

# VARIATION OF SLANG WORDS BETWEEN GEN Z AND GEN ALPHA: A SOCIOLINGUISTICS STUDY

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## Abstract

As language continuously evolves with societal and technological changes, the two generations, Gen Z and Gen Alpha, shaped by different digital environments, showcase distinct linguistic trends. Gen Z, having grown up in the early days of the internet, tends to use text-based slang influenced by memes and early social media. In contrast, Gen Alpha, immersed in the world of TikTok and YouTube, embraces more visual and fast-paced slang. By applying Halliday's register theory, this research highlights how these slang variations are shaped by the social contexts, relationships, and communication methods of each generation. This study explores the unique slang words used by Generation Z (Gen Z) and Generation Alpha (Gen Alpha) on social media platforms and also provides a sociolinguistic perspective on how technology drives the development of language, offering insights into how these generations express identity and navigate their social worlds through slang.

Keywords: Gen Alpha, Gen Z, Register Theory, Slang words, Sociolinguistics

## INTRODUCTION

Language is a dynamic aspect of human culture that continually evolves alongside social, cultural, and technological changes. It is also a medium of expression used by humans to communicate. Language cannot be separated from the development of social and cultural situations. When society and culture change, so does language, which only reinforces its adaptive nature (Jeresano & Carretero, 2022). Language constantly changes, evolves, and adapts to the needs of its users. As long as the needs of language users continue to

change, the language will also change. Language reflects changes in our cultural life and customs (Jeresano & Carretero, 2022). The evolution of a language is influenced by many factors, such as social interaction, lifestyle, and technological development. Continuous communication within and across regional boundaries can lead to language changes or borrowing. In this regard, linguistic phenomena emerge within a community.

One of the most prominent linguistic phenomena in recent decades is the emergence of slang words, especially

among teenagers and young people. Slang may sound strange to those who are not part of the group familiar with using slang words in communication. However, slang words reflect social dynamics and solidarity and serve as a tool to show social identity and group affiliation. (Ballard, 1980) argues that “language not only reflects the social world but also helps shape it.” This means that slang does not just arise from social interaction but also plays a role in shaping how people interact in a given society. The new generations in the past two decades are those who have grown alongside the rapid development of technology (Silalahi, 2023). The terms used in modern society to label these two generations are Gen Z and Gen Alpha.

In the social and cultural context, Generation Z is the group that grew up during the digital transition era, where the internet and text-based social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram greatly influenced everyday life. During this period, Gen Z was involved in early internet culture, including memes and digital trends. According to (Eble, 1998), “slang is often created to foster group identity and exclude outsiders,” meaning slang words are often used to create group identity and distinguish themselves from other groups. Words like “lit,” “fam,” and “yeet” became popular among Gen Z because they reflect their social identity in a text-based digital environment, heavily influenced by memes. In contrast, Generation Alpha grew up in an era dominated by visual and video content through platforms like TikTok and YouTube (Tasyarasita et al., 2023). According to (Wallwork, 1971), new media such as the internet have “profound effects on language, particularly in the areas of vocabulary and interaction.” Generation Alpha is more inclined to use slang that quickly evolves and adapts to interactive video

trends. Terms like “cap” and “sus” reflect how they engage in fast-paced, visual interactions, unlike the text-based trends more common among Gen Z. (Mantiri, 2010) states that from generation to generation, pronunciations continue to change, new words are borrowed or created, and the pace of change varies. As they interact, their language begins to evolve differently, making them distinct from previous generations. With the emergence of new language variations in slang words, sociolinguistic language studies can be conducted, one of which is through sociolinguistic register theory.

Halliday’s register theory provides an important framework for understanding language variation in different social situations. According to (Ballard, 1980.), register encompasses language variations used according to the field, tenor, and mode of communication situations. Field refers to the context or topic of conversation, tenor refers to the social relationships between the speaker and listener, and mode relates to the medium of communication used. The slang words of Gen Z and Gen Alpha can be analyzed through these three aspects to understand how they are influenced by social and technological factors. (Biber & Conrad, 2019) emphasize the importance of understanding register as a tool for analyzing how social context influences language use. They state that “the use of specific linguistic features in a given register is determined by the communicative purpose of the participants,” highlighting that language features like slang develop based on communicative purposes within certain social contexts. In this context, the researchers aim to explore how the slang words used by Generation Z (Gen Z) and Generation Alpha (Gen Alpha) are formed, as well as what influences the differences in their formation and usage. Gen Z includes in-

dividuals born between the mid-1990s and the mid-2010s, while Gen Alpha consists of those born after 2010. Both generations grew up in an intense digital environment, but they use technology and social media in different ways. These differences influence language use, including the formation of slang words.

