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## **Code-Switching and Slang: An Analysis of Language Dynamics in the Everyday Lives of Generation Z**

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### **Abstract**

This study explores the dynamics of code-switching used in Generation Z's (Gen-Z) communication practices, revealing it as a dynamic and adaptive strategy employed in diverse social contexts. Gen-Z exhibits context-specific types of code-switching, utilizing informal and casual forms, such as slang and non-formal language, in peer interactions. Within familial settings, a seamless transition between formal and informal language aligns with established family norms, while professional environments witness the use of formal and professional language. The strategic use of code-switching and slang by Gen-Z serves as a nuanced communication approach, catering to specific social scenarios. In informal peer contexts, the incorporation of slang fosters a sense of camaraderie, while code-switching acts as a tool for expressing emotions and personal identity, reflecting individuals' comfort in conveying specific feelings or ideas in a chosen language. This research contributes to a comprehensive understanding of Gen-Z's language practices, showcasing their adeptness in navigating diverse linguistic landscapes, expressing identity, and adapting to social expectations. Such insights are pivotal for fostering effective intergenerational and cross-cultural communication, bridging understanding between different linguistic and cultural groups.

### **Keywords**

code-switching, gen-z, language dynamics, slang

## Introduction

Language serves as a powerful tool for communication (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Matthiessen, 2015), not only reflecting cultural identity (Halliday & Hasan, 1989; Kramsch & Widdowson, 1998) but also evolving over time (Yule, 2022). In the digital age, Generation Z emerges as a prominent force shaping language dynamics (Haviland, 2013). This generation, born roughly between 1997 and 2012, is deeply influenced by rapid technological advancements (Ajmain, 2020; Demir & Sönmez, 2021), leading to a norm or ethics of digital communication and social media interaction (Apdillah et al., 2022; Eberwein & Porlezza, 2016). Consequently, their language use is characterized by frequent code-switching and a distinctive incorporation of slang (Kandiawan, 2022; Tarihoran et al., 2022).

Code-switching, a common practice among bilingual individuals, enables effective expression and navigation of diverse social scenarios (Ariffin & Rafik-Galea, 2009). Gen Z, in particular, employs code-switching as a means to communicate with different groups, adapting their language to suit various contexts (Nilep, 2006). This linguistic versatility not only aids in effective communication but also serves as a tool for expressing identity and fostering group solidarity (Azlan & Narasuman, 2013; De Fina, 2007; Sophocleous, 2012). Within bilingual communities, the choice of language contributes to a shared sense of belonging and cultural identity (Tarigan et al., 2023).

Simultaneously, Generation Z embraces the creation of covert languages and codes for communication, exemplified by the prevalence of their unique slang (Yusuf et al., 2023). This linguistic phenomenon, especially popular among teenagers, becomes a distinctive form of expression. Gen Z's slang captivates and sometimes confounds older generations, serving as a primary mode of communication among peers. This practice motivates individuals to articulate their thoughts and feelings more freely, fostering meaningful exchanges of ideas and insights (Jeresano & Carretero, 2022; Pimentel & Diniz, 2014; Schilhab, 2015).

Code-switching is a multifaceted linguistic occurrence, with interactions between languages varying based on linguistic factors and the nature of the involved languages (Shay, 2015). Analyzing code-switched data reveals linguistic sharing, cross-lingual transfer, lexical borrowing, and common occurrences of speech errors with restarts (Sitaram et al., 2020). The Indonesian Gen Z's use of code-switching and slang on social media is often driven by social factors, convenience, referential functions emphasizing precise messaging, and affective functions to appear up-to-date, cool, and fashionable among friends (Kandiawan, 2022; Kristanto & Meilasari, 2019).

To delve deeper into how Generation Z utilizes code-switching and slang in their daily lives, comprehensive research approaches were proposed in this paper. Interviews, participant monitoring, and text analysis across various Gen Z groups were conducted to understand patterns of code-switching and slang usage. This study aims to investigate the impact of these language changes on communication processes and how they reflected identity. Employing both qualitative and quantitative methods, it is expected to provide a holistic insight into the role of code-switching and slang in the lives of Gen Z.

This research sought to answer pivotal questions about the permanence and cultural influences of Gen Z's language practices. By exploring the patterns and implications of code-switching and slang usage, there is an aspiration to appreciate and respond to the evolving linguistic landscape, acknowledging the unique diversity within the millennial community. Understanding this generation's language use facilitates a nuanced response to the ongoing social and cultural changes, enhancing communication and interaction in the ever-changing world.

