in two levels which impacts the use of language as well. The first level pertains to the user of the devices and portals who improvises and innovates the

language and communication strategies to fit into the limitations of such devices and portals. The second level pertains to the app developers, program writers, and coders who are continually devising newer ways to make the interfaces of such portals and devices easier and friendlier for the user to communicate.

1.4. Major works

Crystal's 'Language and Internet' (2006) is the first definitive work on the effect on the effect of the internet on language and addresses some of the pertinent issues as internet vis-à-vis literacy and orthography of English language, the stylistic factors giving way to technobabble, the creation of virtual communities, etc. Crystal's work further reflects on the user's customization of languages to the emergence of *netlish* across multiple platforms as instant messaging, blogs and web portals, which he later expands to incorporate textese in 'Txtng: the Gr8 Db8' (2008). These two works by Crystal expands the scope of internet (electronic) linguistics, of which he presents an overview in his paper 'The Scope of Internet Linguistics' in February 2005. The change of meaning in the synchronous and asynchronous mode of online communication has been dealt with extensively by Davis. H. Boyd and Jeutonne Brewer in 'Electronic Discourse: Linguistic Individuals in Virtual Space' (1997). According to Boyd and Brewer, the written form and idiolectal differences can be prominently marked in the synchronous modes of communication and in the process, attempts at creating newer communities. As an extension of the idea of creating virtual communities, Keeble and Loader in 'Community Informatics: Shaping Computer-Mediated Social Relations' (2001) explores the role of Computer-mediated Communication and the formation of user-based communities, starting new social relationships and the changing dynamics of human relationships.

However, it is Bodomo whose work 'Computer-Mediated Communication for Linguistics and Literacy' (2010) provides us with the operation of language with all its limitations in multiple platforms of different IT gadgets. The work is of particular importance in that the author presents his findings on the basis of the use of language in the post Web 2.0 arena, which provides an option for the user to switch over between

multiple platforms and customize language according to portal specific limitations. The foundational framework of Bodomo's work has been applied by Magnan in 'Mediating Discourse Online' (2008) to address the issue of increasingly blurring boundaries between the written and oral discourse vis-à-vis electronic communication. Through extensive field surveys, Magnan presents that the for the frequent users of the electronic medium of communication, the switchover from multiple portals also results in a concomitant lack of consideration for the specified rules of the distinction between written and oral discourse. The impact of Computer-Mediated Communication on Japanese, Portuguese, German and Swedish is dealt with in Danet and Herring edited volume 'The Multilingual Internet: Language, Culture and Communication Online' (2007).

Writing about websites and CMC in the late nineties, Wellman foresaw the advent of Social Networking Sites and attempted to define it as:

"*…when a computer network connects people; it is a social network. Just as a computer network is a set of machines connected by a set of cables, a social network is a set of people (organizations or other social entities) connected by a set of socially meaningful relationships*" (Wellman, 1997.pp: 179).

This definition has actually set the tone for the creation of social networking sites on a later date as technological intervention, that can be controlled, customized and re-created, to manage human and offline relationships. This is also corroborated by Androutsopoulos (2010) who, while classifying it into four stages, viz., organization, interaction, self-procrastination and spectacle, finds it as an extension of personal websites.

However, there exists as robust debate regarding the appropriateness of the term 'Social Networking Sites' over 'Social Network Sites' with Boyd and Ellison (2008) terming Facebook as a 'Social Network Site' stating that the term 'networking' implies 'starting of a relationship between strangers' as the sole reason for having an account. That would mean a deviation from the original philosophy behind the creation of social

networking sites as an extension of offline human relationships to an online platform traversing physical geographical boundaries. Instead, Boyd and Ellison opine that the Social *Network* Platforms provides the user with the options to 'articulate and make visible there [already existing] social networks' (Boyd and Ellison, 2008). Beer (2008), on the other hand, critiques the term 'Social *Network* Sites' as a term that is too narrow in scope and slightly favoured creation of an umbrella term such as Web 2.0 with multiple classifications and categories as Wikis, Mashups, Social Networking Sites, Instant Message Portals, etc.

