Communicative Strategies in Facebook Interaction: A Case Study of Kashmir University Students

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Abstract

Communicative Strategies are conceived of as effective problem solving devices employed by learners of a second language to cope up with communicative difficulties. While these strategies can be effectively employed in both spoken and written media, however studies undertaken on their role in the later medium are very few. The present study aims to understand the use of the Communicative Strategies being employed in Facebook communication by the students of university of Kashmir. Since Facebook communication essentially involves the written medium, the paper will attempt to highlight the role of these strategies in this form of communication. Effort will be made to explain the language choice among English, Urdu and native Kashmiri, made by these students while communicating on Facebook. Furthermore the study has highlighted the declining use of Perso-Arabic script for writing Urdu and Kashmiri and its replacement by Roman script.

Keywords: Facebook, Communicative Strategies, Language Choice, Kashmiri

Communicative Strategies
In the research on Second Language Acquisition (SLA), the concept of Communicative Strategies (CSs) has gained much significance given the large number of studies, both empirical as well as theoretical, it has prompted. The term Communicative Strategy was introduced by Selinker in 1972 in his seminal paper Interlanguage. It has been established that learners of a second language when faced with problems in expressing themselves in that language resort to certain strategies to prevent communication breakdown, called as Communicative strategies. These may be thought of as communication augmenting responses from a second language learner to evade linguistic difficulties in a communicative situation (Corder, 1983), (Long, 1983), (Natakani, 2006). According to Stern, CSs are the "techniques of coping with difficulties in communicating in an imperfectly known second language" (1983, 411). CSs may thus be viewed as

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problem solving devices employed by learners of a second language when faced with problems caused by lack of linguistic resources to convey the intended meaning (Ellis, 1986). Besides being problem oriented, CSs are considered to be conscious decisions on the part of the learner. CSs are "potentially conscious plans for solving what to an individual presents itself as a problem in reaching a particular communicative goal" (Faerch and Kasper, 1980, 81). These may, however, not be confused with learning strategies. Learning strategies are part of the whole language learning process while as CSs are employed to meet the current need to communicate. "If learning strategies are the long term solution to the problem, communicative strategies provide the short-term answer" (Ellis 1986, 181).

Available literature indicates that CSs have been conceptualized in two broad perspectives; the psycholinguistic and interactional perspective. In the psychological perspective, upheld by Faerch and Kasper (1980), CSs are treated as mental problem solving techniques. In this perspective CSs have been classified as reduction strategies (message abandonment, topic avoidance and meaning replacement) and 'achievement strategies' that include appeal, literal translation, code-switching, restructuring and word coinage. The interactional perspective, advocated by Tarone, (1980) emphasizes the actual communication taking place between speakers, the joint negotiation of meaning and the realization of CSs. According to her communicative strategy is "a mutual attempt of two interlocutors to agree on a meaning in situations where requisite meaning structures do not seem to be shared" (ibid, 419). Tarone's CSs include paraphrase (approximation, word coinage, circumlocution), transfer (literal translation, language switch), appeal for assistance, mime and avoidance (topic avoidance and message abandonment).

Dornyei (1995) has highlighted two divisions of CSs; avoidance (reduction) and compensation (achievement). Owing to the lack of linguistic resources, a learner may resort to avoidance and has been reported to be the frequently employed communicative strategy (Hua et al, 2012). Compensatory strategies are invoked to compensate for the missing knowledge and include circumlocution, time-gaining etc.

Ellis (1986) has identified six factors affecting the use of CSs. These are proficiency level of learner, effects of problem source, effects of personality and learning situation. In general more proficient learners of a second language employ compensatory strategies and less proficient learners resort to avoidance strategies (Nakatani, 2006). It has been reported that code-switching would be more frequently employed if there are close cognates between first and second language. Referring to Tarone (1977), Ellis reports that personality factors may have a strong correlation with preferred CSs. Learning situation may affect the choice of CSs employed. In natural settings more CSs may be employed than a

classroom setting (Ellis, 1986). McIntyre and Noels (1996) report that learners with high motivation use CSs more frequently.