It comprehensively analyzes the utilization of code-switching and slang in the daily communication practices of Generation Z. Firstly, it discerns and comprehends the intricate patterns of code-switching and slang use prevalent among Generation Z individuals. Secondly, it seeks to identify the underlying motives and diverse social contexts that drive the code-switching and slang practices within this demographic. Thirdly, it assesses the impact of code-switching and slang on the communication dynamics within Generation Z, unraveling how these linguistic phenomena shape their interactions. Additionally, this study strives to delve into the reflective nature of code-switching and slang, deciphering how these language choices contribute to the formation and expression of identity and social affiliations among Generation Z. Furthermore, the investigation extends to exploring the correlation between the use of code-switching and slang with technological advancements and the broader cultural transformations experienced by Generation Z. Lastly, it seeks to understand the variations in code-switching and slang utilization among Generation Z individuals hailing from diverse cultural or geographical backgrounds. Through these objectives, the study aspires to contribute valuable insights into the intricate linguistic practices of Generation Z, fostering a deeper understanding of the role language plays in their communication and identity formation processes.

## **Method**

This study scrutinized the digital culture and social media slang of Gen Z students in Jakarta and its effect on their daily language. This study focused mainly on 19-22 years old participants. The research method employed is qualitative. Qualitative research is a fundamental scientific process (Sale & Thielke, 2018), that explores and understands human experience and meaning among several individuals or a group of people originating from social issues (Stiles, 2003). Qualitative research, in general, can be applied to the study of societal life, history, behavior, concepts or phenomena, social problems, and more (Kemparaj & Chavan, 2013; Lichtman, 2014). Qualitative research is a procedure in research that produces descriptive data in the form of written or oral words from the behaviors of observable individuals (Hennink et al., 2020).

The study focused on Generation Z, encompassing individuals born from the mid-1990s to the early 2010s, chosen for their active engagement with technology and social media, making them likely intensive users of digital language (Jeresano & Carretero, 2022). The inclusion criteria for the population involve individuals within this timeframe who actively use language in daily interactions, including code-switching and slang. The purposively selected sample of 10 individuals aimed for diversity across social backgrounds, educational contexts, and language experiences. Participants, aged between 19 and 22,

exhibited varied educational backgrounds, reflecting the age range of Generation Z. They came from diverse social and economic backgrounds, engaging with platforms like Instagram and TikTok. Proficient in multiple languages, including English and local languages, participants demonstrated potential contexts for code-switching. Experience with slang was prevalent, with varying frequencies of use in different contexts. Some participants expressed a specific interest in maintaining language as part of their identity, while others viewed it as a form of personal expression. This diverse sample allowed for in-depth analysis and representation of the Generation Z population.

## Results

### Fresh and Creative

The fresh and creative type encompasses slang terms that feature innovative vocabulary, imaginative cleverness, an informal style, and may consist of newly coined words or even resurrect old terms unfamiliar to people (Syahputra & Syafitri, 2022). Generation Z tends to create innovations in their language to uniquely express themselves and differentiate themselves from previous generations.

**Table 1.** Fresh and Creative Slang Words

| No | Slang Word    | Meaning                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|----|---------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1  | <i>Chuaks</i> | <i>Chuaks</i> means a sarcastic statement or a statement that accompanies a sentence with negative intonation. <i>Chuaks</i> is usually added at the end of a sentence after the sarcasm. |
| 2  | <i>Anjir</i>  | Emphasizes certain feelings or expressions such as shock, joy, annoyance, etc.                                                                                                            |
| 3  | <i>Lebay</i>  | Overdoing or overacting                                                                                                                                                                   |
| 4  | <i>Sabi</i>   | The true meaning of can ( <i>bisa</i> ) with the pronunciation reversed                                                                                                                   |
| 5  | <i>Santuy</i> | The Indonesian slang word <i>santai</i> is commonly used in conversation to express being free from tension, enjoying the atmosphere or situation.                                        |

Example of conversation:

- Senior : "*Kalian kerja di sini **santuy** aja ya* (Take it easy when you work here). The job description is easy, if you're confused, just ask me later. Work life balance and feel free guys."
- Intern : "Alright *Kak* (a gender-neutral addressing term for an older person), will be noted."
- Senior : "***Sabi*** nih (certainly possible) next we're going work at coffee shop, *gue yang bayar*in (it is on me)."
- Intern : "Thank you *banget ya kak* (thank you very much)."
- Senior : "***Lebay*** lo udah makasih aja, udah ayo kerja lagi (don't overreact, thanks are enough, let's work again)."