Drawing upon Boyd and Ellison's positioning of the term along with Beer's analysis of the same, the term Social Networking Sites thus, imply 'maintenance of pre-existing social networks' along with attempts to connect with strangers 'based on shared interest, political views or activities' that helps the user to 'construct a public or semi-public [also private] profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system…' (Boyd and Ellison, 2008: pp. 210-211). Such a 'bounded system' helps in creating a separate 'social space' that is 'regulated and [continuously] articulated' by the list of friends and other descriptors.

Considering the scope of the current study, the term Social *Networking* Sites has been used all throughout rather than Social *Network* Sites.

While the definition and use mostly veered in favour of '*networking*' over '*network*' in the recent years, a major shift is witnessed in terms of language as used in the Social Networking Sites. English language, which is usually referred to as the 'medium of globalization' (Wright, 2004: 157), continues to remain the dominant language for online communication as well as the creation of portal architectures which are generally based on ASCII (American Standard Code for Information Exchange) characters. However, a largely monolingual internet has, in the recent years, created space for other languages and opened up for multilingual customization. The development of Unicode

too has immensely contributed in making the web and mobile platforms multilingual. Androutsopoulos terms this as 'linguistic locality' which he defines as:

'a discourse process by which globally available media content is modified [or appropriated] in a local manner, involving linguistic transformation to a local code and an orientation to a specific audience, defined by means of language choice' (Androutsopoulos, 2010:205).

Linguistic localization has also helped in creating and occupying new markets and targeting more modern audiences.

In the recent years, a number of studies have been conducted to show the impact of Computer-Mediated Communication on academics and learning. In many cases, the openness of the medium has proven to be facilitative enough to provide a platform for free interaction on the part of the users devoid of any anxiety of being checked or corrected. According to Overbaugh and Lin (2006), using Computer-Mediated Communication as a complementary pedagogic tool has helped in de-hierarchizing the traditional classroom which is found to be a significant cause of anxiety among the students. This apart, online communication is found to show a demonstrable improvement in critical and analytical thinking abilities (Jin, 2005). Using synchronous communication platforms have shown a marked increase in students' interaction and opened up options to share multiple perspectives on a given subject (Newlin and Wang, 2002). This has proved to be particularly true in the case of Twitter, WhatsApp and messenger platforms. With mobile telephony rolling out 3G services, posting and sharing of views, comments and generating opinions too have become very prompt. The same can be said of accessing the internet instantly in order to find solutions to problems given by the teachers, finding meanings of words and expressions, searching references, etc. – the result of which is an active classroom with a set of engaged learners.

Against the historical background provided vis-à-vis with their interaction and interface through web and electronic media, one of the first observations evident from the current

study is that the respondents have very little or no formal knowledge of the rules pertaining to their respective L1s vis-à-vis English. This is one of the primary reasons for their inability to identify the nature of the errors they commit while communicating in L2, i.e., English. Secondly, this is also the primary reason for their failure to point out the differences in the rules of grammar and usage in their native L1s and English, resulting in anxiety towards English. The "state of apprehension, a vague fear" (Scovel, 1978, p. 134) makes learning as well as performance using English difficult for the respondents (Balachandran and Skully, (2004); Tobias & Everson (1997) and Gaudy and Spielberger (1971). Anxiety impacts negatively on every cognitive process pertaining to learning a language starting from inputting, processing, and the final output in the form of feedback (Tobias 1979, 1980, 1986). The scope of classroom anxiety has been extended by Horwitz *et* al. (1986) to propound the theory of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) which detriments in a proper acquisition of a language. The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety has been defined by Horwitz *et al.* as:

"a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process." (pp.128, 1986)

MacIntyre and Gardner (1985) too have agreed upon Horwitz's theory and stated that foreign language anxiety increases the tendency to self-assess negatively, which subsequently impacts a student's performance in the class negatively.