Halliday's register theory provides an analytical framework for understanding language variation in specific social contexts. According to (Ballard, 1980), register consists of three main components: field (the subject or topic of discussion), tenor (the relationships between speakers), and mode (the way or medium of communication). These three components are highly relevant in understanding how slang words are formed and used between these two generations. (Biber & Conrad, 2019) add that "register is shaped by the communicative needs of the participants and the specific context in which communication occurs," meaning language variation, including slang, develops based on communicative needs and specific social contexts. Previous study about registers concerning of slang words have been conducted. However, with the passage of time and the evolution and changes within society, new studies on variations of slang words must be updated.

By using the framework of register theory, this study aims to understand how social and technological differences shape the use of slang words among Generation Z and Generation Alpha. Changes in field, tenor, and mode reflect changes in social interaction, group identity, and the influence of technology on language development. As (Ballard, 1980) stated, "language is a social semiotic," meaning language not only functions as a tool for communication but also serves as a marker of social identity and adaptation to social changes.

By analyzing slang through the lens of register, this study can provide new insights into how younger generations use language to navigate a constantly changing world.

## METHOD

The different slang terms used by Generation Z and Generation Alpha on several social media sites, such as YouTube, Instagram, Twitter (now known as X), and others, are examined in-depth in this study using qualitative methodologies. Qualitative research is a methodological technique that aims to provide a richer and more nuanced interpretation of language use by using non-numerical data analysis to comprehend human behaviour, experiences, and social phenomena. Insights from prior research on the subject are combined with data from a variety of sources, such as user comments, posts, and other types of social media content that have been submitted by individuals. After this stage of data collecting, the researchers are going to explore the diversity in slang words in greater detail using Halliday's theory of register. In order to provide a thorough knowledge of how and why these slang phrases evolve within the linguistic landscape of younger generations, this analysis seeks to identify the shifts in context, notably in the areas of field, tenor, and mode.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### FINDINGS

The results of the collection of **Gen Z** and **Gen Alpha** slang words, gathered from various social media platforms, are presented and identified as follows:

#### a) Gen Z's Slang Words

##### Slang "Anjir"

The word "anjir" actually comes from the word "dog" to make the word sound more refined. This word is used to

express surprise, admiration for something, *dimana*”, “*Bagus banget njir rumahnya*”.  
 express emotions, etc.

Example: “*Anjir, gua lupa naruh kunci*”

Table 1. Register theory explanation of “Anjir” Slang Words

Field (area)	Tenor (relationship between participants)	Mode (way of communication)
The word “anjir” is usually used in free and casual conversation situations, such as in everyday conversation.	The word “anjir” is generally used in communication between friends or just with people who are already well acquainted.	The word “anjir” appears most often on social media, both verbally and in writing, such as through online messages with close friends.

**Slang “Gercep”**

The word “gercep” actually comes from “gerak cepat” which is then shortened. This word is used to give a warning to do an action quickly or respond to somet-

hing that is done quickly.

Example: “*Ayo gercep, kelasnya udah mau mulai!*”, “*Ehh gercep banget tugasmu udah selesai*”.

Table 2. Register theory explanation of “Gercep” Slang Words

Field (area)	Tenor (relationship between participants)	Mode (way of communication)
“Gercep” is used in the context of actions that require a quick response. Usually, this word is used in everyday situations that are relaxed or casual.	The word “gercep” is usually used among people who have informal relationships, such as peers, close family, or communities that are accustomed to slang.	The mode of delivery of the slang “gercep” is generally informal and often occurs in direct conversation (verbal) or in social media (informal writing).

**Slang “Gabut”**

Literally, “gabut” comes from the abbreviation “gaji buta”, which is a term that originally referred to people who received a salary without working or doing anything. However, in its more modern

use, “gabut” often means a feeling or condition where someone feels bored or has nothing to do.

Example: “*Ehh gabut banget nib, jalan-jalan yuk*”.

Table 3. Register theory explanation of “Gabut” Slang Words

Field (area)	Tenor (relationship between participants)	Mode (way of communication)
In the case of “gabut”, the topic being discussed is about the mental condition or feelings of someone who feels bored, has no activities, or has nothing to do. Usually, it is related to informal situations, such as casual chats.	The word “gabut” is used in relationships that are usually intimate or informal. It is more often used in conversations between peers in a relaxed atmosphere.	“Gabut” is more commonly used in oral communication, such as in direct conversations, telephone conversations, or short chats via social media or messaging applications.

