

EXPLORING GEN Z'S LINGUISTIC PRACTICES: A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF EMERGING DIALECTS IN A MULTILINGUAL SOCIETY

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Abstract

This study explores the language of Generation Zoomers (Gen Z) as emerging dialects in a multilingual society – Lagos, Nigeria. With the rapid changes in communication styles driven by social media, this research investigates how the distinct linguistic patterns of Gen Z reflect their socio-cultural identities. Data were collected from 140 final-year students across two higher institutions (a university and a college of technology) in Lagos using classroom-based slang lists, semi-structured interviews and WhatsApp chat verification. The collected expressions were thematically categorised and analysed for their semantic features, morphological processes (coinage, clipping, blending, reduplication, borrowing, acronyms, and semantic shift), and sociolinguistic functions, drawing on concepts from Interactional Sociolinguistics to interpret how these expressions operate in social interaction. The study identifies and categorises over 150 expressions across fifteen domains of student life, including intelligence, examination practices, money, relationships, and moral conduct. The findings reveal that Gen Z linguistic practices are broader and more complex than slang, encompassing a range of word-formation processes and serving as markers of identity, in-group solidarity, and social hierarchy. The study is restricted to student-related activities; other societal activities are reserved for future investigation. The findings suggest that Gen Z language – a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires using a system of voluntarily produced symbols – serves as a marker of identity and impacts the dynamics of multilingual interaction in contemporary society. The paper argues that these linguistic patterns demonstrate evidence of evolving into an emerging dialect within Nigerian English.

Keywords: *Dialect, Discourse, Generation Z, Linguistic practices, Multilingual Society, Nigerian English, Emerging dialect*

Introduction

The years 1901 to 2025 have witnessed seven distinct generations. The last three – Millennials, Zoomers and Alpha – have impacted language patterns and use in Nigeria. This research examines the use of language among youths categorised as Gen Zs in Lagos, Nigeria, in 2023. Lagos is not only the most densely populated state in Nigeria but the most cosmopolitan, where more than seventy percent of the Nigerian ethnic divides are represented (Adepoju, 2019).

The present study attempts to examine the English linguistic practices of Generation Zoomers (Gen Z) and reconsider them from both linguistic and sociological perspectives. The approach adopted here is synchronic, as it aims to illustrate the formations and the neosemanticism that characterise the present-day English usage of the target generation. The study does not consider the language of Gen Zs, often labelled as slang, as a form of linguistic rebellion, challenging established norms and reflecting the pulse of contemporary social dynamics. Neither is it seen as corruption that bastardises the standard as purists would do. Rather, it is seen as a response to their own world and environment in the same way the older generation did to theirs.

The use of English in youth social interaction offers a compelling exploration of linguistic dynamics within contemporary Lagos multilingual culture. The linguistic landscape has continually evolved, and youth language-use serves as a fascinating lens through which we understand the unique communication patterns of their demography. Against the backdrop of rapidly changing social environments, technological advancements, and global interconnectedness, investigating the emerging dialect of Gen Zs provides insight

into the cultural, social, and identity-related dimensions of their language use. Furthermore, interrogating Gen Z language patterns extends beyond linguistic curiosity to encompass sociocultural phenomena. The study delves into how such patterns contribute to the construction of group identity, reflecting shared experiences, values, and affiliations. As linguistic trends continue to shift, this research aims to capture a snapshot of language dynamics among youth, especially students in higher education institutions in Lagos, Nigeria.

Relevant Literature

Language Variation and Change

Millennials were born between 1981 and 1996. Members of Gen Z were born between 1997 and 2012, while Gen Alphas were born between 2013 and 2025. Nigeria's population as of 2024 is estimated at 234.2 million. Individuals aged 13 to 27, comprising Generation Z and younger Millennials, likely represent a substantial segment of this population, estimated at approximately 50 to 55 million (Worldometer: Nigeria Population, 2024; PopulationPyramid.net; Nations Geo Population). This demography plays a crucial role in Nigeria's social landscape, particularly in education and digital engagement sectors, as younger generations are key drivers of substantial shifts in cultural and linguistic practices. For this study, we rely on Sapir's (1921) definition of language as "a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires using a system of voluntarily produced symbols."

Variation and change in language thus refer to the natural processes through which languages evolve, adapt, and diversify over time and across different contexts (Adepoju, 2018). While variation starts as slang, language change starts as variation (Aitchison, 1981). Thus, these phenomena are inherent in all

languages and are driven by various social, cultural, historical, and linguistic factors. Gen Z language, therefore, resonates with these factors. Language variation or change is not a corruption of the language but an enrichment (Aitchison, 1981; Montgomery, 1986). Thus, language variation and change are dynamic processes that shape the richness, diversity, and resilience of languages worldwide. Labov (2014) explains that language variation and change are the only forms dedicated to studying linguistic variation and the capacity to deal with systematic and inherent variation in synchronic and diachronic linguistics. Variation and change concentrate on the details of linguistic structure in actual speech production, highlighting that language universally involves alternative forms and structures that compete with each other in usage. The study of language variation and change investigates how language varies, the distribution of the variants, and the many factors that determine the choice of one variant over others (Agustin et al., 2021). The essence of the variants is to communicate and make meaning – a systemic process in which individuals interact with and through symbols to create and interpret meanings (Wood, 2004). The general purpose is to share information, ideas, and feelings (Finlay, 1998; Hybels & Weaver, 2014). It involves not only the spoken and written word but also body language, personal mannerisms, and style; anything that adds meaning to a message, formally or informally (Muhartoyo & Wijaya, 2014).