With the creation of a device prominent environment and a 'digital habitat' (Pohjola, 2011), coupled with a lack of any systemic strategy or academic mechanism to deal with FLCA, the respondents deal with it on their own by resorting to the social networking sites and messaging platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp. In the process, these platforms owing to the comfortability of the interface, a lax structure with no checks on the language and structure, becomes the major facilitator of communication between peer to peer, student to the instructor (and as a result, instructor to the student) and other such participants of the communication process. The nature of communication ranges from sharing information to gathering knowledge and general chat among the *friends* and followers. The *easy* mode of communication as provided

by these portals are found to serve two principal purposes for the respondents: firstly, it helps in getting their errors in the process of communication ignored, and their lack of knowledge of the same gets masked, and secondly, such *errors appear* to be *deliberate,* and in the process, it becomes fashionable and gets viral as friends and followers start liking and sharing the post. As the number of such *likes* and shares increase, the errors become a *trend* which gets followed and in the process, it gets validated. The result is an overlapping use of the same in both formal and informal modes of speaking and writing.

In the recent corpus of studies, Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) includes the electronic mode of communication facilitated through mobile telephony and apps as well. While in the process of communicating online, including decoding and subsequent feedback, the understanding of and appropriating the context in which a message gets encoded is generally perceived as difficult unless both the sender and the receiver share a standard frame of reference, but John December's study (1997) has imparted a significant shift when the definition of CMC has been expanded to include different context in which communication takes place, and the same gets interpreted online. Similar studies have been conducted to identify and establish relationship between the psycho-social factors in communication and machine-mediated or web-mediated communication, the prominent among them being the studies by Kiesler, Siegel, and McGuire, 1984; Kling and Gerson, 1977; McGuire, 1983; Spears and Lea, 1992; Spears, Lea, and Lee, 1990. The impact of social context on CMC has been analyzed in the studies by Feenberg, 1989, 1992; Fulk, Schmitz, and Steinfield, 1990; Fulk, Schmitz, and Schwartz, 1992; Georgoudi and Rosnow, 1985; Lea, 1992; Martin, O'Shea, Fung, and Spears, 1992; Schmitz and Fulk, 1991. However, all the studies mentioned above have been conducted with a homogeneous sample with a common language (mostly English as L1) and common set devices as well as portals. December's study marks a deviation from all these in that it made a categorical distinction of CMC, WMC and electronic or mobile telephony mode of communication technologically and terminologically and advocated integration of all three to analyze different contexts in which communication takes place.

It is along these lines that the current study is conducted in which WMC includes both the web-mediated and mobile or electronic mediated communication. Herring in his research (2007) validates December's argument by bringing together these three modes of online communication by stating that the common factor which binds the three happens to be the internet which mediates through a similar architecture of ideating, encoding, transmitting and subsequent decoding. The recent technological advancements in the field of voice input search as in the case of Siri (for Apple devices) or Google Assistant (for Android devices) or Cortana (for Microsoft devices) falls within the domain of the integration of modes as suggested by December and Herring in the later stages.

The present study also attempts to establish that the L2 users of English, particularly in the technical institutions of Northeast India, tend to use the online and electronic mode of communication as a strategy to mask their lack of knowledge of grammatical rules of English and appropriateness of its usage. This is where the study differs from Crystal's position of best texters as the best spellers. Instead, it has been found that there is a growing tendency of reductionism in use of English for communicative purposes which to a large extent, compromises on grammatical and stylistic correctness. This is especially true of a sizeable number of students, particularly those in technical institutions, who are active and fluent users of computers and internet and have widely adopted a descriptivist approach towards language use. However, with a lack of the proper knowledge of the grammatical rules, the students are found to form their own perceptions of correctness, based primarily on observing peer behaviour and language use on the internet especially, the social networking sites, blogs and mobile messaging through WhatsApp, and regular texts.

The study hypothesizes that a majority of the students in technical institutions lack the proper application of the grammatical rules. While Crystal says that the students remain aware of the distinction between the language used in formal contexts and the language used to communicate online or through electronic medium, which remains the fact for the students whose L1 is English, the same doesn't hold true for the students whose L1

is not English, and they have learnt the same as L2 as a part of their curriculum. The root of the problem lies in the feeder level institutions where grammar and style are seldom taught in a manner where students could understand the rules and apply accordingly. Instead, the learning is by rote and is restricted to the domain of traditional grammar only. This has resulted in the students' inability to write and express without knowing the explicit rules of grammar, but using it intuitively and at times, by just following the *trend*. With no mechanism to check the correctness or appropriateness of the *trending* lingo, the rules of language get compromised. With the background of intuitive command dominating over the conscious command of language, the students use the web as a medium to communicate with their peers and share their thoughts online. In the process, they adopt and improvise the lingo, they *exclusivize* themselves by 'bonding' with closed-user group/friends, and in the process, their errors get accepted as 'fashionable' and in some cases, anti-conventional in terms of language use. This is particularly evident in erroneous spelling, faulty punctuation, improper capitalization or non-capitalization and incorrect pronunciation in hypermedia sites as well as Instant Messaging (IMs), Internet Relay Chats (IRCs) and Voice Chats.