Based on the excerpt of the conversation above, it is a manifestation of code-switching with the use of slang in everyday life. The senior initiates the conversation using Indonesian, interspersed with slang directed towards the intern. The intern responds in English, focusing on the dominant language used by the interlocutor. The researcher

concludes that this code-switching occurs because they hear the speaker or interlocutor using English and also to adaptation to the interlocutor. Another factor causing language mixing in the conversation is to facilitate the flow of communication. In the conversation, the senior and intern interact using English, but to facilitate communication, they mix Indonesian in their speech. This is because they are accustomed to using two languages in their daily lives, Indonesian and English, resulting in the mixing of languages in their speech to facilitate the flow of communication. This code-switching also involves the use of slang, which can be expressed to younger people or those not too far in age. The aim is to lighten the atmosphere, enhance familiarity, and initiate light conversations with others so that it doesn't seem stiff.

## Flippant Slang

A word or phrase formed from two or more words that forms a new meaning that is different from the literal meaning of the words that form it.

**Table 2.** Flippant Slang Words

| No | Slang Word     | Meaning                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|----|----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1  | <i>Bar-bar</i> | Describing rough and aggressive behavior. Comments on actions or behavior deemed inappropriate or sensitive.                                                                                                                                                     |
| 2  | Red Flag       | In relationships, the term "red flag" is used to indicate the presence of negative signs that help us to stop and reconsider continuing the relationship. This term, for instance, towards a man, signifies that the man possesses negative traits or behaviors. |
| 3  | Green Flag     | Slang that refers to someone who is worthy of being a friend or partner because they have good character and qualities.                                                                                                                                          |
| 4  | No cap         | Stating the truth and not lying                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| 5  | Pick me        | Used as a satire towards a girl or boy who tries to manipulate people to gain attention                                                                                                                                                                          |

Example of conversation:

- A : *"Kenapa kamu putus sama pacarmu?"* (Why do you break up with your girl/boyfriend?)
- B : *"Dia **bar-bar** banget, gak bisa santuy. Gak nyaman jadinya."* (He's so barbaric, he can't be chatted with. It was uncomfortable.)
- A : *"Itu tanda **red flag** ya?"* (Is that a red flag?)
- B : *"Yes, for me, and I'm a **green flag** girl no need men like him. **No cap.**"*
- A : *"You look like a **pick me** girl."*

Flippant slang is often used to create a relaxed, free, and slightly nonchalant impression. Generation Z tends to embrace this attitude as part of their unconventional and creative identity. The proliferation of social media, memes, and digital culture plays an important role in encouraging the use of flippant slang. This trend often emerges from dialogs and situations that develop online and are then adopted as part of everyday language. The conversation took place between two peers who were chatting. Initially, A used the

Indonesian language. Then, B responded interspersed with slang. In addition to code-switching, they also used popular slang among Gen Z lately. Because A mentioned the term "red flag," which can be interpreted as slang in English, the conversation then shifted to English. Since there are no suitable words or phrases to describe the atmosphere when translated into Indonesian. The factors causing the use of slang include the fact that the interlocutor is a peer who surely understands trending slang terms. Additionally, the habit of hearing and using these words in daily life is inevitable, and it cannot be separated from finding alternative words (Ami et al., 2023).

### Imitative Slang

According to the theory proposed by Allan & Burridge (2006), slang words that are included in this type are words that have already existed before, but their meaning has expanded and is even very different from the original.

**Table 3.** Imitative Slang Words

| No | Slang Word  | Meaning                                                                       |
|----|-------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1  | Hot         | Expressing someone who is very attractive, a strong sense of interest         |
| 2  | Chicken     | The term for someone who is cowardly or timid.                                |
| 3  | It's a wrap | A concluding expression after an activity has been completed and run smoothly |
| 4  | Slay        | Expression for someone who is considered cool, memorable                      |

Example of conversation:

- A : *"Lo lihat postingan terbaru X di Instagram?"* (Did you see X's latest post in Instagram?)
- B : *"Yes, he is so **hot**."*
- A : *"Jadi pusat perhatian seluruh dunia, gak keliatan gugup malah selalu **slay**. Komentarnya juga semua bilang gitu. Very **hot and slay**."* (He's the center of attention all over the world, doesn't look nervous, he always slays. The comments say so. Very hot and slay.)
- B : *"Finally, **it's a wrap** lihat perjuangan dia di babak final kemarin."* (Finally, it's a wrap to see his struggle in the final round yesterday.)
- A : *"Membuktikan kepada haters he's not a **chicken**."* (Proving to the haters he's not a chicken.)
- B : *"Exactly."*