The Concept of Slang

At the intersection of variation, change and Gen Z language is the concept of slang. The invention of electronic media, first in music recordings and radio, movies, and television, accelerated the spread of slang in the early 20th century (Manurung, 2020; Dewi & Widiastuti, 2020). The Internet, with its social networks and media-sharing platforms, has accelerated and globalised the spread of slang (Agustin et al., 2021). The Gen

Zs as agents of change and near digital natives, readily keyed in to the workings of the new telecommunication systems in Nigeria and subsequent immersion in internet provisions. Slang has initially been inaccurately restricted to colloquial or bad language, and imprecisely conflated with such language varieties as jargon, dialect, vernacular, or argot (Mayerthaler, 1981; Bauer, 1983; Scalise, 1984; Dressler et al., 1987; Devi & Nur, 2022), resulting from the same ordinary word-building processes that give rise to the general vocabulary (Eble, 1996). English slang is illegitimate and inappropriate for teaching and use by educated people (Choomthong, 2017; Manurung, 2020). It has been associated with low class or low quality, and its meaning is known only to members of the in-group (group of users) (Azizah, 2019).

Slangish expressions are adopted for 'in-group' communication; however, this tends to restrict or slow the comprehension of the expressions by other members outside the speech community (Agustin et al., 2021; Devi & Nur, 2022). It is employed to achieve social dynamics, define social spaces and aid in identifying and constructing social groups and identities (Androutsopoulos, 2000; Dewi & Widiastuti, 2020). Slang is casual and non-standard vocabulary (Chen, 2008) regarded as a youth subculture (Kastrati, 2017; Odogwu, 2018) and is particularly popular among teenagers and college students (Finegan, 2008). Slang is like fashion in clothing and popular music and changes quite rapidly, meant to achieve social dynamics with the people being addressed (Akmajiæn et al., 2010) and helping to identify and construct social groups and identities (Adams, 2009; Dewi & Widiastuti, 2020).

Internet users now use slang language. Gen Zs now use internet language. Internet language has many forms and word formation (Sahardin et al., 2020) to simplify communication

(Winarto, 2019). Slang is the language of the street; as old as speech; the result of crowding, excitement, and artificial life (Devi & Nur, 2022). It is used by people in social situations where they feel comfortable with their friends (Manurung, 2020) to make a conversation feel more intimate. It is an informal register of language (words, phrases, and usages) used by members of special groups such as teenagers, musicians, or criminals to establish group identity (Rezeki, 2019); commonly used by the millennial generation in an informal setting (Agustin et al., 2021; Siringoringo et al., 2022); a kind of code or secret language that is used by some people or community groups in society (Kartina et al., 2019); created based on word formation processes, functions and social factors.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive research method to examine the linguistic patterns of Gen Z in higher government institutions in Lagos – a government-owned university and a college of technology – to capture the complexity and richness of linguistic practices whose meanings depart from conventional and conceptual usage listed in English dictionaries. Expressions for which there was significant disagreement on meaning among participants were excluded from the final dataset. The researcher assumed that such disagreements likely reflected expressions that were still restricted to narrower in-group usage and had not yet achieved broader currency within the Gen Z student population. This decision was made to ensure that the identified expressions represent a stable, shared lexicon.

Data Collection: Three Stages

The researchers' interest arose organically from classroom observations while teaching at a college of technology and a university. Four classes of final-year students participated: two

from the university (28 and 21 students respectively) and two from the college of technology (48 and 43 students respectively). In total, 140 students provided data.

Stage One – Slang Lists: Each class was asked independently to provide a list of the slang expressions they commonly used, alongside their meanings. This generated a preliminary lexicon of Gen Z expressions.

Stage Two – Semi-Structured Interviews: Following the collection of these lists, semi-structured interviews were conducted with subsets of students from each class at different times. These interviews served to validate usage, establish consensus on meanings, and uncover the contextual nuances governing the use of specific expressions. Interviews were conducted in classroom settings that were convened specifically for the purpose of this research. Students were informed of the study's objectives and participated voluntarily. The interview setting was semi-structured, allowing the researcher to probe for contextual details and usage examples while maintaining a consistent framework across all sessions.

Stage Three – WhatsApp Chat Verification: Additionally, WhatsApp chats of some consenting students were examined to verify naturally occurring usage. Anonymity was assured to all participants.

Study Area and Sampling

The study covers students who reside in areas in Lagos where the use of such peculiarly coded words is predominantly evident, such as Akoka, Yaba, Ebute-Meta, and Oyingbo, where students of the University of Lagos, Yaba College of Technology and Federal College of Education (Technical) reside and are very active at influencing the communication

patterns of their surroundings. These areas are host to students from different backgrounds in several thousand. Their language use in face-to-face and on social media platforms are therefore robust sources for data collection.