This apart, proposed study would also focus on the emergence and overlap of this new conversation discourse and negotiation of interpersonal communication in a transcultural network by taking into account the 'construct' and 'recognition of social context' (Wood *et al,* 2005) and 'structural settings' (Danet and Herring, 2007) associated with the interpretation of meaning.

1.5 Objectives and Hypotheses of the Study:
The primary objectives of the research 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 to the 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.

•   To identify the reasons for the overlap of e-lingo on the formal modes of oral and written communication.

A majority of student-users with their incorrect use of grammar, spelling and style are using Web Mediated Communication to get their errors 'circulated' and 'promoted' through widespread and regular use in the online portals as a medium of *bonding* and *exclusivizing*. The lack of a proper technological tool to ensure a lexically and grammatically correct usage across languages too is adding up to the gradual decline in the importance of using English correctly.

Drawing upon the core principles of Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), the present research will focus on the interpretation of the message by the sender according to the respective frames of reference and the resultant feedback by the receiver through analysis of their updates, posts and tweets using the data generated on their timelines and tweet feeds. The use of 'Errors' in the title thus, implies approaching the topic from a communicational perspective by drawing references to the target group's online behaviour, rather than from a purely grammatical or core linguistic perspectives, and will attempt at showing a link between the language they use online and its impact on their offline language and vice versa.

1.5.1 Hypotheses

The hypotheses of the study are:

(i) The web-mediated and other forms of electronic communication has become a medium to hide the lack of grammatical and stylistic rules of the English language.

(ii) Local factors are responsible for the emergence of new styles and forms in web-mediated communication

(iii) Lack of control over the use of language in the electronic and web mode impacts the users' language in oral and written modes of communication.

(iv) There is a substantial degree of Foreign Language Anxiety with respect to the use of the English language.

(v) The innovations are strategized to cover up the lack of correct knowledge and rules of the English language.

(vi) There is an overlap of e-lingo on the formal modes of oral and written communication.

1.6. Methodology:

The sample size for the current study is three hundred students who are pursuing undergraduate studies in different branches of engineering at the North Eastern Regional Institute of Science and Technology (NERIST), Arunachal Pradesh. To analyze the strategies adopted for communication online and the styles of language use, the timelines of Facebook of the respondents along with their Twitter feed and responses on Piazza have been observed. Apart from the timeline, branch-specific communities on Facebook have been formed in which materials and information pertaining to the syllabus and class have been posted in order to generate responses in both synchronous and asynchronous modes. The responses have been further tallied with their formal modes of communication during their oral presentations and writing in the examinations as a part of their academic requirement. The nature of communication has been deliberately kept *open,* and interaction has been mostly de-hierarchized.

1.6.1 Instruments

For the purpose of the study, three questionnaires have been used. The questionnaires have been prepared using the Google docs, and the same has been uploaded online with the respective URLs posted on the Facebook pages and the Piazza platform created for each class and individual branches. The constituents of the sample are heterogeneous as the respondents who are studying at NERIST are from all the eight states of the northeast as well as some students coming from the other states of India. The two most prominent factors which necessitated the use of online questionnaires include the respondents' comfortability with the medium and access to the devices, and a flexible and non-uniform class schedule. Being a split campus, posting the questionnaires online ensured reach and access to each member of the target group and the responses had been generated within the stipulated time frame given to them.

The following are the three questionnaires which are used in the study:

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

(ii)   The Language Proficiency Questionnaire

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

The ELCAS is an appropriated form of the FLCAS, the standard questionnaire devised by E. K. Horwitz, M. B. Horwitz and J. Cope (1986). It was used to measure the intensity of anxiety of the users with respect to the use of English as a language for communication. The results derived from this questionnaire were tallied with the results obtained from the respective questionnaires on testing Language Proficiency and Web and Social Media Proficiency.