Avoidance or Reduction Strategies	
Message Abandonment	Lack of sufficient communicative skills in English leading to abandonment of conversation in English
Topic Avoidance	Lack of sufficient communicative skills in English leading to avoidance of a certain topic of conversation
Achievement or Compensatory Strategies	
Literal translation	Literally translating a word form Urdu or English to cope with the communicative difficulty in English
Borrowing or code switching	Learners borrowing words from Urdu or Kashmiri or entirely shifting to Urdu or Kashmiri in case of communicative difficulty in English
Foreignizing	Learners employing an Urdu or Kashmiri word by morphologically and phonologically adjusting it to English
Approximation or Generalization	Use of a near equivalent word of English in the absence of a specific word
Word coinage	Creation of a non-existent word of English
Circumlocution	Explanation or description of an event/action in the absence of a specific word of English.
Use of all-purpose words	Use of general words of English in place of a specific word

Table 1: List of most common Communicative Strategies

CSs have been considered to be part of what has come to be known as strategic competence (Brown, 2000). Strategic competence, in its turn is thought to be part of Communicative competence (Canale and Swain, 1980). According to them, communicative competence, besides grammatical and sociolinguistic competence comprises of discourse competence which is the knowledge of intersentential relationship and strategic competence. Strategic competence is the ability of a learner to employ "verbal and nonverbal communication strategies to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to performance variables or due to insufficient competence" (ibid, 30). Paribakht (1985) regards strategic competence as the ability of a learner to invoke solutions to the communication problems. According to him the solutions include "both production strategies (oral and written) used to solve lexical, syntactic, and sociolinguistic problems in communicating a message, and reception strategies (aural and written) used to solve similar problems in receiving the message" (p. 142).

Table 1 presents the most common communication strategies adapted from Tarone (1977) and Faerch and Kasper (1984).

1. Communicative Strategies in Written Medium

Available literature indicates that CSs have been generally conceived for their role in the spoken form of language and very few studies have been undertaken to find out their role in written medium. However, as Ellis (1986) points out that, communicative problems can occur in monologues like writing and as such any model of CSs should be broad enough to accommodate the strategies employed in written medium as well. To explore the relationship between English language proficiency and the use of CSs in written medium, a significant empirical study has been conducted by Aliakbari & Allvar (2009) among Iranian English language learners. The authors have concluded that the rate of use of Reconceptualization strategies like paraphrase increases with increase in language proficiency and simultaneously the rate of use of Substitution strategies like borrowing decreases. The study further reveals that with use of CSs in general decreases with the increase in proficiency because of the reason that "……with higher proficiency, the learners' linguistic repertoire becomes more established and more developed which reduces the gaps in their performance to fill with strategies" (10).

Another important study to understand the use of CSs in written medium has been undertaken by Xhaferi (2012). The empirical study conducted on the native Albanian students majoring in English language and Literature indicates the frequent use of CSs in written medium by the learners. The study concludes that among the various CSs in terms of their usefulness, circumlocution was the most frequently employed technique followed by approximation. Appeal for help was third useful strategy and literal translation stood at fourth place. The study further reveals that the use of CSs varied between male and female learners. While the most frequently used strategy by female participants was approximation, the male participants used circumlocution more than any other strategy.

Ambrose (1998) studied the CSs employed by ESL first year BSc students of University of Botswana in writing their Biology answers and found out that these students used several CSs like circumlocution, paraphrase and generalization. However the author concluded that these strategies didn't help the students in improving their performance because of the subject specific technical terms of the subject involved.

2. Facebook

Social media provides users with deep and rich experience for participation, interaction and collaboration. Various social media tools allow their users to create and share information on the web and collaborate with others interactively thus making easier to find information and connect online with one another. Social media and Web 2.0 tools have made its impact in higher education, and majority of learning management systems that are used in higher education have