The study adopts purposive sampling to select social media platforms and a diverse group of youths from different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds whose age bracket falls within the Gen Z group. The research instruments included semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and WhatsApp chat analysis. The aim was to gain in-depth qualitative insights into how and why youths use supposedly strange words and expressions in various situations.

Theoretical Orientation

This study draws on concepts from Interactional Sociolinguistics (IS), an approach developed by John J. Gumperz (1981; 2001) that focuses on the interplay between language use and social context. While the present study does not conduct a full interactional analysis of recorded conversations, it adopts IS as a theoretical orientation for interpreting the social functions of Gen Z expressions. Key IS concepts that inform the analysis include:

Contextualisation cues – linguistic and paralinguistic signals that help interlocutors interpret meaning in interaction (Gumperz, 2001). In this study, we consider how Gen Z expressions serve as cues that mark in-group membership, signal humour, or assert identity.

Code-switching – the use of multiple languages or language varieties within a single interaction (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2021). Gen Z expressions often blend English, Nigerian Pidgin, and indigenous Nigerian languages.

Identity construction – how language use reflects and constructs social identities (Bucholtz, 1999). Gen Z expressions are analysed for how they signal group affiliation, social status, and generational identity.

In addition, the study employs descriptive linguistic analysis to examine the morphological and semantic features of the collected expressions, including coinage, clipping, blending, reduplication, borrowing, acronyms, and semantic shift. This dual approach – descriptive linguistics combined with sociolinguistic interpretation – provides a comprehensive account of Gen Z linguistic practices in Lagos.

Data Analysis

The collected expressions were analysed through a two-stage process:

Stage One – Thematic Categorisation: The slang lists provided by the 140 students were reviewed and grouped into emergent thematic categories based on their semantic domains (e.g., intelligence, examination practices, money, relationships). This process was inductive, allowing categories to emerge from the data rather than being imposed from pre-existing frameworks.

Stage Two – Descriptive Linguistic and Sociolinguistic Analysis: For each category, the expressions were examined for their morphological features (coinage, clipping, blending, reduplication, borrowing, acronyms, and initialism) and semantic features (meaning broadening, narrowing, and shift). The explanatory notes from the semi-structured interviews and WhatsApp verification provided contextual validation of meanings and usage. Finally, drawing on concepts from Interactional Sociolinguistics, the expressions were interpreted for their social functions – how they mark in-group membership,

express solidarity or hierarchy, and contribute to identity construction among Gen Z speakers.

Result

The data collected from 140 final-year students across two higher institutions in Lagos yielded 15 distinct categories of Gen Z expressions. These are presented in Table 1 below, followed by detailed explanatory notes on the semantic and etymological features of selected terms.

Table 1: Categories of Gen Z Linguistic Expressions

IDENTIFIER	CATEGORY	EXPRESSIONS
ONE	Intelligence or Bookworms	Jack; Jacko; Jakometre; Jacker; Brainiac; Jackphite; Omniknowest; Igii we; Bookola; Brain box; Scholar; Guru; Bookie; Efico; Efiwe; Bibliopile
TWO	The Unintelligent	Ozuo Benin; Wawa Hausa; Mumu Pidgin; Ignoramus; Scholar; JJC (Jonny Just Come)
THREE	Studying and Exam Technique	La cram, la pour; Dub/ dubbing; CAP (copy and paste); Spread; TDB (Till Day Break); Tear book; Hyper-jack; Formation; Giraffing
FOUR	Exam Cheating Materials	Expo; Bomb; Microchip; Bullet; Statistics; Chukuli; Eegun
FIVE	Paying for Grades	Sort; Block; Scam; Align; Belong
SIX	Absenteeism	Ditch; Ja pa; Stab; NAS (Non-

		Academic Student)
SEVEN	Enrolment Status	Erosion; Professional student
EIGHT	Examination Success	Scatter; ABA; Ace; Spank
NINE	Examination Failure	Bang; Trash; EFCC
TEN	Moral Conduct	Marlian; Churchy; Saudi; NFA (No Future Ambition)
ELEVEN	Money and Commerce	Shishi; Skibo; Guide; Pepper; Bar; Cheddar; Runs; Hammar; Awoof; Dash; Jara; Ijebu Price Bargain Boku; Gbera; Buy buy; sharp sharp; Shine Your Eyes
TWELVE	Sex and Relationships	Boo; Bae; Ship (Relationship); Ghosting; Knack; Shag; Runs girl; Babe; Breakfast; Rizz; Toast
THIRTEEN	Approval, Compliments and Attributes	Purr; Boss; Na you; Sharp guy; Oga at the top; Chairman; Bross; Snack; Agbani Darego; Sisi; Aje butter; Correct
FOURTEEN	Greetings and Common Expressions	Wetin dey happen? How far? Gucci Omo Period Cap; See finish; E don cast; Find level for the matter; Las las; On colos; Shine teeth; gbe body; Pressure ti wa; Who dey breathe; Follow up; Form; Waka pass; baba for the girls; burst my brain; Shey, you dey