Table 4. Register theory explanation of "Lebay" Slang Words

Field (area)	Tenor (relationship between participants)	Mode (way of communication)
In the word "lebay", the field that often appears is around reactions or expressions that are considered excessive in everyday life.	In the use of the word "lebay", the tenor usually occurs among close friends or close teenagers, because this word tends to be informal and has a slang nuance.	The word "lebay" is usually used in everyday oral communication and is informal. It often appears in casual chats or conversations on social media or short messages.

**Slang "Lebay"**

The word "lebay" is a slang term in Indonesia that means over the top or too

dramatic in reacting, speaking, or acting.

Example: "Ah, lebay lo! Luka kecil dong."

Table 5. Register theory explanation of "Kece" Slang Words

Field (area)	Tenor (relationship between participants)	Mode (way of communication)
The use of the word "kece" occurs in the context of casual everyday conversation with the topic used being when assessing or conveying something that is considered interesting or cool.	The word "kece" is more commonly used in interactions between peers, or in environments that have close and informal social relationships.	The word "kece" generally appears in oral communication, such as everyday conversation or social media. However, this word can also be found in text messages or social media captions that aim to create an informal and relaxed atmosphere.

**Slang "Kece"**

Kece is a slang word meaning cool, attractive, or charming. This word is often used to compliment someone's appearance or style that looks charming. Kece can refer

to various aspects, such as clothing, face, or attitude that are considered stylish and fashionable.

Example: "Wow penampilanmu kece banget"

Table 6. Register theory explanation of "Geer" Slang Words

Field (area)	Tenor (relationship between participants)	Mode (way of communication)
The word "geer" is usually used in a free and casual conversation situation, such as in everyday conversation. It is usually used to highlight someone's behavior.	The word "geer" is generally used in communication between friends, between people who are well known, or even to strangers.	The word "geer" most often appears in everyday conversation. However, it also appears on social media, both verbally and in writing, such as through online messages with close friends.

**Slang "Geer"**

The word "Geer" is an abbreviation of the phrase "Gede Rasa" which is usually used to describe a condition when some-

one feels too confident about something even though it is not certain.

Example: "Bisa aja dia bukan suka sama, loe! Jangan geer!"

Table 7. Register theory explanation of “Garing” Slang Words

Field (area)	Tenor (relationship between participants)	Mode (way of communication)
The word “garing” is usually used in informal and casual conversation situations. It is usually used to indicate a response to the attitude/ words of others.	The word “Garing” is generally used in communication between friends and people who are already well known.	The word “garing” most often appears in spoken conversations because it is a direct response from someone. However, the word also often appears in written comments on social media.

**Slang “Garing”**

The word “Garing” is often used to comment on jokes or attitudes that are not funny and can be predicted beforehand or

are too stale to be heard or seen.

Example: “*Candaan lo itu garing, tau ga ?*”

Table 8. Register theory explanation of “Bucin” Slang Words

Field (area)	Tenor (relationship between participants)	Mode (way of communication)
The word “Bucin” is usually used in informal and casual conversation situations. It is usually used to highlight someone’s behavior.	The word “Bucin” is generally used in communication between friends, between people who are already well known, or even to strangers.	The word “Bucin” most often appears in everyday conversations. However, it also appears on social media, both verbally and in writing, such as through online messages with close friends.

**Slang “Bucin”**

The word “Bucin” is a term derived from the abbreviation of the words “Bucak Cinta” which has been widely used sin-

ce YouTubers Jovial da Lopez and Andovi da Lopez popularized it in 2015.

Example: “*Aku ga nyangka, aku bisa se-bucin ini ke dia..*”

Table 9. Register theory explanation of “Kobam” Slang

Field (area)	Tenor (relationship between participants)	Mode (way of communication)
The word “kobam” is usually used in a free and casual conversation situation, such as in everyday conversation. It is usually used to highlight someone’s behavior.	The word “kobam” is generally used in communication between friends, between people who are already well known.	The word “kobam” most often appears in everyday conversations. However, it also appears on social media, both verbally and in writing, such as through online messages with close friends.

**Slang “Kobam”**

The word “Kobam” is the opposite of the word “Mabok” which means drunk. It usually refers to the drunken behavior of

someone, or the drunkenness felt by someone.