integrated these within their feature sets. It is used for e-learning as they have created opportunities for effective teacher-learner, learner-learner and teacher-teacher communication, interaction and collaboration. With the inclusion of mobile technology, there has not only been an intense rise in the number and type of social media tools but their use is also on increase. In developed countries like USA, Poland, UK and Korea at least four in ten adult citizens use social media tools. Social media sites dominate the Internet usage in Asia and the Pacific (Human Capital Institute, 2010). In comparison to men, women are more actively engaged in social media sites (Susanto and Goodwin, 2010). Though currently the use of social media sites is more popular among youngsters but studies are revealing that there is an increasing trend of participation by elders from last few years. In general social media can be classified in the following four categories: a) online networks and ecosystems – e.g. Facebook LinkedIn, MySpace and Twitter, b) online publications – e.g. YouTube, Flicker, RSS, SlideShare and Twitter, c) Online collaborative platforms – e.g. Wikis like MediaWiki, blogs like Wordpress or Blogger, and collaborative office solutions like Office365, Google Docs, MS Lync, Debategraph, Teamwork or WorkSpot, and d) online feedback systems – e.g. voting and debating, rating and commenting, surveys, polls, blogs, etc. Online networks and ecosystems build and reflect the networks and relationships between peers. Online publication tools provide services or platforms for sharing and publishing content online. Collaborative platforms facilitate cooperative and work processes between people. Tools for online feedback facilitate input from an audience through one-way or two-way communication. To promote business many organizations have included social media in their organizational structure. Governments of various nations have also incorporated social media in e-governance, however, to make this integration secure and more efficient they have devised frameworks, policies and guidelines that regulate this integration.

Facebook (http://www.facebook.com) was launched by a Harvard sophomore in February 2004 and was initially restricted to students of Harvard and expanded to all universities, schools within two years. Nowadays anyone of age 13 or older can open an account on Facebook and create personal profiles such as personal information, quotes, pictures, audio, movies, video, etc. and establish connections with other users and establish peer-relationship based social network. Users besides posting information can also interact with other users by commenting, liking or sharing posts of other users. Facebook though similar to other social networking sites has several unique characteristics that include several tools, documentation, and application programming interface (API) for third-party integration. In July 2010, Facebook announced that it had over 500 million users. By February2011, Facebook had over 250 million users in the US (Nielsen Company, 2011), and the number of Facebook users in the Arab world almost doubled between 2009 and 2010 (Dubai School of Government 2011. Facebook can also be accessed via mobile technologies, with Facebook Mobile enabling users to update their Status, browse their 'News Feed' and view friends' 'Profiles'

from a mobile phone. In 2011 it was also revealed that from more than 500 million global users 50% of active users log in every day, the average friends for a user are 130, on an average a user is connected to 80 community pages, groups and events, more than 200 million users access Facebook through mobile devices and on an average of 10,000 new websites integrate with Facebook on external websites every day.

3. The Present Study

The state of Jammu and Kashmir of the Indian union comprises of three distinct geographical divisions, Kashmir valley, Jammu and Ladakh. The native language of majority of the people of Kashmir is Kashmiri, while in Jammu two major languages spoken are Dogri and Kashmiri[1]. Ladakhi and Balti are two major languages spoken in Ladakh division. Urdu is the official language of the state that serves as Lingua Franca for the people. English is the main language of education and administration. In the Kashmir valley, besides Kashmiri, majority of the people can communicate in Urdu, especially the educated sector. English as part of education and governance is also employed by the latter by specific purposes.

Given the increasing popularity of Facebook among the youth of Kashmir, the present study aims to establish empirically, the language choice and the CSs employed by the post-graduate students of the University of Kashmir in their Facebook Usage. The prevalent multilingualism among the educated youth of Kashmir offers them a choice to employ any of the three languages, Kashmiri, Urdu and English in an act of communication. In the present case, Language choice reflects the choice by these students in their interaction on Facebook. The preference for Roman script over Perso-Arabic in writing Urdu and Kashmiri has also been shown in the results. It further aims to establish whether or not CSs are employed by these students in their interaction on Facebook and if employed what is the nature of these. Since Facebook involves written communication, the study assumes that CSs are utilized in written medium on the similar pattern as employed in oral communication. The study is based on the following two research questions:

- Which of the three languages, Kashmiri, Urdu and English, are preferred by the students of university of Kashmir in their Facebook usage?
- Which of the scripts, Perso-Arabic and Roman, is preferred by the students in their Facebook usage?
- What kinds of CSs are employed by the students in their interaction on Facebook?

3.1. Methodology

[1] Urdu and Kashmiri are written with the Perso-Arabic script

The participants of the study included 100, 50 male and 50 female, randomly selected students from the various departments included in four faculties of the University of Kashmir. The four faculties were Arts, Science, Social Science and Law with 25 students representing each of these. The 25 students of faculty of law were pursuing their bachelors programme (LLB), rest of the 75 students were enrolled in 3rd semester of their masters programme offered by various departments. The data was collected by means of four point scale questionnaire that was divided into four parts. The first concerns the demographic profile of the informants, while as the second reflects the time spent in Facebook usage. The third part is concerned with the languages employed by the informants in their interaction of Facebook and the fourth part indicates the CSs employed by these. Since the study involves three languages Kashmiri, Urdu and English, use of SLA terms like L1, L2 has been avoided rather the name of individual languages has been preferred. The quantitative analysis of 96 filled in questionnaires (4 were found to be ineligible) was done with the SPSS-16.

