

## ***COMMUNICATION IN THE POST-METHOD ERA AND THE GENZ THEORY***

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### **ABSTRACT**

The post-method era for English teachers developed as a necessity of the time, as a contra-indicator to the “*one-size-fits-all*” theory. Consequently, this era is seen as the opposite of the approach and method and requires different parameters in the whole language learning process. Under such circumstances, flexibility and practicality are key issues. This new era would therefore develop new theories of teaching, or a combination of approaches and methods, which would resolve the issues of incompetent language users and linguistic performance i.e. all that the audio-lingual method, for example, failed to accomplish through drills and repetition. What was actually missing the whole time was the practical usage of the language, in different situations and contexts, outside of the classroom (and a combination of different approaches and methods). Having surpassed the issue of communicative ability, competence and performance, however, the new era brought with it an even greater challenge: that of communication according to Gen Z and the different varieties that were taught by teachers all over the world. Namely, not only is the English variety an issue- it now includes slang and social media English i.e. a whole new language, which is discovered and used by Gen Z. This paper aims at presenting different factors, different settings and examples which provide evidence that communication nowadays and teaching English is a huge challenge for teachers. A small-case survey with learners of Gen Z is conducted, at two stages and with two different groups, with the aim of comparing not only learner knowledge, but also, the degree to which the words are still present, used and comprehended by them. Namely, the case study ran for two semesters, with different groups of learners, but on the same course. Different words were presented and students were asked to define them and use them in context. Results and the discussion of the findings reveal what is actually the status of learners of English in North Macedonia, the impact of globalization through social media, and a language that is known for the learners more than the actual, formal English that is taught in schools and institutions. The case soexamines a different challenge, that of slang communication as a new trend in the post-communicative era, with current examples and general knowledge of the issue. The results provide evidence for teachers who have been teaching English their whole lives and who, of course, do not belong to the Gen Z category. Accordingly, effective communication strategies are in conflict with that of what is regarded as trend. The gap of knowledge is greater than one can even imagine.

**Key words:** post-method, communication, social media, slang, ELT methodology.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### *The language awareness issue*

There is indeed a tendency of language misconception in terms of actual knowledge of it. The new generations, namely the so-called generation Z, imply a vast knowledge of the English language in terms of communication, but do not, in fact possess any information or knowledge of the language itself. A huge number of our ELT students enroll for teaching English to others, based on the misconception that only through communication they have mastered the language, with this, lacking the major components of knowing a language such as its syntax, morphology, and general language awareness i.e. what language actually consists of. This misconception leads to failure in various courses, which are a must during their studies. A course that introduces these issues and provides learners with knowledge of different aspects of language use is English Language Awareness. It, in fact, deals with the most important and relevant issues of language knowledge, emphasizing the power of language and the changes that languages undergo during different periods of time. It captures issues such as language variety, discourse, attitude, culture, appropriacy, language change, the media and technology, language manipulation, standard language and gender-based discourse. When learning a language, these terms are inevitable and knowledge about them is crucial. According to Richards and Rodgers (2001) “ in trying to apply approaches or methods, teachers sometimes ignore what is the starting point in language program design, namely, a careful consideration of the context in which teaching and learning occurs, including the cultural context, the political context, the local institutional context and the context constituted by the teachers and learners in their classrooms”. (2001, pg.248)

ELT students are introduced to language awareness at year one of their studies. The course itself provides learners with hot topics and debates and builds knowledge from scratch. To begin with, the most important question that is posed refers to language and the power language has. Students are shown samples of formal and informal language and are presented with examples as to how the public mass, through media and technology, are in fact, manipulated with the use of language i.e. news that might be unacceptable for the mass might soften the form of message perceiving, making the mass less judging of the circumstances, for instance. Throughout the course, students are taught how to read between the lines and how to recognize variety and culture, literate versus illiterate. As much as students have debated and shown interest in the course content, the final result made it clear that students had in fact not studied along the way. They had taken for granted their basic knowledge of the language i.e. their communication skills and believed that it is sufficient. The issue, however, is greater than that of communication competence- it is that of what *type of language* use are students in fact, competent in?

## 2. Language learning theory and misconception

Within the fast development of technology in the global world, access to language is made easier. Opportunities to interact with others in English are made possible on an everyday basis. One would think that this is a positive influence on generation Z (in terms of language and culture). The truth of the matter is, though, language is not learned. It is in fact, changed, manipulated, wrongly transmitted...a whole set of acronyms and shortened speech, that only this group of learners understands is the reality. Learners come into class thinking and believing that they know the language and as so, they do not proceed to learn it. They do not try, nor attempt to understand how language functions, under what circumstances it changes and what it is linked to.

