



Gen Z Chat Language: A Discourse of Violence and Discrimination

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Open Access

Manuscript ID:
BIJ-2025-J-014

Subject: English

Received : 21.05.2025

Accepted : 09.06.2025

Published : 28.07.2025

DOI: 10.64938/bijri.v9n4.25.JL014

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Abstract

Language plays a crucial role in human communication, serving as the primary medium through which individuals express thoughts and ideas. Language is in a continuous state of change, evolving to accommodate the shifting needs of its users. As societies develop and cultural experiences diversify, linguistic structures and vocabularies undergo modification. Several factors contribute to language change, including social interaction, technological progress, and lifestyle shifts. The rapid advancement of technology has had a profound impact on people worldwide, particularly those born between 1995 and 2014, commonly identified as Generation Z. The widespread adoption of social media has contributed to significant changes in language they use. This paper aims to discuss how the Gen Z chat language has evolved into a language of violence and discrimination. It also tries to prove how Gen Z chat language contributes to racial discrimination using real life examples from the Kerala context. The paper aims to showcase that just like how apocalyptic literature foregrounds the hope that may arise after the foreboding horror, the Gen Z chat language will also finally evolve into a constructive language rather than a destructive one.

Keywords: language, gen Z, violence, discrimination

Language plays a crucial role in human communication, serving as the primary medium through which individuals express thoughts and ideas. It is intrinsically linked to social and cultural development, adapting in response to societal transformations. This adaptability underscores language's dynamic nature, reinforcing its role as a reflection of human progress.

Language is in a continuous state of change, evolving to accommodate the shifting needs of its users. As societies develop and cultural experiences diversify, linguistic structures and vocabularies undergo modification. Moreover, language facilitates the assimilation of innovations, driven by human creativity and technological advancements. The English language, in particular, has experienced profound changes over the past millennium, illustrating this ongoing evolution.

Several factors contribute to language change, including social interaction, technological progress, and lifestyle shifts. For instance, advancements in technology often introduce new terminology, while cross-cultural communication fosters linguistic borrowing and adaptation. Additionally, variations in lifestyle influence language usage, further shaping its development over time.

In addition, Martini (2015) stated that generation by generation, pronunciations evolve, new words are borrowed or invented and its rate of change varies. Furthermore, the majority of the changes that occur in our language often start with young adults and teens (Thump, 2016). They begin to focus on belonging to a self-organized group of peers, teammates and friends and becoming the "we" generation. As they interact, the language begins to grow differently and



made them remarkably distinctive from the previous generations. (Jeresano & Carretero 2022)

The rapid advancement of technology has had a profound impact on people worldwide, particularly those born between 1995 and 2014, commonly identified as Generation Z or Zoomers. This generation follows the millennials and has been characterized by scholars as “people born in the 1990s and raised in the 2000s through the most significant developments in the century” (Tarihoran et.al 2022) . Unlike previous generations, Gen Z has been immersed in a digital environment, surrounded by the internet, smartphones, laptops, online networks, and digital media from an early age.

One defining characteristic of Generation Z is their familiarity and comfort with modern technologies, particularly mobile communication, which remains relatively new to older generations. They are highly connected to the internet and digital platforms, influencing their social interactions, education, and cultural engagement. Global trends in music, movies, and celebrity culture are closely linked to this generation, and fashion, food trends, and events are increasingly shaped by social media and globalization. Gen Z is considered the first truly digital generation, having grown up with smartphones and social media as integral parts of their daily lives.

Technology plays a central role in shaping their communication habits. With constant access to mobile devices and the internet, Gen Z prefers digital platforms over traditional forms of communication such as SMS. Social media applications, including Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, and Twitter, are their primary means of interaction. This shift has also influenced learning methodologies, as digital tools and online education become more prominent.

Furthermore, the widespread adoption of social media has contributed to significant changes in language use. The increasing integration of digital communication has led to linguistic shifts, fostering the blending of languages and cultures. As social media usage continues to grow annually, its influence on language and communication patterns is expected to expand, shaping how future generations interact in an increasingly digital world.