3.2. Results

The popularity of Facebook among the students was reflected in their responses as 45.8% of the respondents use the social networking site for all the seven days of the week. In terms of the number of hours spent in Facebook usage, 27.1% spend more than ten hours per week while 56.3% spend 1-3 hours on weekly basis.

3.2.1.Language Choice

With regard to the languages used in Facebook usage, 58.4% of the respondents communicate in all the three languages, English, Urdu and Kashmiri and 16.7 % communicate in English and Urdu, the rest communicate in English only.
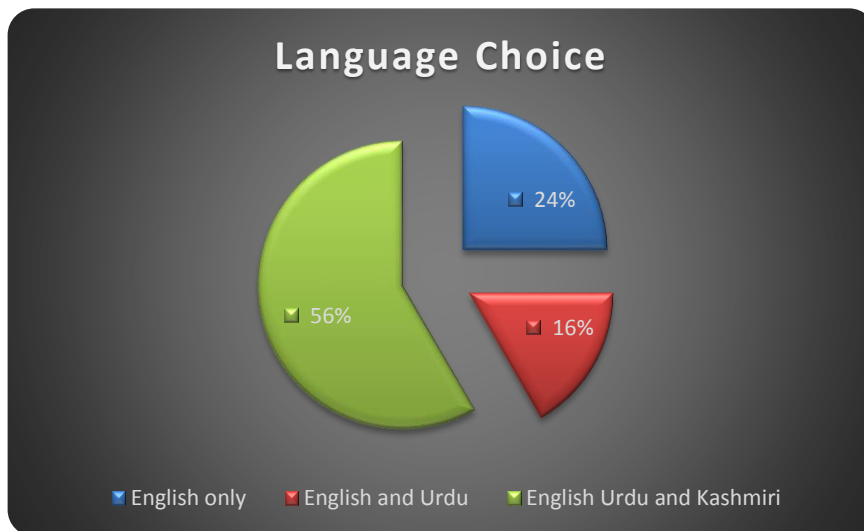
Graph 1: Language choice made by the students of University of Kashmir while communicating on Facebook

Only 12.5% of the respondents 'never' communicate in Urdu, while as 29.2% 'never' communicate in Kashmiri. 27.1% communicate in Urdu 'often', but only 18.8 % communicate in Kashmiri 'often' and interestingly only 12.5% of the respondents 'never' communicate in Urdu, while as 29.2% 'never' communicate in Kashmiri. This clearly indicates a preference of Urdu over Kashmiri. As far the use of script is concerned, the results show that most of the respondents employ Roman script for communicating in Urdu and Kashmiri. Only 12 respondents employ Perso-Arabic script for communicating in Urdu and 8 respondents utilize it for communicating in Kashmiri.

The results indicate certain disparity between male and female respondents in the language choice. In general, male respondents were found to communicate in Urdu and Kashmiri to a greater extent than females. While 36% of male respondents 'often' communicate in Urdu, only 17.4% females communicate in the language 'often'. Again 32% of the male respondents communicate in Kashmiri 'often' while only 2 female respondents were found to communicate in Kashmiri 'often'. While as 4 male respondents were found to 'always' communicate in Kashmiri, no female participant was found to communicate in the language in this manner.

3.2.2. Communicate Strategies
3.2.2.1. Avoidance or Reduction
With regard to above CS, it was found that a substantial number of the respondents 'never' abandon a topic midway or simply avoid a topic when they are not able to communicate in English; 36.5 % of the respondents 'sometimes' abandon a topic midway and 19.8% avoid a topic 'sometimes', when they are not able to communicate in English. Only 4 male and 7 female respondents 'often 'abandon a topic midway, and ten male and 3 female respondents avoid a topic 'often', due to lack of communicative skills in English.