The Language Proficiency Questionnaire was designed taking into account the classroom composition, prospective respondents, and the intended target group. 'The Language Experience and Proficiency Questionnaire' (LEAP-Q) (Marian, V., Blumenfeld, H.K., & Kaushanskaya, M., (2007)) and 'Language History Questionnaire' (Li, P., Sepanski, S., and Zhao, X., (2006)) served as the models for designing this questionnaire.

The Web and Social Media Proficiency (WeSoMP) Questionnaire was prepared to take into account the indicative behavior of the respondents and their presence and range of activities in the social network media.

Five-point Likert Scale has been used in the first two questionnaires, viz., the English Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (ELCAS) and the Language Proficiency Questionnaire. The score has been kept in the range of 1 to 5 indicating *strong disagreement* and *strong agreement* of a position respectively. The scores in each questionnaire are derived by summation of the responses. The findings of each questionnaire are further tallied and analyzed by taking into account the language and strategies adopted by the respondents in online communication in different portals and

social networking sites along with their oral presentations and writing for academic purposes.

To handle the issue of privacy, a declaration in writing has been given stating that the data is used for the specific purpose of this study. The images, personal information, and IDs have been pixelated to conceal the respondents' identities.

The present study focuses on styles of the language used in the social networking sites as well as in text messaging. Against the backdrop of lack of a proper script among the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, and proper grammatical knowledge of a majority of the students of northeast, the study takes into account the student-users' interactional strategies in the online mode along with their use of various language learning tools and software widely available on the web. The recent technology support for the incorporation of native languages, the development of Unicode and their impact on code-switching and metalanguage too has been assessed.

The data are based on detailed questionnaires pertaining to the grammatical and linguistic competence of the user, along with his/her comfortability in navigating and using multiple networking sites. The sample for the data has been drawn from the students' use of social networking sites as Facebook and micro-blogging site Twitter. The collected data has been used to interpret the language used by them in their web portals, profile pages of their social and professional networking sites, and in IMs, IRCs and voice chat portals.

Comparative analysis is done between their uses of language in an online mode with their use of the same in more formal contexts such as written/oral medium as reflected in their answer scripts, assignments and oral presentations.

1.7. Thesis Overview

The Introductory chapter deals with the theoretical framework and the objectives of the study. The chapter provides a comprehensive literature review along with a detailed description of the methodology that is used for the research.

A specific literature review is also given in the individual chapters of the thesis.

The second chapter, which is titled as 'Foreign Language Anxiety among the L2 Users of English,' focuses primarily on defining and assessing English language anxiety of the second language learners in the classroom. The assessment is based on the interpretation of data collected using the English Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (ELCAS) questionnaire. Summation of each aspect of anxiety is tallied with their use of the English language in various contexts. The students were tested in classroom situations, and the nature of their problems in the language use would be categorized. Similarly, the strategies they adopt to negotiate their problems with language in the electronic media have been identified and documented.

The third chapter, 'Proficiency Acquisition in English as a Second Language,' assesses the students' level of proficiency using Language Use and Proficiency questionnaire. The results of this questionnaire are an extension of the findings of the ELCAS. The data derived from both the chapters have been used collectively in the core chapter along with the results of the Social Media and Web Proficiency Questionnaire.

The fourth chapter, which is titled as 'Communication Strategies adopted Online by the L2 Users of English,' is based on the interpretation of data collected using the Social Media and Web Proficiency questionnaire to assess the level of comfortability on the part of the users in navigating through various social networking sites and blogs. The findings of the questionnaire have been tallied and justified with the data derived from the two other questionnaires dealt individually in the two preceding chapters. The attempt has been made to explore the levels of syntactic and stylistic customization

employed by the students in dealing with the restrictions and conditions imposed by several portals. Profiles, status updates, and posts on Facebook and Twitter along with the blog posts are used to highlight such customizations by the user. The chapter also deals with the deal with the levels of understanding, responding and creating 'exclusive zones' by the users, bound together by a familiar pattern of language use.

The concluding chapter provides a summation of the findings of the previous chapters and justifies the objectives of the study.