		wine me?; Jollificate; Sabi; E sure for me, die; bam bam; Gist; Juicy; Yarn; Jara e; Free yourself; Chop knuckle; Kpai; Bere; Akproko; Savage; Woke; Extra; Clap back; Vibe; Wavy
FIFTEEN	Street and Everyday Life	Lit; Flex; Slay; Vibes; GOAT (Greatest of All Time); FOMO (fear of missing); squad; Bail; Stab; Crunk; Shayo; Ditch; Aproko; Jaiye; Skibo; Dey your lane/ Scatter; Ginger; Padi; Jam; Level; Soapy; Mad o; Chillax; Cruise; Lamba; Sapa; Pepper dem; Bounce; Spray

Explanatory Notes

In the language used to describe the intelligent and bookworms, 'Braniac', 'scholar', 'brain box', and 'guru', have their conventional meanings but 'Jack' and 'Jackphite' are person's names and proper nouns. In academics, they are used to mean intelligent. Jack (n/v) refers to the person and study activities respectively. Other expressions and terminologies are 'onmiknowest' and 'bookola', with the prefix omni + know (est) to mean all-knowing. In 'bookola', book is compounded with 'ola', a Yoruba word meaning wealth to signify the richness of book knowledge. 'Igi iwe' (a compound noun) is Yoruba translated as a 'tree of books.' Bookworms (full of reading), 'Jacko' (always engrossed in reading) and 'Jackometre' are variants of Jack (studious). A 'bibliophile' is a book lover turned to students' special vocabulary. 'Efico' and 'efiwe' are variants of 'iwe' (Yoruba word for book).

To denote a fool in some Nigerian languages, some words are used across the universities to mean the same thing. 'Ozuo', 'mumu' and 'wawa', and 'mugu' are words used to describe a fool in the Benin, Hausa, and Pidgin languages, respectively. Adepoju (2019) observed that, in street expression, 'Mumu follow Mumu' and 'Mumu follow Mugu' are used to refer to two unintelligent persons. They are used across universities to signify the dull, weak and seemingly 'the stupid'. 'JJC' (Johnny just come) is interpreted to mean a naïve person or novice to a place or situation. 'Scholar' is used for students who do not understand how to navigate academic activities.

Next is the language used for studying and exam-related activities. 'La cram, la pour' (a French creation) demonstrates how most students memorise their course notebooks mainly for an examination. 'Dubbing' means copying someone else's work, 'CAP' (copy and paste) refers to the verbatim use of materials without recourse to its relevance or otherwise of certain portions. 'Spread' means writing to fill up pages of examination booklets with irrelevant information, and 'TDB' (till daybreak) means studying all night non-stop. 'Tear book' is to study hard whereas 'hyper-jack' is to study excessively. 'Formation' refers to sitting among friends in an examination hall and 'giraffing' (an allusion to a giraffe's long neck) means peeping into someone else's work.

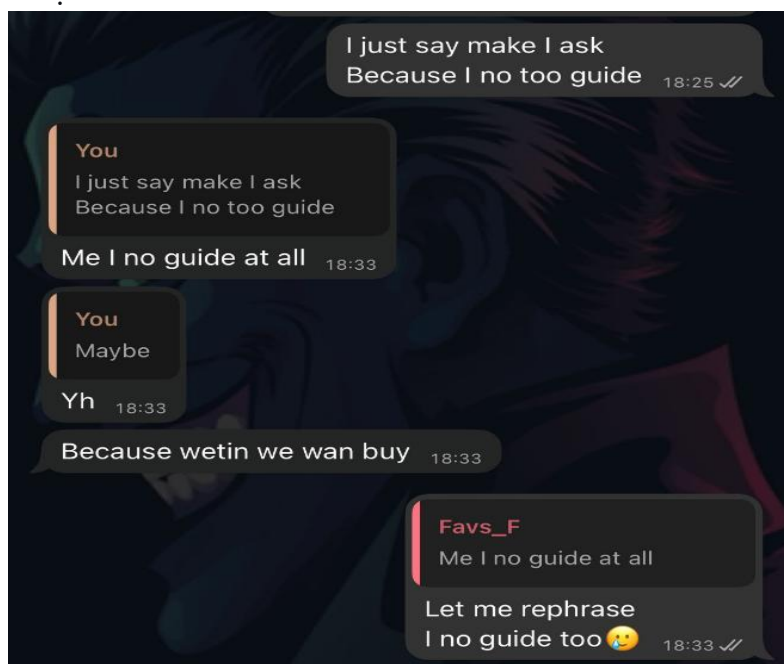
Referring to materials sneaked into the examination hall for malpractice, cheating, and paying for grades, students use words whose literal meanings shift from the conceptual ones. 'Chukuli' (coined), 'expo', 'bomb', 'microchip' also called 'eegun' (Yoruba for the masquerade), 'bullet', and 'statistics' have special meanings. This is also the case with 'sort', 'scam', 'block', and 'align'.

