

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Language is the most effective communication system to signal ‘social reality’ or ‘culture’ (Halliday, 1978), and is characterised by its highly organised system of human communication. It encompasses many interrelated systems, which aims at communicating methods effectively (Pathak, 2005). Language reflects the social environment clearly and the societal values do have a remarkable effect on its language (Pathak, 2005). Moreover, language is a social phenomenon and it reflects the society through its use in formal and informal domains (Cohen, 1956). Ferdinand de Saussure, a linguist, who was the first to view language as a social phenomenon, stated that language is a structured system that can be viewed synchronically (at a moment in time) and diachronically (as it change over time). According to de Saussure, language is a social product (Vigilant, 1996).

de Saussure quoted that,

“we can say that language always works through a language; without that, it does not exist. The language, in turn, is quite independent of the individual; it cannot be a creation of the individual; it is essentially social; it presupposes the collectivity.” (Vigilant, 1996)

Language varies according to the social structure of a local speech community and it also expresses solidarity or group identity.

1.1.1 Language and Communication

Language, by far and large, is the development of the basic form of communication between human beings, and in a society (Ghose, 2004). Human communication occurs when there is intelligence, senses to perceive, reasoning, memory, imagination, meaning and interpretation. Social interaction is likely a major factor for the evolution of human intelligence, which enhances the use of language.

“We are forced by our very nature to interact with other people in a fundamentally different way than to interact with, say, stones and sticks”
(Strawson, 1962).

Human communication is a multifaceted collection of systems that follow a snowball effect. Language allows us to communicate faster and simpler, but the language also elicits more language, thoughts, and ideas, which guides humans to devise improved methods (or worse ways) to carry out our communications through our social interactions. Social media author Shel Israel recalls the era of emerging social media, when language was casual, personal, and sometimes off-color (Naufal, 2011). In fact, there is a lexicon evolving in this area. Nevertheless, about half a century ago, in the 50's, communication among human beings was mainly through real time speeches and materials in printed forms. Things have advanced a lot in the present-day context. The fast development in the technology related to human communication has created a virtual link between the world population, what more with the advent of Internet and other sophisticated communicative gadgets like i-phones, etc.

Leech (1966) quoted that,

“It is certainly desirable that we should cultivate an objective and critical awareness of the linguistic transactions into which we enter day by day, either as initiators or passive recipients”.

This is especially valid in present-day’s context whereby people are gradually changing or adapting themselves to the latest communicative approaches with the advent of Internet.

In view of that, online social networks have definitely become the most sought-after ‘tool’ used to search and communicate with people from all walks of life worldwide in today’s generation. Such social networks are, in fact, very popular and trendy in the present-day context, and have become a fundamental part of the global online experience. The networking portals or sites have therefore created a special niche in the networking society. Online social networks facilitate connections between people around the world based on shared interests, values, membership in particular groups and so on. This online technology provides a more convenient means for people to find and communicate with individuals who are in their networks using the Web as the interface (Jarche, 2010). Online matrimonial sites are not an exception in this aspect. These matrimonial sites are generally defined as one of the variations of the standard dating websites, with a focus on those intending marriage rather than simply dating (Wikipedia, 2010). In this cyber age, online matrimonial sites especially are regarded as a channel that ‘quick-fixes’ suitable matches, and are thus very popular among the Indian community throughout the world. Online matrimonial sites are self-operative and equipped with different portals to cater for different languages. The application of online matrimonial sites as a fast resolution to search suitable life partners have in fact

shown that there is a fundamental shift occurring in the way potential candidates locate their ideal life partners, especially in the case of Indians (Agnihotri, 2002). Netizens, the term given for the users of the internet, who are actively involved online (Simpson and Weiner, 1997), get connected online with their counterparts from all over the world through those matrimonial sites of their choice at the convenience of multimedia.