Example: “*Ta sorry, kobam nih semalam.*”

Table 10. Register theory explanation of “Baper” Slang Words

Field (area)	Tenor (relationship between participants)	Mode (way of communication)
The word “Baper” is usually used in a free and casual conversation situation, such as in everyday conversation. It is usually used to highlight someone’s behavior or feelings.	The word “Baper” is generally used in communication between friends, between people who are well known, or even to strangers.	The word “Baper” most often appears in everyday conversations. However, it also appears on social media, both verbally and in writing, such as through online messages with close friends.

**Slang “Baper”**

The word “Baper” is an abbreviation of “Bawa Kurang Hidup”. This term refers to someone who has strong emotional strength, where it is easy to carry feelings or

easily touched by something.

Example: *“kata-kata manis dia bikin gue baper.”*

b) Gen Alpha’s Slang Words

Table 11. Register theory explanation of “Skibidi” Slang

Field (area)	Tenor (relationship between participants)	Mode (way of communication)
The word “Skibidi” is widely used in social media and entertainment. Sometimes it is also widely used when playing games.	The word “Skibidi” is casual and is usually used between peers because it is fun.	The word “Skibidi” is often used in verbal and visual communication (such as in games, videos or memes)

**Slang “Skibidi”**

The word “Skibidi” comes from a viral song, often used to describe something energetic and fun.

Example: *“Our team is so skibidi bro!”*

Table 12. Register theory explanation of “Gyatt” Slang Words

Field (area)	Tenor (relationship between participants)	Mode (way of communication)
The word “Gyatt” is widely used in popular culture and in the world of fashion.	The word “Gyatt” is commonly used or directed at close friends and is also widely used in online communities.	The word “Gyatt” is an informal word that usually appears through text or on social media (such as TikTok, Twitter (X), etc.)

**Slang “Gyatt”**

The word “Gyatt” is a slang expression that shows admiration for someone’s appearance, often used in the context of

social media.

Example: *“Wom, that person was so gyatt!”*

Table 13. Register theory explanation of “Rizz” Slang Words

Field (area)	Tenor (relationship between participants)	Mode (way of communication)
The word “rizz” is usually used in social or relationship contexts such as dating.	The word “rizz” is used between teenagers or adults who are still relatively young and is sometimes competitive to get the attention of the opposite sex.	The word “rizz” is spoken and used in everyday conversation with close friends as a joke or as a date.

**Slang “Rizz”**

The word “Rizz” usually refers to a person’s charisma or attractiveness, especi-

ally in the context of attracting the attention of the opposite sex.

Example: *“You got rizz by him, girl!”*

Table 14. Register theory explanation of “Sigma”

Field (area)	Tenor (relationship between participants)	Mode (way of communication)
The word “sigma” is commonly used to motivate or praise someone for self-development.	The word “sigma” is commonly used in discussions between individuals seeking alternative views.	The word “sigma” is widely used in various media, such as text, video and sometimes even in podcasts.

**Slang “Sigma”**

The word “Sigma” is a term used to describe a personality type of person who is independent and does not care much about social norms, often associated with

the concept of an “alpha” male who focuses on personal goals.

Example: *“My bro got that sigma inside him!”*

Table 15. Register theory explanation of “Mewing” Slang Words

Field (area)	Tenor (relationship between participants)	Mode (way of communication)
“Mewing” is commonly used for aesthetics or in the health field considering that “mewing” is a technique to improve the shape of the jaw. But “mewing” is also widely used as a joke on social media.	“Mewing” is done by an individual to show the side of his face that forms a perfect jawline.	“Mewing” is usually done via video (Tiktok) or in online forum discussions.

**Slang “Mewing”**

The word “Mewing” is a technique of placing the tongue on the roof of the mouth to improve the shape of the face and jaw.

Example: usually demonstrated directly by making a “shh” gesture (a gesture indicating to be quiet) then continuing by showing the jaw while using the mewing technique.

Table 16. Register theory explanation of “Cooked/Cooking” Slang Words

Field (area)	Tenor (relationship between participants)	Mode (way of communication)
The term “cooked/cooking” can usually be found in lifestyle or can also be used in mental health.	The word “cooked/cooking” is usually used between close friends or used to support someone.	The word “cooked/cooking” is used in casual chats or in text form on social media.

**Slang “Cooked/Cooking”**

The word “Cooking” is a slang term that usually means someone is very cool or someone has done something that is considered extraordinary. But the use of the word “Cooked” can also be used as a term

when someone is “finished” or in a bad state.

Example: *“Wom, that girl is cooking the stage!”* atau *“Good luck, bro. You’re cooked so bad.”*



Table 17. Register theory explanation of “Slay”

Field (area)	Tenor (relationship between participants)	Mode (way of communication)
The word “slay” is used in the field of fashion or is used for someone’s self-confidence.	The word “slay” is widely used between friends or followers on social media.	The word “slay” is used in texts, social media captions or can be used in direct chat.