Related to absenteeism from school and student enrolment status, students who usually stay away from classes are said to be 'NAS' (non-academic students); truants are said to 'stab', 'ditch', or 'ja pa' (run away) from classes. 'Erosion' is used when students are advised to change departments because of poor academic performance. 'Professional' students are those who have had several extra years without graduating.

Some words and phrases are reserved for successes and failures in examinations. A student is humorously said to 'scatter' or 'spank' an examination that a student did excellently and 'bang' or 'trash' an examination that a student failed woefully. 'ABA' is used to refer to an A/B grade or an A/B course. 'EFCC' has nothing to do with the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, a government agency in Nigeria but refers to an E, F, or C grade or an outright failure.

Moral conduct in the academic circle has its appellations. 'Churchy' and 'Saudi' refer to overtly religious Christian or Muslim students, respectively. 'Marlian' implies students who are generally irresponsible or exhibit bad behaviour, alluding to a generation of Nigerian pop music stars regarded as non-conformists. 'NFA' (No Future Ambition) as the acronym depicts refers to students who do not take academic activities seriously.

Concerning money and commerce generally, pepper shifts in meaning to imply money as a metaphor for wealth. To 'guide' in Gen Z language is to have money as seen in the WhatsApp screenshot:



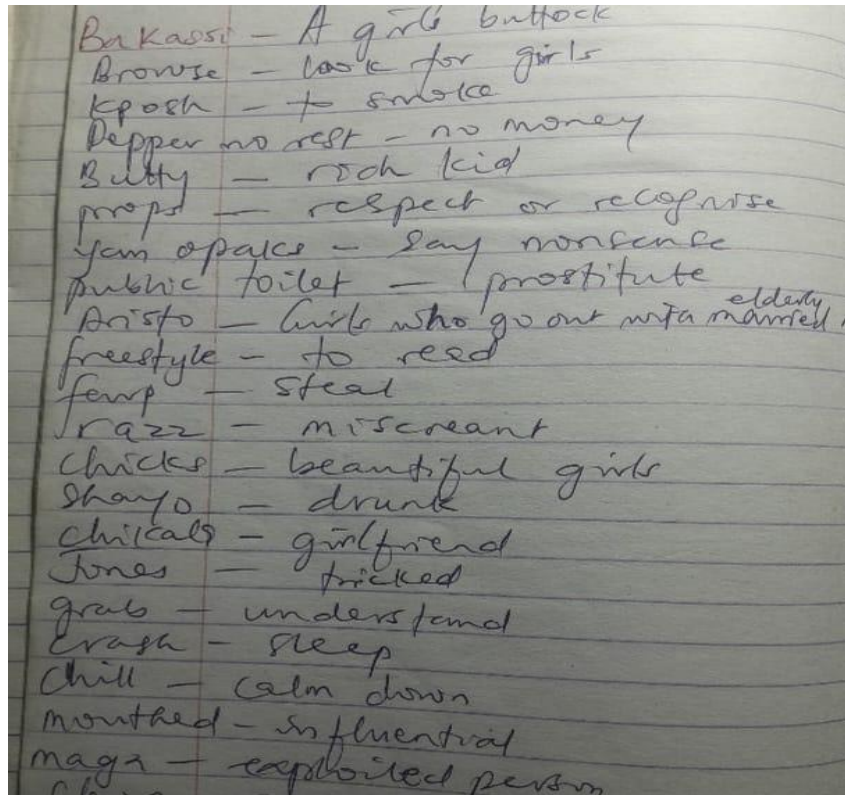
‘Runs’ means hustle or informal jobs for money-making. ‘Cheddar’ represents money which is borrowed. ‘Shishi’ was popular in the 2023 general election in Nigeria and is attributed to a presidential flag-bearer. It suggests the smallest of naira denominations, though Nigeria's currency is in Naira and Kobo. This generation uses ‘shishi’ to stand for small amounts of money or none at all. ‘Jara’ refers to extra or bonus. ‘Buy buy’ (a reduplication) is used by this generation to signify purchasing goods or making a transaction in the market. ‘Awoof’ means "freebie" or something obtained at little or no cost. The term ‘gbera’ implies "reduce the price" or "give a discount" in Pidgin, encouraging a product seller to lower prices to attract buyers and stimulate sales. ‘Bargain’ refers to or to haggle over prices demonstrating the collaborative nature of market transactions

and the importance of reaching mutually acceptable terms. 'Boku' means plenty or a lot in Pidgin. It reflects the abundance of goods or customers in the market. 'Hammer' means to succeed financially or achieve wealth and success. It fosters admiration or respect within the group, depending on the context. 'Shine your eyes' is an encouragement to be vigilant or cautious, providing advice and guidance within social interactions. 'Sharp sharp' (another reduplication) means "quickly" or "efficiently." It has its roots in established Nigerian English expressions.