In today’s society social media platforms have evolved into spaces of violence. According to Murat Mengü and Seda Mengü,

Social media is not only a domain of freedom where individuals express themselves overtly or secretly, but also an area where several ways of violence emerge or even a means used for some aspects of violence...As for the the elements of violence in social media, the sites for women and child porn, visual material including excessive violence, campaigns of abuse towards certain people and institutions as well as black propaganda, attributing negative aspects, misdirecting people by assuming fake identities, different ways of theft in social media may be pointed out.(2015)

Kerala, once renowned for its peaceful and harmonious society, is now witnessing a concerning surge in youth-related violence and crime. This growing issue is multifaceted, influenced by various social and technological changes. A significant factor contributing to this trend is the evolving nature of Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012. Unlike previous generations, they are digital natives who have grown up in an era dominated by smartphones and social media. The widespread availability of digital technology in Kerala has played a crucial role in shaping this phenomenon. With 88% of schools equipped with internet access and 93.41% having in-house computers, the state boasts a robust digital infrastructure. Additionally, government initiatives aimed at providing free internet connections to 20 lakh economically disadvantaged families have effectively made internet access a fundamental right. While these advancements have facilitated greater connectivity and access to information, they have also inadvertently exposed young individuals to harmful content, cyberbullying, and various online risks, contributing to shifts in behavior and social interactions.

Gen Z uses social media platforms as a medium to practice and propagate violence. Violence can be defined as “a way of action ... based on the power physically and materially to hurt other creatures or to be harmed” it can be broadened to encompass “the exertion of physical force so as to injure or abuse” or “injury by ... distortion, infringement, or profanation”(Violence, n.d.-a).



The most frequent forms of youth violence on social media include cyberbullying and victimization, online harassment, electronic dating abuse, and cyberstalking. Additionally, digital platforms contribute to gang-related violence, peer-to-peer conflicts such as school shootings, and incidents of cyber-suicide. But Gen Z takes violence through social media to an extreme level. In Kerala, a WhatsApp group was created only to propagate a fight between two groups of school students which eventually led to the death of a 10th standard student Mohammed Shahabas.

Social or physical connections are rare among the Gen Z students, making them the generation of virtual connections. This has led to the evolution of a new slang among them popularly known as the Gen Z slang or Gen Z chat language. According to Yusuf et al “The development of technology and information that spreads quickly is one of the influencing factors” for the formation of the gen Z slang or gen Z chat language (Yusuf, Fata, & Aini, 2022).

Slang is a non-standard language used in a non-formal situation...Slang is a common type of language since the speech style is characterized by language codes personal to a generation or group. It is a language that a specific group of people uses to communicate with one another and to convey their thoughts in casual settings... Furthermore, it is considered that slang is the language of the young generation because all children of the 2000s understand what the speaker and the interlocutor mean. (Yusuf, Fata, & Aini, 2022)

Allan and Burridge (2006) identify seven key functions of slang, including addressing others, initiating casual conversations, fostering a sense of closeness, conveying emotions or impressions, humiliating or insulting individuals, and expressing intimacy. Additionally, they classify slang into five distinct categories: Fresh and Creative, Flippant, Imitative, Acronym, and Clipping. But according to Yusuf et al the functions of slang are To Start A Casual Conversation ,To Express Impression ,To create an intimate atmosphere, To Address Information, To Abuse Others.