1.1.2 Hindu Matrimony and Alliance Seeking

In Hinduism, it is believed that marriage not only unites two individuals (man and woman) but also creates a special bond between two families (YGo Hinduism, 2005). In the earlier days there were agents, commonly called the ‘marriage brokers’, who carry with them a record book which contained some details and photographs of the prospective brides and grooms provided by the respective parents or families. Today, despite adherence to similar customs by the loyal followers, the scenario of a marriage broker recommending suitable matches to the parents (of prospective bride or bridegroom) has totally changed with the establishment of digital means that accomplish the very same task – finding the most suitable life partners. Nowadays, leading matrimonial websites portray prospective brides’ and grooms’ profiles for public view, and readers may just get connected with their desired life partner in a matter of a click.

Having easy access to such convenient channels to seek marriage alliances, prospective brides and grooms (the candidates) worldwide who participate actively in their corresponding matrimonial websites are often obliged to post descriptions about themselves, families and other such related details in their profile pages as requested by the creator or organiser of the website. The candidates’ profile may contain a detailed

description about self, family background, age, job, personal interests, caste, religion, and so on. Details may, at many a times, include the supposed characteristics of their prospective (would be) life partners too. Based on these specific categories, the candidates conduct a search for their best matches, and the websites display the refined results that match the set requirements. The texts (digital transcripts) portrayed by the candidates in their profile pages play a vital role in conveying or communicating the intended message. Many of these matrimonial websites also display information on successful marriages that took place between the candidates as a motivation factor. This study has investigated the use of language in this context, and has shown a relationship between language and the society – an insight into sociolinguistics (Holmes, 2001). It is worthwhile doing such a study as it reveals a new style of writing (in the form of a brief discourse) that has gradually evolved in the context of Hindu matrimony involving the Internet as the primary media of communication.

Do women and men speak differently? This has been proven true for all speech communities and not just for English speakers. This is yet another issue that is being given such a great emphasis not only by sociolinguists in particular, but also by the fellow linguistic experts from other areas of applied linguistics such as psycholinguistics (Holmes, 2001). Similarities and differences that may be portrayed by different genders in terms of ‘language structure’ and ‘language use’ are hence discussed in this study too.

1.1.3 Discourse Analysis

This study used data in the form of written discourses (digital transcripts) from a selected group of netizens. Discourse refers to any linguistic unit that consists of

multiple sentences with a writer (or speaker) who produces the discourse along with its reader (or listener).

Brown and Yule (1983) quoted that,

“The analysis of discourse is, necessarily, the analysis of language in use.”

Analysis of ‘language structure’ and ‘language use’ plays a vital role in sociolinguistics. It is in fact a methodological tool in most language use based fields including sociolinguistics (Nessa and Malterud, 1990). Discourse analysis is the analysis of language ‘beyond the sentence’. It is therefore used in this study to analyse the data collected in terms of the cohesion (language structure) and coherency (language use) of the discourse (Brown and Yule, 1983). Coherence is product of many different factors, which combine to make every paragraph, every sentence, and every phrase contribute to the meaning of the discourse. A coherent text may need three aspects of processes in the interpretation of a writer’s (or speaker’s) intended meaning in producing a discourse. Those aspects are: (1) computing the communicative function, (2) using general socio-cultural knowledge and (3) determining the inferences to be made (Brown and Yule, 1983). Halliday and Hasan’s quote *“A text has texture and this is what distinguishes it from something that is not a text ...”* explains that a texture of a text is provided by the cohesive relation (Brown and Yule, 1983). The grammatical and lexical relationships that exist within a text or sentence explain the cohesion of a text. Basically, cohesion is the link that holds a text together and gives a meaning to it. Cohesion comes in two types, namely grammatical cohesion and lexical cohesion. A selected range of cohesive devices that include reference, ellipsis, substitution, conjunction, etc. is used for the analytical purposes in this study.

1.2 Aims / Objectives of the Study

The present study aims at analysing the pattern of discourses used by a group of Hindu netizens in communicating messages intended for seeking suitable marriage alliances online. The study is based on structural linguistic and sociolinguistic analyses whereby observations are done on the discourse patterns in terms of structure of language or features that find place in the language, and how this language structure correlates with the use of language in the Hindu matrimonial context. The identification of culture-bound lexical items and their relevance, and the choice of words and key vocabulary used by the netizens are also emphasised in this study. The discourse extracted from hundreds of the digital transcripts were analysed in terms of the cohesion and coherence of the sentences or phrases used in them. The analysis was done on both genders, whose digital transcripts were segregated equally into three different age groups. The commonness and distinctiveness, if any, is also analysed in terms of language structure and language use of the corresponding netizens to identify the communicative efficiency in the area of interest.