The result is the complete contrary of what scholars were expecting during the 90's. In fact, the influence of the Internet and technology was hypothesized as resources of language and input,

“there is also a growing interest in possible methodologies for exploring the available information for the purposes of language study. In the future, greater use will doubtless be made of technology as both a provider of examples of language and language use, and as a support for language learning (through grammar reference packages or grammar, style and spelling checkers.” (Arndt, Harvey, Nuttall, 2000, pg. 164)

Language and culture are inseparable, just as variety and standardization are inevitable. These important components have in fact, diminished. According to Jeresano & Carretero (2022),

“language plays an important role in human lives because it is the medium of expression in which people communicate. It is inseparable with social and cultural evolution in mankind. When society and culture undergo change, so as language, which only confirms its' adaptive phenomenon.” (2022, UIJRT)

The cause for this is the so-called global, international English that is sufficient only for communication. The misconception in this case, is linked to the unawareness of what language consists of. It is also linked to the developments of language itself in terms of standard speech, formal and informal and so on. For a future English language teacher to be, this misconception leads learners astray. Each and every ELT student should therefore study and learn the language as it is in order to teach it to others.

The main aim of this paper is to actually emphasize the awareness of ongoing development of language skills, theory and knowledge and to make the distinction of what knowing the language actually consists of. It also introduces the new media slang and issues related to the drastic changes to language altogether.

### **3. Gen Z motivation?**

The general concept of motivation at a time when learners do not possess an aim or goal in life but are studying for the sake of being educated is another issue that interferes in the seriousness of learning, namely, learners are irresponsible and do not carry out tasks as required. The majority of the students rely on their basic knowledge, which, at times, proves to be insufficient. This reality is another challenge that teachers need to surpass. The level of interest in learning is crucial, yet, in most cases, is missing. Nevertheless, teachers are taken accountable for the learners' overall success. Learners also find topics irrelevant, materials too boring and communication too easy. A time has come when we, teachers, have a lot to learn from our learners in terms of language change and genre, social media and slang.

#### ***3.1 The English slang of social media***

Teaching is a profession that is linked either to success or failure i.e. when a group scores good points, the credit goes to the teacher and vice versa, when a group fails, the total course score falls onto the shoulders of the teacher(s) i.e. we are taken accountable. This issue of *failure* as a whole, made me more curious to understand what in fact was the cause. I started inquiring about their plans, their interests and along the way, the students began using another language. It was not something that I understood, however, I was intrigued.

Students attempted to explain to me how they knew the *language* and how they had come across it. I asked whether all of them understood and they nodded their heads in acceptance. I then changed the perspective. Show me I said, explain the language to me. I then gave them different contexts. How would you reply to these situations in *your language* I said?

T: The first context was a setting in a restaurant. You order food and do not like it. Tell your friend that it is not good.

S: "This food is low-key bland, no cap."

S: "This food doesn't slap."

Translation: The food is small in portion and tasteless, I am serious(not joking).

T: (to another student) You and your friend are gossiping about someone else's style.

S: "I'm not vibing with her style, tbh."

Translation: Her style does not connect to fashion, to be honest.

T: (to another student): You have been busy studying for the exam. You fail.

S: I've been swamped and straight-up bombed the exam.

Translation: Swamped means busy, straight-up means straight forward, bombed means failed or performed poorly.

T: (to another student): You want to ask someone out.

S: "Hey, you wanna link sometime, grab some grub, or catch a vibe?"

Translation: Link means to get together, grub means food, catch a vibe means enjoying someone's company.

With only four settings and contexts, I concluded that all of Gen Z knew what they were talking about. I felt as an alien from Mars. They not only knew the meanings, but could perfectly use them in conversation. They could explain to me how that language functioned and they had norms, abbreviations, commas, and words. Words that meant nothing to me, but meant communication to them. I continued to associate those words with different contexts, and tried to link their form of communication with mine. Along the way, I mentioned that in order for change to happen in language, the changes should not only be accepted by the younger generations and society, but rather, should be accepted in the formal, language society, that of scholars and dictionaries and grammars. Due to the course being a one semester course, we could not continue with further investigation of the issue, nor could we conclude what the future of English would be and whether or not, the same words would be used in the following years to come.