Most of the Gen Z slang words are inherently violent, abusive or discriminative. Some of the examples are,

- “Snack - Gen Z slang used to describe someone who you find attractive. In social media, it is sometimes spelled as snack” (80 Gen Z slang words and how to use them, n.d.).
- “Shade- To throw ‘shade’ at someone is to disrespect or disapprove of someone” (80 Gen Z slang words and how to use them, n.d.)
- Ohio – A meme referring to the idea that strange and absurd things happen in the U.S. state of Ohio. The phrase “Only in Ohio” is often used to describe bizarre or cursed images and videos, implying that Ohio is an alternate reality where weird things are the norm.
- “L- Short for the word “loser” or “loss”, and pronounced like the letter in the alphabet, “L” is most commonly used as an insult” (The lowkey guide to Gen Z speak, 2023).
- “NPC - Short for non-playable character, it means the opposite of a main character. This person is usually a background character in your life that doesn’t have significant importance” (What do these Gen Z slang words mean?, n.d.).
- “Mid- Used to insult or degrade something you don’t like, labeling it as average or poor quality” (What do these Gen Z slang words mean?, n.d.).

Therefore, not only that Gen Z chat language has added a number of new terms to the English vocabulary but also changed the connotations of many existing words. What is intriguing is that these changes in meanings are not affirmative but negative. These words are used as a means to discriminate or to propagate violence against individuals. According to Yunisrina Qismullah Yusuf and Ika Apriani Fata, one of the major uses of Gen Z chat language is to abuse others. They explicate the uses the example of the word “fuckin”, which is a word commonly used in chats by Gen Z.





The above picture depicts the chat between two friends discussing the death of one of their classmates.

Mihir Ahammed - the 15-year-old Kerala boy who died by suicide last month - was subject to “unimaginable humiliation, even on his last day” by some students at his school, his uncle, Musthafa PC, the CEO of the popular ID Fresh Foods company, said in an Instagram post Monday evening.

In the heartbreaking post - in which horrific details of the abuse of Mihir, bullied for his dark complexion - he cried over gleeful messages exchanged by his nephew’s tormentors, who he said “didn’t end their cruelty even after his death”, referring to the boy as a “ni*ga who actually died”. (NDTV, 2023)

This is the evidence for how the Gen Z chat language contributes to racial discrimination and hails for violence.

Not only the English language, but also the Malayalam language has also undergone a lot of changes in the hands of Gen Z. “As a language, Malayalam has had a tradition of borrowing from other languages including Portuguese, Arabic, Tamil and Sanskrit by virtue of trade and colonisation. However, this borrowing is different from the current linguistic assimilation... these new changes ...are primarily driven by the Malayali youth who are in turn aided by online influences”.

The term ‘vibe’, originating from American Vernacular English, conveys a sense of joy or a particular atmosphere. In contemporary usage, it effectively encapsulates the essence of a moment, place, or connection without the need for extensive description. Recently, there has been a growing trend of incorporating Malayalam prefixes with ‘vibe’, leading to the emergence of neologisms such as ‘thantha-vibe’. Similarly, the term ‘vaazha’, which literally translates to ‘banana,’ carries cultural connotations that extend beyond its direct meaning. It is commonly featured in the idiom “Vaazha vecha mathiyarinnu” (roughly translating to “It would have been better to plant a plantain”), which metaphorically expresses the futility of an effort. In this context, ‘vaazha’ serves as a powerful descriptor, symbolizing the perceived uselessness of investing time or resources in individuals considered unproductive or incapable of yielding meaningful

outcomes. Literally translating to ‘old-fashioned vibe,’ ‘thantha-vibe’ characterizes behaviors and attitudes that deviate from the norms of Generation Z. Unlike ‘vibe’, which carries a neutral or positive connotation, ‘thantha-vibe’ often conveys sarcasm and disapproval, reflecting a generational shift in perceptions of traditionalism and modernity.

Not only the chat language but also the movies enjoyed and praised by this generation are inherently violent and discriminative. For example Marco is a 2024 Malayalam movie featuring Unni Mukundan. This movie is known for its brutal and fierce violence. Despite lacking a positive message to the society the movie was a huge box office hit.

In conclusion, Language is constantly evolving and this evolution may or may not be in the positive direction. Gen Z chat language today is evolving into a language of discrimination and violence. Just like how apocalyptic literature foregrounds the hope that may arise after the foreboding horror, the Gen Z chat language will also finally evolve into a constructive language rather than a destructive one.

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