



# The Discourse of Gen Z in Social Media Network: Inputs to English Language Teaching

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## Abstract

Gen Z language in social media is expressive, unrestricted, and liberated. Many studies have revealed that the use of social media has adverse effects on the writing skills and performance of Gen Z. Thus, this study was conducted to identify the interests of Gen Z based on their postings and to design writing tasks that may be of interest to them. This critical discourse analysis aimed to explore and analyse the content and functions of Gen Z's posts. Additionally, the writing style of Gen Z in social media was also investigated. Specifically, posts were limited to Twitter as it is believed that this platform is where Gen Z youngsters become loud, proud, unfiltered, and genuine in their language. A total of 45 tweets were collected by the researcher. Findings revealed that Gen Z posts are commonly about school-related tasks, entertainment, and personal matters. Their posts function to express appreciation, frustration, uncertainty, longingness, relief, sorry, wishful, and love. Furthermore, this study revealed that Gen Z people do not conform to the conventions of language, uses cursing and swearing in posts, and uses emojis to intensify and reinforce a strong emotion. Teachers are encouraged to adapt and embrace the technology to create engaging, authentic, and meaningful writing activities that may address the possible writing challenges of Gen Z in academic writing.

**Keywords:** *Gen Z, language, social media, posts, critical discourse analysis*

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## Introduction

The language of Gen Z in social media platforms is expressive, unrestricted, and liberated. This generation is considered the least conservative as compared to former generations when it comes to language. They like to integrate emojis in their communication. They are also so innovative that they are fond of inventing new words (Devlin, 2021). It appears that this cohort has no limitations in expressing their thoughts, ideas, and insights as they are youngsters who are full of emotions and ideas. Their speech online mirrors their identity and the context to which language is used in function. Moreover, Gen Zers' language is often informal as it may contain jargons, slang, and even taboo language that only their cohort may understand (Pasa & Mahyuni, 2022). Their language style may be attributed to their complex environment to which they keep on adjusting and thriving to (Serbanescu, 2022).

Specifically, Generation Zers, commonly known as Gen Z, iGen, postmillennial, etc., are those who were born between the mid-1990s to 2010 and grew up with technology at hand. Gen Z people are independent and care for their fellow, aim for diverse communities, highly regard flexibility, relevance, originality, and non-hierarchical leadership. They are inclined to collaborative tasks since they are sociable. Also, they possess a pragmatic attitude when it comes to resolving issues that arise (De Witte, 2022). Gen Zers are very connected online as it is through the digital world that they keep themselves updated of current events (Serbanescu, 2022). In fact, Gen Z youngsters are the ones who spark conversations and trends from all sorts of topics – entertainment, sports, news, pop culture, and the like (Pietsch, n.d.).

In terms of topic interests, Gen Z or Zoomers are found to be politically liberal on topics about same-sex marriage, race, and climate change (Devlin, 2021). They are also open-minded that they become more accepting and empathetic in terms of individual differences (Smith, 2023); thus, they embrace diversity in terms of viewpoints, they prefer to be outside of the box and not be confined exclusively to politics and to labels assigned to them (Young, 2019).

Statistically, Gen Z comprises the biggest percentage of demographic profile of social media users, with 30.6% whose age ranges from 18-24 years old. As of January 2023, there are a total of 84.45 million Filipino social media users whose average age is 24.9 years old. This supports the claim that half of the time Gen Z spends on the internet is allotted to social media. It appears that the use of social media among Gen Z is for them not to be 'irrelevant' and not to be outcasted to their social friends' activity. This has been a platform to remain connected with friends (Kissinger, 2019). Based on reports, the main reason for using social media is to keep in touch with friends and family. The commonly used social media were the following: Facebook (95.7%), FB Messenger (92.1%), Tiktok (77.2%), Instagram (71.9%), and Twitter (56.7%) (Howe, 2023). Specifically, Twitter – a free social networking microblogging site that allows users to broadcast short posts called 'tweets' – is one that is liked by Gen Z to practice their freedom of speech as they can post freely their insights on some topics regardless of their age, gender, and nationality. It is in Twitter that users spark public discourses and debates online on various timely issues. However, some claim that Gen Z youth are assertive in exercising their free speech that they tend to disregard the feelings of other social media users (Mamangon et al., 2018).