Gen Z's language for sex and relationship includes 'Bae' or 'Boo' as a term of endearment for a romantic partner, boyfriend or girlfriend to demonstrate intimacy and affection. 'Ship' (clipped from relationship) expresses support for or endorsement of a romantic pairing, reflecting the youth's engagement with fictional or celebrity relationships. 'Babe' is a girlfriend or an attractive woman – a casual term for a romantic partner. 'Ghosting' refers to abruptly ending communication in a relationship, reflecting contemporary dating norms and digital communication. 'Runs Girl' is a girl or lady involved in transactional relationships, reflecting social and economic dynamics, often with a negative connotation.

'Gucci' signifies that everything is good or okay, reflecting Gen Z's adoption of brand names as their expression. 'Snack' refers to someone attractive or appealing to reflect societal beauty standards and objectifying tendencies. 'Bros' is seen as an older male or authority figure within a social environment. Its use acknowledges respect and deference towards seniority or experience in social interactions while 'Oga at the top' by users refers to someone in a position of authority or leadership. It acknowledges hierarchical structures and power dynamics in a social environment. 'Chairman' is a way to salute, greet or hail

a person. 'The Chairman' refers to hierarchy; shows respect and acknowledges leadership in a workplace environment.



A section of the notes taken while validating some of the claims.

'Aje Butter' (also 'Butty' as a variant) denotes a rich or pampered person. It indicates socioeconomic status, and it is often used pejoratively by people of lower status. 'Ginger' is to excite, energise, motivate or inspire someone. It embodies the concept of social support and encouragement among peers. Someone gingered is empowered. 'See finish' describes a 'no boundary' concept in interpersonal relationships where one party feels

diminished or disrespected due to excessive familiarity. The meaning and interpretation can vary based on the context of the interaction and the relationship between speakers, as it could also reflect background knowledge of the topic of discourse.

The meaning and interpretation of 'e don cast' vary depending on the interlocutors and shared background of the conversationalists. It may be used humorously among friends to shrug off minor setbacks or more seriously where the stakes are high. 'Find level' for the matter is Pidgin-use to reassure and offer support in challenging situations. 'Find level' suggests a pragmatic approach to problem-solving and conflict resolution. 'Sabi' is Nigerian Pidgin-English to indicate confirmation of knowledge or understanding. It also means an intelligent person and is used to praise academic or practical achievements within society. For greetings and other common expressions, 'las las' means "in the end" or "eventually" presupposing a pragmatic attitude towards life's uncertainties and challenges. By acknowledging that things will work out 'las las', speakers demonstrate resilience and acceptance of the outcomes of ventures. 'Burst my brain' expresses extreme excitement or amazement. The phrase, a figurative language, conveys emotional states and experiences in vivid and expressive ways. 'Burst my brain' evokes shared enthusiasm or celebration within the group. 'On colos' became a popular term in the year 2023 when it was used to describe someone who is under the influence of hallucinogenic drugs, particularly experiencing vivid visual hallucinations. 'On colos' is to succinctly convey someone's altered state of consciousness due to drug use. 'Shine teeth' is 'to smile broadly or to grin', signalling warmth and friendliness, fostering positive rapport and social harmony. The Yoruba-English 'Gbe Body' means to dance or move energetically. 'Gbe Body' was made popular by celebrity artists like Zlatan and Burna Boy. The expression demonstrates the role of

language in coordinating and regulating social behaviour within specific contexts. 'Waka pass' – to ignore – reflects social attitudes of indifference and passivity within Nigerian society. It is to navigate social encounters and conflicts with discretion and detachment, possibly minding your own business. 'Pressure ti wa' (code-mixing English and Yoruba language) demonstrates a situation of extreme stress or demand causing exertion. It may be used humorously among friends to lighten the mood or more seriously in situations where the stress is significant. 'Who dey breathe?' is pragmatically used to inquire about someone's presence or existence, often humorously or colloquially. It is to ask who is present or active in a particular situation. It can be used in informal settings among friends or acquaintances to inquire about someone's whereabouts or participation. In more formal contexts, it may be employed to lighten the mood or initiate casual conversation. It fosters social connections, constructs identity, and establishes rapport within Nigerian Pidgin-speaking communities. The phrase 'follow-up' illustrates determination and ambition. 'To carry last' is to fail and 'not to carry last' is to succeed, articulating a desire to succeed and excel. It reflects social values around competition and achievement within urban contexts.

When a person uses the word 'form', it means one is accused of pretending or acting above their status. It challenges the authenticity or sincerity of someone's behaviour within the group. It may be used to challenge perceived arrogance, a make-believe attitude, depending on the speaker's intent. 'Omo' is a very ambiguous word that cuts across different meanings and is used to express shock or disbelief in the face of a problematic situation. It could be positive or negative. It fosters solidarity and shared emotional experiences among peers. Its meaning may shift based on the severity of the physical and psychological situation and the speaker's emotional state. See

‘gbege’ expresses shock or surprise at a problematic or chaotic situation. It expresses shared emotional experiences and solidarity among speakers facing adversity. It may be used to assert vulnerability or assertiveness, depending on the context of the situation. The phrase ‘Baba for the girls/ boys’ praises someone for their leadership or popularity within the group. It shows admiration and respect for the designated leader or influencer. Its meaning may vary based on the speaker's tone and the perceived leadership qualities of the individual. ‘Baba for the Girls’ praises someone for their popularity or success with women. It contributes to a masculine identity associated with charm or attractiveness. ‘Shey you dey whine me’ can vary depending on the cultural context of the interaction and the kind of relationship between the speakers. It may be used jokingly among friends or more seriously in situations where trust or honesty is at stake. Speakers adapt their language and communication style to suit the specific social context and dynamics of the interaction.