3.2.2.2. Inter-lingual Achievement or Compensatory
Literal translation from Urdu and Kashmiri while communicating in English as a CS was found to be employed by majority of the participants. 22.9% of the participants 'often' literally translate from Urdu, while as 18.8% do the same from Kashmiri. 33.3% of the participants literally translate from Urdu into English 'sometimes', and 31.3% employ the strategy from Kashmiri into English. Borrowing and Code-switching was found to be quite prominent in the responses of the participants. 62.5% of the participants borrow words from Urdu 'sometimes', 27.1% 'always' utilize this strategy, when they don't know an English word. With regard to borrowing from Kashmiri, 8.3% do it 'always', 13.5% 'often' and 46.9% 'sometimes'. As far code-switching is concerned, 76% of the participants switch from English to Urdu, while as 62.5% switch from English to Kashmiri when they are not able to communicate in the English.

Foreignizing, which means using an Urdu or Kashmiri word in English by adjusting it phonologically was found to be the least employed CS.

Intra-lingual Achievement of Compensatory
Majority of the respondents resort to providing description or explanation and use of near equivalent words in case they don't know specific English words. This inter-lingual CS also featured distinctively in the responses of the participants. 81.2% of the respondents provide a description or explanation when they lack the knowledge of the specific word. Among these 62.2% do it 'sometimes', 11.5% often and 7.3% do it 'always'. Expect for a small percentage of 13.5%, all the respondents make use of near equivalent words as a strategy when they don't have knowledge of specific English words. 29.2% of participants 'always' use this strategy while as 40.6% use it 'sometimes'. Use of more general words in place of specific words of English was found to be the most employed CS with 92.7% of the respondents using this strategy. Creation of non-existent words as a strategy is employed by comparatively lesser number of the participants; only 34.4% of participants employ it 'sometimes'.
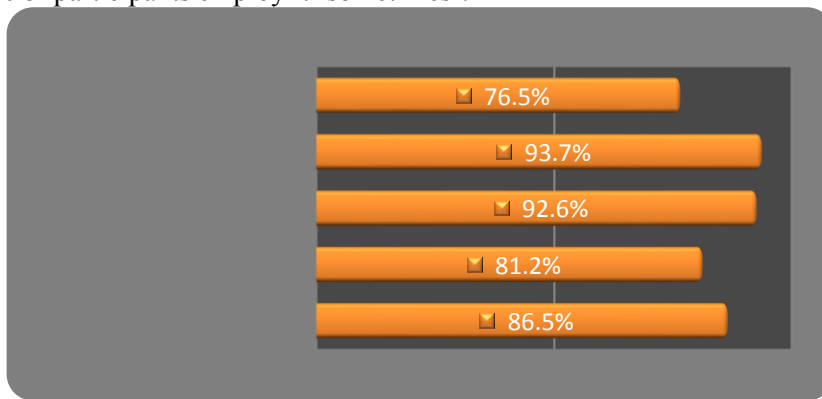
Graph 2: Significant Communicative Strategies employed by students of University of Kashmir while communicating on Facebook

4. Conclusion
The study indicates that besides English which is main language utilized, use of Urdu and Kashmiri in communication on Facebook is substantial among the students of University of Kashmir, with Urdu being preferred after English. Kashmiri is least used among the three languages. The result may reflect the prestige associated with the three languages. In comparative terms, Urdu is considered more prestigious than Kashmiri and of course, with English at the top of Prestige hierarchy. The use of roman script in communicating in Urdu and Kashmiri may be attributed to different factors, like accessibility of the keyboard for script, difficulty in the use of Perso-Arabic script, total lack of knowledge of the script, comparatively low prestige of Urdu etc.

Since Facebook communication is essentially written in nature, however like other forms of e-communication like chats, emails and mobile texts, it is quite informal in contrast to conventional written communication, so the use of CSs is

significant. The study implies that CSs are equally employed in written medium like the spoken one, for which the concept was originally propounded. Among all the CSs, the prominent ones which featured in the study were Borrowing, Code-switching, use of near equivalent words and Explanation or Description. The phenomenon of Code-switching and borrowing is quite common in situations of language contact like the one prevalent in Kashmir valley. Outcome of research studies undertaken with an aim to understand the use of CSs in written and spoken media in societies with a language contact involving three languages can have many implications for ELT programmes. The use of CSs by members of such societies could be effectively utilized in teaching of English. Learners of English as a second language can be taught to employ CSs effectively in written and oral communication. Further studies could be untaken to understand the use of CSs among college and secondary level students in the context of Kashmir for development of ELT curriculum for learners of different age-groups and proficiencies.

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