Based on the observation of the researcher, the Gen Z youngsters use various social media applications for various purposes. Some students would often use Facebook to share memes, update others of their errands, accomplishments, and whatever current events they have. However, these students seem to use Twitter for expressing strong emotions which may be vulgar as some would use profane language even if the context is on the positive side (e.g., winning a contest, conquering a challenge, received awards and distinctions, etc.). Additionally, in this platform students would express their rants about their mishaps in life, insights regarding social issues related to government, gender inequality, racial discrimination. According to some students, they prefer to use Twitter as this is more liberated as compared to Facebook. They also like the feature that tweets may not be visible to the public unless one 'follows' the user's account. Lastly, there are few teachers who have Twitter accounts; thus, they may not be able to see what students are posting online.

## Methodology

This study employed critical discourse analysis (CDA). For this study, social media posts from Gen Z students were collated by the researchers. The posts were limited to Twitter, one of the topmost used platforms of Filipino youngsters in expressing thoughts and ideas. But most especially, in Twitter, Gen Z people are “loud, proud, unfiltered, and totally genuine” (Pietsch, n.d.).

In collecting the corpus for this study, a student known by the researchers was assigned. This was because: 1) the researcher had no Twitter account; 2) the students had access to accounts of their peers which may be private for public view; and 3) for the researcher, who was also a teacher, to observe anonymity by not knowing whom the posts were coming from. The posts were limited to January-July of 2023. These posts were downloaded. The names of the posters were blurred to keep their identity anonymous.

In analyzing the texts, this study employed Mullet’s (2018) summary of the CDA framework which were narrowed to seven stages: (1) selecting the discourse; (2) locating and preparing data sources; (3) exploring the background of each text; (4) coding texts and identifying themes; (5) analyzing the external relations in the texts; (6) analyzing the internal relations in the texts; and (7) interpreting the data.

## Findings

### *1. Common Themes of the Social Media Postings of Gen Z*

After the analysis of themes of the social media posts of Gen Z students, it can be deduced that their postings commonly fall under school-related tasks, entertainment, and personal matters. School-related tasks refer to posts of students which function as a means of expressing: appreciation to the school per se; frustration to various academic activities; and sharing of perspective on school-related issues. For entertainment, students’ posts were centered on celebrities like Korean Pop (K-Pop) icons, concert tours, sports interests, and online gaming. Lastly, for personal matters, students’ posts were commonly about their experiences in life and their romance.

These themes were clustered as to what functions the posts imply. These functions were expressions of appreciation, frustration, uncertainty, longingness, relief, sorry, wishful, and love.

## ***2. The Linguistic Features Used by Gen Z in Social Media***

Gen Z language may be described as eccentric. This is because of the unconventional form they use in their posts. Their deviation from the norms is one of the effects of the continuous dominance of technology. Notably, Gen Z language is characterized by the use of various slang terminologies. Interestingly, this study found various linguistic features and styles Gen Z applies in their postings. For instance, the majority of the posts were (C5) not following the conventions of the language like proper capitalization, punctuations, spacing, and spelling. This style was followed by (C2) using curses and foul language to express strong emotions. Then, (C7) they use emoji/s to reinforce/intensify the emotion being conveyed in the post.

## ***3. Classroom-based Activities for Gen Z Students***

***Writing personal essays or journal.*** It was evident that Gen Z students are very expressive of their feelings and emotions through posting updates on their social media account. They seem quite vocal about their current events and they post updates of their daily life. Furthermore, the activity of writing a personal essay will also give students a platform to share their insights on various topics they are interested in. It is worth considering that teachers should be careful in crucially planning the writing program for students.

***Reviewing of the conventions of the language.*** Based on the findings, the majority of the posts of Gen Z do not adhere to conventions of language. Although posting on social media does not require to be grammatical, students may be affected unconsciously of the habits of not conforming to the conventions

***Maximizing the use of technology.*** The ubiquitous use of technology in education is interminable. Most especially during the pandemic when in-person classes were suspended, the technology has been an alternative to continue learning despite global threat on health. Hence, it is recommended that language teachers adapt and embrace the use of technology in their ESL classes for a more engaging, authentic, and meaningful learning experience that caters the learners' needs.

## Conclusion

Gen Z students are inarguably expressive of their thoughts, ideas, and sentiments. In this modern world, they often expressed their strong emotions through posting to various social media sites (i.e., Twitter). As students, their postings fall under school-related tasks, entertainment, and personal matters. Their posts function to express appreciation, frustration, uncertainty, longingness, relief, sorry, wishful, and love. Interestingly, the Gen Z generation, aside from using slang terms, has become eccentric in their language as they employ different linguistic features in their postings. Their posts are generally deviating from the norms and conventions of language such as spelling, capitalization, use of proper punctuations, and vocabulary. Also, they seem to use curses and foul language that do not intend to harm but to express a strong surge of emotion. Likewise, their use of emoji in their postings signifies and reinforces strong emotion.

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