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Social Networking Sites (SNSs): Shifting Paradigm of English Language Usage

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ABSTRACT

English is the globally accepted language in various nations and professions in different varieties, but the English that has acquired a wider spectrum than all these Englishes is the English used in Social Networking Sites which has changed the scenario of English language usage due to the ease in its accessibility and the kind of flexibility of language usage. The English used in Social Networking Sites like Facebook and Twitter has changed the linguistic behaviour of the people by producing a number of acronyms like BFF, FB etc, creating new verb forms like 'to tweet' or nouns like 'tweeple' or producing many compound nouns such as 'netiquette', changing the meaning of traditional verbs and nouns by introducing new meanings to them, e.g. the word 'friend' is used to refer "someone to an online list of acquaintances", and by making use of prefixes like 'un' for the purpose of conveying the meaning of negation as in 'unlike a comment/update' by ignoring its original prefix 'dis' for referring the antonym of 'like'. By emphasizing on the aim of communication, grammar and vocabulary are put on the peripheral value in Social Networking Sites. Therefore, the focal point of this paper is to study the changes in the linguistic behaviour of the people caused by the SNSs.

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1. Introduction

Being globally accepted and internationally recognized language, English can be found with a lot of varieties such as national- prevailing in different nations or continents around the world, for Example, British English, Indian English, American English, African English etc.; professional varieties like Business English, Technical English, English used in Media, English used in Medical field etc.; by blending it with local languages in our multilingual country like India, it may take the form of Hinglish (blending of 'Hindi' and 'English') or Gujlish (blending of 'Gujarati' and 'English'). Yet all these Englishes remain limited to or in the boundary of certain nations, certain professions or professionals, certain fields of study, certain communities or groups, certain region and places. But the variation of English that has gained universal recognition among the people of all age groups, all religions and cultures, almost all the nations around the world, all kinds of groups and communities is the '*English used in Social Networking Sites*'. While talking about Social Networking Sites, it becomes essential to know what Social Networking Sites mean!

Social Networking Sites facilitate "*the building of social networks or social relations among the people who share interests, activities, backgrounds, or real-life connections*" and they allow their users "*to share ideas, activities, events, and interests within their individual networks*" (Wikipedia). Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, My Space etc. are some of the examples of such Social Networking Sites that have become famous among the people of all age group with variety of educational, cultural, professional, social and linguistic backgrounds due to their free availability, open accessibility and flexibility of language

use. The common factor in these diverse Social Networking Sites is the use of English as a medium of communication, but the English of SNSs is quite distinct from Standard English or English with any other variation. Before moving ahead, it becomes prerequisite to know the main features and distinctions among different SNSs. Twitter is a social messaging tool that lets one to stay connected to people through brief text message updates –up to 140 characters in length. It is based on answering the question – "*What are you doing?*" One can comment, post thoughts and observations throughout the day in answer to this question. Facebook is a social networking site that allows friends to post message for the user to see, to upload photos and albums, to update status, which informs their friends of their whereabouts and actions (Wikipedia). LinkedIn is a site that can be helpful to build a professional network.

2. Theoretical Framework

The conceptual/ theoretical framework for this study is grounded on the concepts by the scholars in the field. Language is considered as a system of arbitrary vocal symbols for human communication (Trager (1949); Barber (1964:21); Saussure (1966:16); Bolinger(1975:15); Wardhaugh (1977:3) in Abdul Chaer (2007:32) quoted from Dheedyk(2011)). In line with this, Canale and Swain (1980) have given the concept of '*grammatical competence*' while focusing on competencies in '*the model of communicative competence*' or in Chomskyan terms '*linguistic competence*' or what is also called as '*formal competence*' referring to the knowledge of grammatical rules and regulations: morphological; syntactical; lexical knowledge of the language to produce meaningful words and sentences



which is one of the indispensable part of the language production. Language is reconstituted and reconstructed by every speaker in every generation (Sciffman, 1996:9). So, it is no secret that languages change in the course of time (Bloomfield, 1933:13). A great deal of new words awaken us up that language is not stand still (Finegan, 1979:258). Under this theoretical background, this research will investigate the meaning of new words that appear in Social Networking Sites which is in line with the ideas proposed by Yule (2006:5358) regarding word formation, i.e. etymology, coinage, borrowing, compounding, blending, clipping, backformation, conversion, acronyms, derivation, prefixes and suffixes, infixes, and multiple processes that result into the formation of new words. There are types of new words; those are old words with new sense, new coinages, derived words, abbreviations, collocations, eponyms, phrasal words, transferred words, acronyms, pseudo-neologism, and blends according to Newmark (1988:140).

3. Neologism in Social Networking Sites

With the advent of Social Networking Sites, many new words have emerged. Many nouns have been transferred into verbs with the expansion in their utility. The word 'facebook' is a noun – it is a name of social networking site, but the word 'facebook' is changed from noun to verb. It is a noun as it refers to 'a thing' and a verb as it shows 'an action, an event or a state'. As a verb form also, it has at least three meanings that depend upon the structure of the sentence, for example, in the sentence "I facebooked my photos yesterday", the form of 'facebook' refers to an action of 'uploading the photos on my Facebook page'; "I facebooked that girl – Priya and it turns out that she is an engineer" means 'looked her up on

facebook'; in another formation, "Did you facebook Tiya about the party", the form of 'facebook' means 'to contact/to inform Tiya through her Facebook page'. The same is the case with 'myspace' and 'twitter' which have become quite versatile words. When we find ourselves and others 'myspacing' or 'tweeting', we find ourselves 'updating our status on that SNS', 'commenting' and 'sharing our ideas on that site'. Like conventional verb form, they have also their different forms such *present participle* and *past participle*. i.e. 'facebook', 'facebooking', 'facebooked', 'tweet', 'tweeting', 'tweeted' etc. Their forms of present participle can also be used as gerund in the sentence formation, e.g. "Facebooking is a social activity", and "Tweeting is a sharing act".