According to (Piantari, 2011), code-switching also occurs when there is a meaning that one wants to emphasize. When someone uses a language with a specific code, and there is a meaning they want to emphasize in their speech, the language code used can change. The excerpt of the conversation above also includes the use of slang, which is not a word that already exists but not in its literal meaning. In the example conversation, in the opening conversation, A asks B a question using Indonesian. Because of the subject at hand, B answers in English. They are discussing posts and comments on social media. And there is the sentence "...the comments also all say so. Very hot and slay." Everyone understood what the slang word meant. In social media, all circles and various

ages use it. So, it can be concluded that these words are familiar and can be used to show expression towards something. The use of words is also not limited to one group, but can be used and understood by all groups other than Gen-Z. The factor behind the code-switching in the event is the subject (third person) discussed with different backgrounds. The use of slang language also does not escape the conversation as a form of communication that shows familiarity and connects between groups.

## Acronyms

Based on Cambridge Dictionary, acronym is an abbreviation consisting of the first letters of each word in the name of something, pronounced as a word.

**Table 4.** Acronyms

| No | Slang Word            | Meaning                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|----|-----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1  | <i>Baper</i>          | <i>Bawa perasaan</i> . Someone who has a sensitive nature and often uses their emotions to respond to any event and also other objects.                                                                                                                   |
| 2  | <i>Bucin</i>          | <i>Budak cinta</i> . This situation defines when someone is infatuated or obsessed with their partner.                                                                                                                                                    |
| 3  | <i>Mager</i>          | <i>Males gerak</i> . Too lazy to do any activity                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| 4  | <i>Salfok</i>         | <i>Salah fokus</i> . Expressing the state of someone who is distracted by something they shouldn't be                                                                                                                                                     |
| 5  | <i>GC/Gece/Gercep</i> | <i>Gerak cepat</i> . This word is usually used when someone is responsive in doing something. Without waiting long, when there is something that must be done, they will immediately do it. Those are the kind of people that others would say are quick. |

Example of conversation:

- A : "Guys, tadi gue ketinggalan kereta. Kurang **gercep** satu menit jadi telat 30 menit." (Guys, I missed my train by a minute, so I was 30 minutes late.)
- B : "Gue jadi **mager** banget sih kalau udah telat, mending kerja di rumah aja." (I'm so lazy once I'm late, better to work at home.)
- A : "Tadi di kereta juga **salfok** lihat couple **bucin**." (On the train, I misfocused on seeing infatuated couple.)
- B : "Lo pasti **baper** liatnya, jangan iri ya." (You must have been so emotional, don't be jealous.)

The use of slang acronyms reflects creativity, and the way Generation Z identifies themselves with their cohort. Creating new slang acronyms can be a unique and fun form of expression. The use of slang acronyms also reflects creativity, and the way Generation Z identifies themselves with their group. Creating new slang acronyms can be a unique and fun form of expression. As in the example above, these slang acronyms can be used by anyone. It shows expression in carrying out daily activities. At the beginning of the sentence, the word *guys* can refer to other people (more than one), so the slang sentence used is not limited to peers. But can be used as a form of familiarity, and starting a conversation is not too rigid and formal.

## Clipping

Clipping in word formation is the process of creating a word by cutting parts of the word itself. Clipping is also defined as the process of forming words derived from a word that has more than one syllable, undergoing a cutting process at the beginning or end of the word.

**Table 5.** Clipping

| No | Slang Word     | Meaning                                                                                |
|----|----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1  | <i>Brow</i>    | This word stands for “brother”, usually used as a nickname for close friends.          |
| 2  | <i>Gaess</i>   | From the word “guys” typed to be more local and accepted in the social sphere of Gen-Z |
| 3  | <i>Say</i>     | Acronym <i>sayang</i> (dear) usually used as a nick-name for called friends            |
| 4  | <i>Cangtip</i> | Beautiful. Compliments to someone                                                      |