The following year, I began teaching the same course but to a different group of learners. This group, compared to the former, was more interested in the formal aspects of language and topics that were linked to culture, variety and change. They had a lot of knowledge and ideas related to language itself and the course went quite smoothly. The results of the midterm were better compared to the previous group and somehow, I thought they were not aware of the English slang of social media. In order to confirm this theory, I searched online and found the most used words of Gen Z slang along with their definitions. I made a list of the words and the following day, introduced the topic of language change, taboo language and gender-neutral English. I explained that towards the end, we would do an activity referring to the English they use in everyday chat or conversation with friends that understand it. I provided them with the list, consisting of a total of 17 words and asked them how many they actually understood. To my surprise, only 2 out of 18 students did not know all the words. The others knew them all. The concept of understanding and knowing something is tied to its accurate usage in different contexts, and therefore I requested from students to write the meaning and use the same

word in a sentence. Students were overwhelmed! I had never seen that much enthusiasm! They felt superior to me due to my lack of input and this made the task even more enjoyable.

The following table (table 1) consists of the sample words used, the meanings and their usage in actual context. Noticable is the fact that the words are all explained and put into sentences. How had they learned them and who had taught them where to specifically use them?

Table 1. English SLANG of social media sample

English Slang	The meaning	The word in actual usage
1. Cap	Lie, fake, when you know someone is lying	e.g. You're capping. I am seriuous, no cap.
2. Lit	Fire, extra, excellent, awesome	You are at a party. You like it. It is lit. or Awesome. (Used when something is great). e.g. This new song is lit.
3. Savage	Cool, tough	Someone or something which is great or crazy. e.g. Your fashion is savage.
4. Flex	Show off, boasting, brag	e.g. Stop flexing your new car.
5. FOMO	Fear of missing out	Acrynym
6. Stan	Obsessed, a fan of someone, admire	e.g. I am a BTS stan.
7. Tea	Gossip, spill information	e.g. I have tea to tell. Let's meet.
8. Sis	Sister, bff	e.g. My sis is the best.
<b>9. Yeet</b>	<b>When something is thrown, strong etc.</b>	<b>This had a mixture of responses. Not sure which one to include...</b>
10. Grub	Food	e.g. Let's get some grub.
11. Ghosting	Ignoring, blocking,	e.g. He ghosted me after our date.
12. Clout	Successful, fame, popularity	e.g. That guy is clout.
13. Vibe	Energy, feeling good, positive	e.g. This party is vibing.
14. Sus	Hiding sth, suspicious,	e.g. He is hiding something, he is kinda sus.
15. Simp	One-sided love, falling for Someone	e.g. He already fell in love with her, he's a simp for her.
16. Slaps	Good, liking it	e.g. he food slaps.
17. Valid	True	e.g. Your assumptions are valid.

The group agreed that the lock-down during COVID-19 had given them the opportunity to chat with people from abroad and that the language used was English slang. There was no formal instruction of how to use what, however, the students had perfectly mastered the language. The concept of being "cool" has always meant the same thing for teenagers, but, under different circumstances, the terminology used has changed. Just as the 90's slang has diminished and generations following it are not aware it ever existed, the same is to

happen to the slang of social media. It is a trend and diminishes in a couple of years. Only the most frequent used ones are accepted into language norms by scholars in the field.

#### 4. Conclusion

Language, just as anything else, evolves and is constantly in the process of change. Change occurs due to different factors and under different circumstances. Sometimes, this change makes it easier to “modernize” the language(s) and to adapt them to the trend of everyday terminology and communication. At others, it causes confusion, just as the overall confusion of what language for Gen Z is. This is the slang of social media, a language which is developing very fast and which does not remain present for a very long time. It is created by social media users and Gen Z who wish to get the message across quickly and without following the norms of how the language should be written correctly. Interestingly, even though no one is sure of how long this form of English will remain present, it is still widely used and greatly understood. In the provided situations with the above mentioned ELT students, I was astonished as to how well *they* knew about this new existing form of English and how well they actually communicated with each other! They knew the meanings of the new words and upon them, set situations for their contextual usage. I was introduced to something I had no clue existed. The terminology was not even shortened words. They were words simply used for certain contexts and in certain situations. They *substituted* the actual words that exist in the English language. The “positive” effect of technology and the Internet in terms of language usage has proven a contra-effect. Learners rarely search for information on language and its usage. The core concept is communication, which is achieved, through English slang. Apparently, communication and social skills are rapidly developing a new norm. The wide-spread of such informal language is an issue that should be further examined by scholars in the field.

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