‘To Jollificate’ means "to celebrate" or "have a good time." This term embodies the concept of communal celebration and joy within Nigerian culture. By ‘jollificating’, individuals gather to share in each other's happiness, reinforcing social bonds and collective identity. It is used as a verb as it involves actions. ‘E sure for me die’ expresses absolute certainty or confidence in a statement or action. It may inspire trust or admiration among peers, depending on the context. It contributes to the construction of a confident or self-assured identity.

Referring to someone or something stylish or impressive is known as ‘bam bam’. This term illustrates the role of language in expressing aesthetic judgements and preferences within social interactions. ‘Gist’, ‘juicy’ and ‘yarn’ illustrate interest and curiosity in gossip or rumours. ‘Juicy’ and ‘yarn’ convey

excitement and anticipation, reflecting the social dynamics of information-sharing and entertainment among peers. 'Jara e' means to be agile and diligent reflecting power dynamics within the interaction. It may be employed by individuals with bargaining power or social influence to negotiate better terms or assert their position. 'Chop knuckle' signifies a fist bump or gesture of agreement and friendship among family members. It signifies satisfaction and contentment. The word 'kpai' means "to die" or "to kill." It reflects the sensitivity and taboo surrounding death, demonstrating the power of language to convey complex emotions and experiences. 'Beere' (Yoruba word) conveys abundance and plenitude in social contexts. 'Beere' signifies the richness and vibrancy of experience. 'Akproko' means someone who is overly curious or nosy. It is derogatory and condemns behaviours perceived as intrusive or inappropriate within specific social contexts. It demonstrates how language is used to enforce social norms and regulate behaviour.

'Savage' entails boldness or audacity, reflecting the youth's embrace of rebelliousness and nonconformity. It denotes power and resistance as individuals assert their autonomy and challenge societal norms through language. To be 'woke' signifies awareness of social justice issues and systemic inequalities. It shows the youth's engagement with activism and advocacy. This underscores consciousness and solidarity, as individuals express their commitment to social change through language. 'Clap Back' denotes a sharp or witty response to criticism. Gen Z uses the expression for self-defence and assertion. It is to demonstrate power and conflict as individuals engage in verbal infighting within social interactions. 'Wavy' signifies something cool, stylish, or impressive. It reflects admiration and approval.

Insight from Interactional Sociolinguistic theory, explains how peculiarly coded words serve as a tool for negotiating social relationships, constructing identities, and expressing cultural values within the age bracket. By analysing the language of Gen Z in various contexts, researchers gain insights into the complex interplay between language, culture, and society. There is street and everyday life language of Gen Z. 'Pepper dem' (already in the Oxford Dictionary) means to make others envious. 'Lit' is used to signify excitement or enjoyment, and a marker of shared enthusiasm among peers. 'Squad' refers to a close group of friends, stressing the importance of social bonds and group cohesion. The usage reinforces the sense of belonging and collective identity within peer groups.

'Flex' is used to denote 'showing off' or 'boasting'. It reflects the wish for social validation and status. The usage reveals the negotiation of social power and hierarchy within youth interactions on face and identity (Adepoju, 2016). 'Slay' conveys excellence or achievement, reflecting an emphasis on individuality and self-expression. The usage reinforces notions of agency and empowerment for performance and identity construction. 'GOAT' (Greatest of All Time) is adopted to elevate someone or something to iconic status, reflecting Gen Z's tendency to idolise and admire certain individuals or entities. This reinforces social hierarchies and aspirational values within youth culture about prestige and admiration. 'FOMO' (fear of missing out) is adopted to reflect anxiety about social exclusion or isolation and it is shaped by digital communication and social media. It underscores the importance of social inclusion and participation in contemporary youth discourse in relation to technology and social interaction. 'Bail' is to leave a party, signalling a shift in social engagement. It indicates changing dynamics or priorities while 'crunking' shows high-energy

excitement, expressing the collective high energy and enthusiasm that contribute to the party's dynamic.

‘Shayo’ symbolises the intake of alcohol. Alcohol taking is a social activity that promotes bonding and relaxation among peers. The word ‘Jaiye’ is of Yoruba root which means to enjoy life or have fun. It encourages a carefree attitude of aligning with the social norms of party culture. ‘Skibo’ is to enjoy or live a lavish lifestyle. It reflects aspirations for a luxurious life – an indication of how extravagant one may be in their spending. ‘Dey your lane’ means mind your own business. It maintains social boundaries and personal space within a setting. ‘Scatter’ means to destroy but in Gen Z expression, it is to make an event very exciting. It describes high-impact actions, promoting an energetic and memorable experience. It encourages enthusiasm and participation which is vital for maintaining party energy. ‘Padi’ is Pidgin for friends, to reinforce social networks and the importance of friendship in party settings. ‘Jam’ is a good song or to enjoy music. Music is a central element of the party, creating a shared cultural experience.