The meanings of certain words have completely changed with their use in Social Networking Sites, for example the conventional meaning of the verb 'to tweet' refers to 'chirping', but in Social Networking Sites, it means the act of 'commenting' or 'sharing ideas'; the noun 'friend' refers to 'mate', 'buddy' or 'companion', but in SNSs it is used to refer "someone to an online list of acquaintances". A number of new compound nouns have emerged due to SNSs. Compound nouns starting with 'tw' have become famous.

Table: 1 Examples of compound nouns used on Social Networking Sites

Compound Nouns	Blending of	Meaning
Netiquette	Net + etiquette	The rules and manners to be followed on internet
Frenemy	Friend + enemy	A person with whom one is friendly in spite of fundamental dislike
Tweeple	Tweet + people	Used to refer the community of people who use the social networking site –



		Twitter
Twterminology	Twitter + terminology	Used to refer to the terms on the social networking site - Twitter
Twabulous	Tweet + fabulous	A slang term used to refer a fabulous tweet
Twishing	Twitter + Phishing	It is used to refer to the act of sending a message to a twitter user in an attempt to obtain his or her name and password

According to the typological analysis of internet language, discussed by Shortis (2001), there can be following broad categories: 1) Shortenings, contractions, and G-clippings and other clippings, 2) acronyms and initialisms, 3) letter/numbers homophones, 4) misspellings and typos, 5) non-conventional spellings, 6) accent stylization. Besides, Thurlow (2001) has focused on other aspects such as 'creative use of punctuation' like (multiple dots) or (exclamation marks!!!!!!); 'capitalization or other symbols' for EMPHASIS or STRESS; 'use of onomatopoeic and/or stylized spelling' (e.g. cooooo!, hahahaha!, ahhh!, woohoo!, yeah!). In the language of SNSs, single letters or numbers, combination of letters and numbers or letters or numbers as homophones are used instead of words.

Table: 2 Examples of combination of letters and numbers or single letters or numbers used as homophones on SNSs

b - be	1 - one	ur/yr -your
b4 - before	r - are	U R - you are
c - see	u - you	w8 - wait
gr8 - great	2getha - together	2moro - tomorrow

Consonant clusters are also used in the English used in social networking Sites.

Table: 3 Examples of Consonant clusters used on SNSs

thx - thanks	txt - text	nxt - next
frm - from	ppl - people	yr - your
bt - but	msg - message	

The use of acronyms has also increased in the English used on the SNSs. The examples of such acronyms are given below:

Table: 4 Examples of Acronyms used on SNSs

OMG - oh my god	BBL - be back later
LOL - laugh out loud	BFF - best friend forever
AEAP - as early as possible	BFN - bye for now

There are certain words in English which are used in social networking sites following the style of their accents. Americanized words such as 'gonna', 'wanna' etc. have also become famous. The examples of such words are given below:

Table: 5 Examples of words written following their style of accent or Americanized words used on SNSs

dat - that	d'ya - do you	bin - been
afta - after	laf - laugh	wanna - want to
wassup - what's up	gonna - going to	

Short forms of certain words have also become very much popular on the social networking sites. Following are some examples of such words.

Table: 6 Examples of the short forms of the words used on SNSs

mon - Monday	bud - buddy
lang - language	lab - laboratory
sis - sister	com - communication
min - minute	bro - brother

Words with G - clippings and other clippings are also widely used in the language for interaction on the social networking sites. Here are some of the examples given below in the table-

Table: 7 Examples of words with G and other clippings used on SNSs

goin - going	havin - having
thinkin - thinking	alrigh - alright
mornin - morning	wher - where
hav- have	wil -will

Misspellings and typos have also become frequent while communicating on social networking sites.

Table: 8 Examples of misspellings and typos found on SNSs



seing – seeing	offense – offence	rember – remember
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To form opposite in English language, generally, prefixes are added before noun (unreason, unrest), adjective (unkind, uncertain,) or verb (unfasten, unmask). To show an approval for a posted message, a thumb-up like button is used. But toggling it off results into *'unlike'* the same activity previously liked which puts a person into *'a neutral state'* that is something different from the original opposite-dislike (Ben Zimmer, 2009). The prefix 'un-' is the most productive one that can be attached to words of English origin such as unhappy, unfair; Latinate words like unable, unconscious; present and past participle to form adjectives such as unfeeling, undecided, unjustified etc. (Khushu Lahiri, Chakravarty, 2013) In the age of Social Networking, it is frequently used to mean negation in a neutral way as in *'undo – to cancel last command'*, *'unfriend – to remove someone from the list of friends'*, *'unfollow – to stop following something'*, *'unfavourite – to remove something from the list of favourite'*, *'unsubscribe– to cancel the subscription to something'*.

4. Conclusion

To sum up, it becomes quite clear from the above discussion that significant changes are occurring in the conventional model of English language usage. Due to neologism and other varieties related to words use on Social Networking Sites, the paradigm of English language usage is shifting giving rise to a new variety of English.

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