**Slang “Slay”**

The slang word “Slay” is a word used to express praise. It is usually used when someone does something very well or ap-

pears confident.

Example: “*Oh my God, slay girl!*”, “*Slay queen~*”

Table 18. Register theory explanation of “Delulu”

Field (area)	Tenor (relationship between participants)	Mode (way of communication)
The word “delulu” is commonly used in social relationships.	The word “delulu” is used between friends in a humorous or sarcastic tone.	The word “delulu” is used informally in conversation and on social media.

**Slang “Delulu”**

The slang word “Delulu” is an abbreviation of the word “delusional” which describes an unrealistic attitude or

view, especially in the context of relationships.

Example: “*Boy, you’re so delulu you know?*”

Table 19. Register theory explanation of “Sus” Slang

Field (area)	Tenor (relationship between participants)	Mode (way of communication)
The word “sus” is commonly used when playing games or in social situations.	The word “sus” is used between close friends. Usually the context is having fun.	The word “sus” is used orally and in writing, in chats and direct conversations.

**Slang “Sus”**

The slang word “Sus” is an abbreviation of “suspicious” which is used to indi-

cate suspicion or distrust of something or someone.

Example: “*That so sus man...*”

Table 20. Register theory explanation of “Aura” Slang

Field (area)	Tenor (relationship between participants)	Mode (way of communication)
The word “aura” is often used as motivation or self-esteem.	The word “aura” is used in close friendships or in the context of praise.	The word “aura” can be used in text or captions on social media. It can also be said directly.

### Slang “Aura”

The slang word “aura” is a term that refers to someone who has a strong attraction or charm, as if it has increased significantly.

Example: *“He got +10000 aura!”*

### DISCUSSION

From the results of the examples of slang words that have been found and presented with Halliday’s register theory above, the author has discovered differences in word variations across each generation. Slang words among Gen Z tend to be abbreviations of local Indonesian words, which have literal meanings. Some words are those that are read backward, and some other words exist due to the influence of famous figures of that time. Meanwhile, in Gen Alpha slang, there tends to be the use of artificial language derived from foreign languages, abbreviations of foreign words, and some terms that have emerged due to viral phenomena on the internet.

The differences in variation between these two generations are likely influenced by the distinct developments in media and technology during their respective times in the era of Gen Z, the development of the internet was not as easily accessible as it is now. Social interactions among individuals are still largely conducted in a traditional manner without any technological assistance. Even when interacting through media such as the internet and social media at that time, it could still be felt that the interactions were rooted in the individuals’s own environments. Not too much influenced by the common terms from the foreign language user community because it is still text-based among the individuals themselves, so the slang consists of abbreviations or the opposite of the existing local language.

However, as technological development has rapidly advanced to this day, Ge-

neration Alpha, who are essentially those born after the internet and technology have approached perfection, have minimal traditional social interactions. Generation Alpha tends to enjoy interactions from the media available across various internet sources in their daily lives. Usually quickly, because popular media today often use visual types in their message delivery. This may be the reason why the variation of words in Gen Alpha slang often borrows from foreign terms that have gone viral on the internet and tends to be a language that is “spoken” or “demonstrated”.

### CONCLUSION

The study of the slang used by Generation Z and Generation Alpha on social media reveals how language evolves in response to technological, social, and cultural changes. Through the framework of Halliday’s register theory, it becomes evident that the social dynamics and modes of communication specific to each generation play a significant role in shaping their distinct linguistic identities. While Generation Z developed slang primarily in a text-based social media environment, heavily influenced by early internet culture, Generation Alpha’s slang is more visual and fast-paced, driven by platforms like TikTok and YouTube (Kandiawan, 2022).

These variations in field, tenor, and mode reflect the broader sociocultural shifts between the two generations. The evolution of slang among these younger generations not only highlights the adaptability of language but also underscores its role in fostering group identity and creating social cohesion (Murcahyanto, 2014). Slang serves as a dynamic linguistic tool that allows individuals to connect, distinguish themselves from other groups, and navigate the fast-evolving digital landscape. As technology continues to advance, it is likely

that the language of future generations will continue to transform in novel and unpredictable ways, shaped by the unique communicative demands of their social contexts. In sum, this research illustrates that the slang of Gen Z and Gen Alpha is not just a reflection of linguistic creativity but also a marker of deeper social and cultural trends, offering valuable insights into how these generations interact with the world and each other through language.

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