‘Mad o’ is an expression defined as crazy in a good way, describing exceptional experiences, and reinforcing group excitement. The word ‘mad’ is ameliorated. ‘Chillax’ is a blend of chill and relax, creating another word for ‘relax’. ‘Cruise’ has several meanings: to have fun, tease, or even casual enjoyment. It emphasises a laid-back approach to fun. ‘Lamba’ also means several things: a lie, fun talk, or hype. ‘Spray’ is the act of throwing money in celebration – a display of wealth and generosity, enhancing social status. ‘Tight’ implies very good or close approval and positive feedback, reinforcing group consensus. ‘Famz’ is the act of associating with someone for gain. It is an attitude of navigating social networks for personal benefit a strategic social skill.

‘Vibes’ imply the atmosphere, aura or energy of a situation. It echoes Gen Z's emphasis on sensory experiences and emotional display of character. Its usage illustrates sociolinguistic theories on affect and embodiment, as individuals articulate their feelings and perceptions through language.

Discussion

The categorisation and analysis of Gen Z expressions above illustrate how language operates within specific social contexts, reflecting cultural values and interpersonal dynamics. Drawing on concepts from Interactional Sociolinguistics, this study offers insights into how these terms function to negotiate identity, express solidarity or hierarchy, and manage social relationships. Each term serves a specific function in conversation, whether to show respect, indicate familiarity, or express emotions. Through their peculiar use, speakers display social interactions effectively; maintain harmony; assert identity, and; foster in-group bonds. This analysis demonstrates language's dynamic and context-dependent nature, showing how Gen Z language use is integral to communication and cultural expression.

By analysing Gen Z's language through the lens of IS, we observe how they function to create, negotiate, and reinforce social identities, relationships, and cultural meanings. These are realised through several linguistic features: coinage, clipping, blending, reduplication, borrowing, acronyms and initialism, semantic shift, narrowing and broadening. IS focuses on how Gen Z language is employed in social interactions, examining the intricacies of communication within specific contexts. Such contexts in this work include money and finance, indifference to growth, corrupt practices of different guises within schooling, acceptance and rejection, smartness and dullness, successes and

failures, sex and relationships, etc. In the analysis, the data are treated as linguistic practices of Gen Z in relation to social and educational contextual interactions. Thus, these peculiarly formed words are used to understand how the language of this generational group fosters mutuality and social intelligence among its users and excludes members of the out-group. From this, it becomes evident that the use of certain slangish expressions in social communication allows for shades of interpretation and understanding among users in such diverse contexts. By examining how the new words are used or interpreted, IS becomes apt in the analysis of face-to-face interactions. Furthermore, the researcher discusses Gen Z's language in the form of word economy in its social contexts, providing valuable insights into its roles, functions, and implications towards evolving into a different dialect of Nigerian English. The dialect of Gen Z's expressions in the form of coinage, reduplication, blending, clipping, meaning broadening and narrowing explores the multifaceted roles they could play in identity construction, social interaction, and cultural expression. This study, therefore, contributes to broader discussions on language, society, and the complexities of human communication.

It should be acknowledged that the analysis in this study is primarily lexical and semantic, drawing on interview-validated meanings rather than recorded natural interaction. As such, the study offers a descriptive taxonomy of Gen Z expressions with sociolinguistic interpretation, rather than a full interactional analysis. Future research would benefit from recording and transcribing natural peer conversations to examine how these expressions function as contextualisation cues in real-time interaction.

Conclusion

The researchers examined language usage among Lagos Gen Z in 2023 to stress generational differences that can cause communication gaps. By impacting language and society, Gen Z is developing into a dialect of the language of use, leading to language evolution by introducing new words and meanings. It reflects and shapes cultural values, trends, and societal changes, creating intergenerational communication barriers or bridges. While older generations view Gen Z language as informal, Gen Zs see it as a key part of their linguistic identity. They often blend languages to enrich linguistic diversity. Some linguistic practices of the Gen Zs eventually become part of mainstream language to reflect its dynamic nature and the influence of youth as agents of language shift and evolution. Previous evidence is seen in the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) (2020), which added several Nigerian English words, reflecting the influence of Nigerian culture and language on English.

Using insight from Interactional Sociolinguistics, the study explored how Gen Z linguistic patterns function within social interactions to convey meaning and build rapport. The theory helped analyse the group's interactional functions, such as marking in-group membership or expressing humour and solidarity. The study also emphasised how linguistic patterns of Gen Z extraction reflect group identity and evolve with social dynamics, demonstrating context-dependence of the usage.

In conclusion, Gen Z language use reflects broader social and cultural influences. It is not just informal language but a dynamic aspect of communication that shapes the evolution of language. The research highlights the importance of understanding the dialect of the younger generation to foster effective communication and social cohesion. While the present study is primarily descriptive, focusing on the lexical and semantic features of Gen Z expressions with sociolinguistic interpret-

tation, it provides a foundational taxonomy that can inform future interactional research.

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