## Discussion

Semi-structured interviews contained pre-set, open-ended questions, with further questions emerging from the discussion (Denny & Weckesser, 2022). Participant monitoring in the study encompassed various contexts of code-switching and slang usage within Generation Z. Notably, code-switching was observed in informal settings like interactions with peers or within the campus environment (De Socarraz-Novoa, 2015; Unamuno, 2008), while the use of slang tended to surface in relaxed situations and online interactions via social media (Jeresano & Carretero, 2022; Kandiawan, 2022; Yusuf et al., 2023). Daily interaction patterns exhibited certain regularities, with participants seamlessly transitioning between code-switching when conversing with family members and employing slang with friends, showcasing a keen awareness of different social contexts. The environmental reactions to language usage varied, as some participants received positive responses from peers for their use of code-switching and slang, while others noted differences in views based on situational contexts. Participants demonstrated linguistic adaptability in their daily activities, flexibly adjusting language use depending on the context (Pei et al., 2019), with formal language prevalent in academic settings (De Socarraz-Novoa, 2015; Unamuno, 2008) and informal language dominating daily conversations (Jeresano & Carretero, 2022; Kandiawan, 2022; Yusuf et al., 2023). Additionally, social media interaction played a significant role, as observations reveal participants frequently employing slang and code-switching to express themselves, emphasizing the platform’s importance for diverse linguistic communication within this generation.

In the analysis of Generation Z's language dynamics, a multifaceted approach was taken to scrutinize text messages, conversations, and social media content. Within text messages, a discernible pattern of code-switching emerged, predominantly blending English and local languages. This linguistic phenomenon is particularly evident in emotional expressions and specific situational contexts. On social media platforms,

particularly Facebook and Twitter, slang becomes a prominent feature in communication (Piantari, 2011). Participants often utilized slang to convey humor, express identity, and narrate daily experiences, contributing significantly to the shaping of their online identities (Panhwar, 2020; Themistocleous, 2015). Online conversations further reveal variations in language style, incorporating emoticons, abbreviations, and Generation Z-specific expressions, showcasing their adaptability to digital language norms (Apdillah et al., 2022). Interestingly, the positive responses received by some participants for their use of code-switching and slang on social media underscored the importance of language as a pivotal factor in shaping online social interactions. Through the analysis of texts over time, a noticeable evolution in language style among participants became apparent, providing valuable insights into the dynamic nature of Generation Z's linguistic expressions.

In general, these terms find their way into concise messages, signaling a sense of closeness, text abbreviation, and frequently serving as recurring jokes, seamlessly integrating into daily routines. These greetings extend to various relationships, encompassing close friends, seniors, or anyone else in the circle. The choice of slang greetings adapts based on the recipient of the message. Clipping slang is commonly employed to cultivate an informal and friendly conversational tone. This mirrors Generation Z's communication style in their day-to-day interactions, particularly in casual environments and across various social media platforms. The reason for using slang greetings in the chat is usually that it shows a sense of familiarity, it has become an inseparable part of everyday sentences, and everyone uses the word and understands its purpose.

Slang, often referred to as *the language of the streets*, constitutes an informal form of communication encompassing words and expressions shared within specific social groups (Pei et al., 2019). Gen Z, being at the forefront of contemporary language trends, frequently incorporates slang into their everyday conversations. The intriguing aspect lies in the extensive use of slang on social media, showcasing a phenomenon marked by its massive and dynamic distribution. This platform serves as a breeding ground for the continual emergence of new words originating from online discussions, which are then widely adopted by Gen Z (Nuraeni & Pahamzah, 2021).

In exploring the types and meanings of slang language on social media, the framework proposed by Allan & Burridge (2006) offers a valuable lens. This theory aids in identifying various types of slang words, encompassing fresh and creative expressions, flippant language, imitative phrases, acronyms, and clipping instances (Budiasa, 2021).

In parallel, code-switching emerges as a noteworthy linguistic phenomenon. This occurs when individuals seamlessly transition between different language codes during communication. For example, someone might start with language code A, such as Indonesian, and then seamlessly switch to language code B, such as English. This act is formally termed code-switching. Furthermore, code-switching can manifest when individuals integrate their second language into their speech in the first language. Despite the amalgamation of languages, each clause maintains its distinct linguistic functionality (Piantari, 2011).

## Conclusion

Gen-Z use code-switching in their daily communication as a form of adaptation to various social contexts. Motives behind this use may include a desire to connect with others, show group affiliation, or express their cultural and linguistic identity. Code-switching can also arise in response to social norms and expectations in various situations. The most common types of code-switching used by Gen-Z may vary depending on the social context. In communication with peers, Gen-Z may use informal and casual code-switching that includes the use of slang and non-formal language. With family, they may switch between formal and informal language according to family norms. In the work environment, code-switching can include the use of formal and professional language. Gen-Z use of code-switching and slang may be a communication strategy aimed at adapting to specific situations. For example, in informal contexts with peers, the use of slang can create a sense of familiarity and fun. On the other hand, code-switching may also be a way to express feelings and personal identity, especially when individuals feel more comfortable using a particular language to convey certain emotions or ideas.

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