1.3 Research Questions

Basically, this study is intended to derive solutions to the following research questions:

- 1) What types of lexical items, words or key vocabulary are likely to persist as an integral component and how do these serve as the focus of the discourse with correspondence to the context?
- 2) How do the culture-bound lexical items (if any) portray socio-cultural significance in communicative language?

- 3) In what ways are the discourse patterns in the written discourse of the netizens similar or different with gender and age?
- 4) How is the intended meaning conveyed coherently (or cohesively using cohesive language structure) to make the reader understand the main focus?
- 5) What makes the discourses in this study common and (or) distinct in general?

The findings of this study, that provides answers to all of the above research questions, are discussed in detail in Chapters 4 and 5.

1.4 Scope and Limitations of the Study

Although the scope of this study could have been made much wider in terms of the variables and linguistic properties (structure and use) investigated, especially with such a huge population universe from where the sampling was done, a few limitations were still observed. Firstly, despite the abundance of such online matrimonial sites favoured by the Indian netizens, data was collected only from two of those which were chosen on a random basis. With this arrangement, there was also a concern over stereotyped presentation of the digital texts as it was noted that different matrimonial websites have different ways of presenting the profile pages of their candidates. However, attempts have been made in this study to extract only those texts that were written in a paragraph form with at least two sentences, be it complete or not. Secondly, the number of samples from the male and female candidates was each limited to 40 per age group, and with this, a prediction for a discrete pattern in the discourse analysed could not be made somehow. However, the findings have somehow proven otherwise and the details of the discussions are included in Chapters 4 and 5. Next, the digital transcripts extracted for

the purpose of analysis were all presumed to have been written originally by the candidates themselves because in some profiles, it was actually the parents or siblings who initiated the search for the prospective bride or groom. Some of the profiles observed stated that the profile was created by the parents but the texts extracted seemed to be like those written by the candidates themselves.

On the whole, this study has aided in the identification of the relevance of coherent text in conveying the intended message in a matrimonial context. This study has also provided some interesting facts about how the target readers are ‘impressed’ with the texts presented in the profile pages, and how this group of people are persuaded to read on.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study has contributed in providing an insight into a particular community’s way of communication using English text in order to achieve their goals, in this case to seek marriage alliances. Besides identifying the culture-bound lexical items, this study also helped in recognising the socio-cultural significance by correlating language structure with that of the use of language. Even at a superficial level, the study has therefore, been able to identify a particular pattern of discourse that is being evolved in the area of digital communication in the context of matrimony among Hindu communities living worldwide. On that note, this study has therefore been significant in giving a lead for future studies in a similar genre.

1.6 Use of the Study

The findings of this study have been proven useful in the identification of the linguistic and non-linguistic factors that are implicated in the evolution of a particular communicative pattern using the Internet. In olden days, communication was only possible via speech and printed materials. But that is not the case in the present-day context where the advent of Internet has made a drastic change in the way people communicate. So, this study has somehow shown the discourse pattern that is evolved when people use such an advanced technology to communicate their intended meanings (messages) in the fastest time possible, and that too worldwide. By observing the digital transcripts written by the netizens with regard to the Hindu matrimonial context, we can observe a particular discourse pattern with remarkable linguistic and non-linguistic features that cannot be seen in other types of ‘normal’ discourses. This study also enabled us to identify the use of shortened forms of sentences, symbols, and other unique styles of text presentation (like simplification) that seemed to be exclusive for digital communication in Hindu matrimonial context, and hence been useful in this aspect too.

Owing to the fact that the Hindu matrimony and its associated events are very much procedural and often consume a fair bit of time (from the day a suitable alliance has been selected right up to the actual matrimonial ceremony), the online matrimonial site has played a crucial role in matchmaking suitable alliances within a matter of just a few clicks! So, this study has again been useful to make known how netizens use language to communicate globally at such ease.