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GEN-Z SLANGS AND THE AI REVOLUTION IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Abstract: This article examines the intersection of Gen-Z slang—its forms, functions, and sociolinguistic significance—with current and emerging uses of artificial intelligence (AI) in language teaching. Drawing on corpus observations, sociolinguistic theory, and recent advances in educational AI, the paper argues that Gen-Z linguistic innovation presents both challenges and rich pedagogical opportunities. AI tools (including large language models, adaptive learning platforms, and conversational agents) can help teachers recognize, contextualize, and harness slang for communicative competence, critical digital literacy, and learner motivation—provided educators adopt an ethically informed, evidence-based approach. The paper concludes with practical classroom strategies, suggested research directions, and policy considerations for integrating Gen-Z linguistic realities into AI-supported language education.

Keywords: Gen-Z, slang, sociolinguistics, AI in education, language teaching, digital literacies, L2 pedagogy.

Introduction

Language evolves rapidly in digitally mediated contexts. Members of Generation Z (roughly those born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s) are prolific creators and consumers of novel lexical items—slang, memes, emoji sequences, and creative orthographies—which function as markers of identity, in-group bonding, and pragmatic nuance (Tagliamonte, 2016; Androutsopoulos, 2015). At the same time, artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping language instruction through personalized learning, automated feedback, and interactive conversational agents (Luckin et al., 2016; Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019). This article synthesizes current thinking about Gen-Z slang and explores how AI can be leveraged to incorporate contemporary, authentic language use into principled language pedagogy.

The Nature and Functions of Gen-Z Slang

Slang has long been an engine of lexical innovation; Gen-Z slang is distinguished by three interrelated features:
1. Multimodality. Slang appears across text, images, GIFs, and short video platforms. Meaning often emerges from multimodal combinations rather than lexical items alone (Crystal, 2001; Danesi, 2017).
2. Rapid diffusion and mutation. Viral platforms such as TikTok, Twitter/X, and Instagram accelerate uptake and transformation of forms (Tagliamonte, 2016).

3. Pragmatic density. Single slang tokens can carry layered pragmatic meanings (stance, affect, social indexicality) that are context-sensitive (Eckert, 2012).
Functionally, Gen-Z slang indexes group membership, performs face-saving or ironic stances,

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and compresses complex social meanings into compact forms. For language teachers, these features mean that slang is not merely 'wrong' or ephemeral noise: it is a site of rich pragmatic and sociocultural learning (Androutsopoulos, 2015).

AI Technologies Relevant to Language Teaching

AI in language education manifests in several practical tools:
- Large language models (LLMs) and chatbots provide on-demand conversational practice and explanations (Kukulska-Hulme, 2020).
- Adaptive learning systems tailor lexical and grammar practice to individual learner profiles (Holmes et al., 2019).
- Automated assessment and feedback systems score speaking/writing and give corrective or formative comments (Ranalli et al., 2017).
- AI-enhanced corpora can surface usage patterns, collocations, and pragmatic contexts from vast data (McEnery & Hardie, 2012).

These technologies can process large, multimodal datasets—crucial for modeling Gen-Z slang—and can be designed to foreground sociopragmatic features rather than only linguistic form.

Pedagogical Alignment: Opportunities and Challenges

Opportunities:
1. Authentic input and exposure. AI can curate real, current examples of slang in context.
2. Contextualized explanation. LLMs can generate explanations of slang meanings and appropriacy (Lee et al., 2019).
3. Adaptive practice. Systems can contrast standard forms and slang variants.
4. Conversational practice. Chatbots simulate casual chatting contexts.
5. Corpus-driven awareness. AI tools track slang emergence and regional differences.

Challenges and Risks:
1. Appropriacy and overexposure (Tagliamonte, 2016).
2. Data bias and toxicity (Bender et al., 2021).
3. Ephemerality of slang.
4. Commodification and surveillance (Williamson & Piattoeva, 2021).
5. Teacher preparedness.

Practical Classroom Strategies for AI-Supported Integration

1. Critical corpus tasks.
2. Role-play with adaptive chatbots.
3. Pragmatics portfolios.
4. Metapragmatic instruction.
5. Ethics and digital literacy modules.

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Assessment and Measurement

Assessment should prioritize communicative outcomes and pragmatic competence. AI can support:
- Scoring pragmatic appropriacy in simulated interactions.
- Generating diagnostic reports on register misuse.
- Portfolio assessment of annotated learner artifacts.

Ethical, Equity, and Policy Considerations

- Bias mitigation (Bender et al., 2021).
- Learner privacy (Williamson & Piattoeva, 2021).
- Access equity.
- Cultural sensitivity (Eckert, 2012).

Directions for Future Research

1. Empirical studies on slang in AI-assisted curricula.
2. Longitudinal corpora on slang.
3. Explainability research for AI.
4. Cross-cultural studies on Gen-Z slang.

Conclusion

Gen-Z slang is an inseparable part of contemporary communicative reality. AI—when thoughtfully designed and ethically deployed—can amplify language teaching aims by surfacing authentic examples, personalizing practice, and scaling reflective tasks. The productive path forward lies in collaboration among teachers, learners, linguists, AI designers, and policymakers.

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