

## **DIFFERENCES IN SLANG UNDERSTANDING IN GENERATION Z AND MILLENNIALS IN INDONESIA'S DIGITAL ERA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This study aims to analyze the difference in slang comprehension between Generation Z and Millennials in the digital era. This study employed a quantitative method with data collection techniques through questionnaires distributed to 80 respondents. The respondents were divided into two groups consisting of 40 Generation Z and 40 Millennials. The results of the study show that Generation Z has a higher level of understanding of slang than Millennials. This is influenced by the intensity of digital media and social platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter. Meanwhile, Millennials tend to be more familiar with the slang that developed in previous eras and have a lower understanding of the latest slang terms. The findings of this study indicate that technological developments play an important role in shaping language variation and intergenerational understanding. Therefore, this study emphasizes the importance of understanding generational differences in language use, especially in the context of digital communication.*

**Keywords:** *Slang, Generation Z, Millennials*

### **ABSTRAK**

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis perbedaan pemahaman bahasa gaul antara Generasi Z dan Milenial di era digital. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kuantitatif dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui kuesioner yang dibagikan

kepada 80 responden. Responden dibagi menjadi dua kelompok yang terdiri dari 40 Generasi Z dan 40 Milenial. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Generasi Z memiliki tingkat pemahaman bahasa gaul yang lebih tinggi daripada Milenial. Hal ini dipengaruhi oleh intensitas media digital dan platform sosial seperti TikTok, Instagram, dan Twitter. Sementara itu, Milenial cenderung lebih familiar dengan bahasa gaul yang berkembang di era sebelumnya dan memiliki pemahaman yang lebih rendah terhadap istilah bahasa gaul terbaru. Temuan penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa perkembangan teknologi memainkan peran penting dalam membentuk variasi bahasa dan pemahaman antar generasi. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini menekankan pentingnya memahami perbedaan generasi dalam penggunaan bahasa, terutama dalam konteks komunikasi digital.

**Kata Kunci:** Slang, Generasi Z, Milenial.

## **A. INTRODUCTION**

Wardhaugh (2006) states that language is a dynamic system that continues to evolve along with social, cultural, and technological changes. Sociolinguistics examines the relationship between language and society, including how social factors such as age and social groups affect language use. In this context, language variations such as slang emerge as a form of social identity and interaction within a group.

Partridge (1933) explains that slang is a form of informal language used by certain social groups to create a sense of community and group identity. He also states that slang is

commonly used by younger generations to express creativity and distinguish themselves from older generations. In addition, the rapid development of digital technology has changed the state of global communication, especially through the emergence of social media. This change has created a new linguistic phenomenon in the form of evolving slang expressions in digital communication. As digitally active generations, Generation Z and Millennials are among the primary users of this language variation. However, there are significant differences in the way these two generations interact with technology. The Millennial Generation is the

generation that adapted to technology in adolescence, while Generation Z is a group of individuals born between 1997 and 2012, they are the generation that came after the Millennial Generation and grew up in the era of technological development. This is strengthened by the results of research conducted by Anastasya Shinta Ramadhani & Ambar Pujiyatno (2025), which shows that the use of slang among Generation Z is part of the evolution of language influenced by advances in digital technology and social media platforms.

These differences in experience affect the level of understanding and use of slang vocabulary. Data shows that Generation Z is known to have a distinctive communication style, which is characterized by the use of new words (neologisms), abbreviations, code mixing, and the use of visual language such as emojis or memes. This phenomenon has developed rapidly, particularly on digital platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter (Arsanti, 2020).

On the other hand, the Millennial Generation who are more

familiar with terms such as "baper", "mager", or "santuy" tend to retain the terms that developed from popular culture in the 2000s. The change in language use by these two generations is of interest, especially in the field of linguistics, as it can create potential misunderstandings awkward phrasing social interactions between people.

Although previous research has explored intergenerational slang use in general, there has been no study that has specifically measured the ability to understand slang across Millennials and Generation Z. The focus of this study is to fill this gap by analyzing the extent to which differences in digital cognitive and adaptive abilities affect slang understanding between the two generations and identifying the factors that influence slang comprehension across generations. The results of this research are expected to contribute to the field of sociolinguistics in understanding how the development of slang affects intergenerational communication relations in Indonesia.

## **B. RESEARCH METHODS**

This study employed a quantitative research method to analyze questionnaire data collected from the respondents. The questionnaire consisted of Yes-or-No questions designed to facilitate comparison between the two generations. According to Sugiyono (2009), quantitative research methods are research methods based on real, measurable, and analyzed facts used to investigate a specific population or sample, data collection using research instruments, quantitative or statistical data analysis, with the aim of testing a hypothesis that has been established. Meanwhile, a questionnaire is a data collection technique through a written interview approach, where the researcher provides a series or list of statements that are systematically compiled, then answered in writing by the respondents (Sugiyono, 2016).

Data collection techniques are tools or strategies used to gather information or facts in the field. In this study, the data collection technique used was a survey administered through Google Forms

media. This survey aims to collect information on the difference in language comprehension skills in the era of digitalization by Millennials and Generation Z. The researchers prepared a google form-based questionnaire containing 15 questions related to the use of slang in social media, the influence of social media on slang, and how often respondents use slang in communication.

The questionnaire was then distributed to friends and local residents belonging to Generation Z or Millennial Generation through social media. The researchers asked respondents to fill out the survey voluntarily, so they could give honest answers without feeling pressured. The respondents who were the target of the study were individuals born in 1981 to 1996 who were members of the Millennial Generation and from 1997 to 2012 who were included in Generation Z. Information was also obtained about social media usage habits, time spent on digital platforms, and the level of respondents' participation in conversations using slang. The study sampled about 80 people, meaning 40 Millennials and 40 Generation Z, respectively, reflecting

the variation in social media use between the two generations. Data collection was carried out over a week to collect the necessary samples.

Data analysis was carried out to obtain research results. Then all the data was collected from the respondents, then data analysis was carried out to find the results and conclusions of the study. Quantitative data was analyzed using statistical techniques while questionnaire results were analyzed using percentage calculation. Data analysis was carried out using Microsoft Excel software.

### C. RESULTS and DISCUSSION

Based on the questionnaire data collected from 40 Generation Z respondents and 40 Millennial respondents, significant differences in slang comprehension were identified.

**Table 1. Survey Results: Gen Z vs Millennial**

| No. | Questions | Gen Z (%) | Mill. (%) | Higher |
|-----|-----------|-----------|-----------|--------|
|-----|-----------|-----------|-----------|--------|

#### A. Social Media & Technology Use

Uses

gadgets/social

|   |                             |      |      |              |
|---|-----------------------------|------|------|--------------|
| 1 | media as communication tool | 95.0 | 15.0 | <b>Gen Z</b> |
|---|-----------------------------|------|------|--------------|

Uses

|   |                                |      |      |              |
|---|--------------------------------|------|------|--------------|
| 2 | Instagram, TikTok, X, Snapchat | 87.5 | 12.5 | <b>Gen Z</b> |
|---|--------------------------------|------|------|--------------|

Uses

|   |                                  |      |       |                   |
|---|----------------------------------|------|-------|-------------------|
| 3 | Facebook, BBM, Twitter, Telegram | 62.5 | 100.0 | <b>Millennial</b> |
|---|----------------------------------|------|-------|-------------------|

#### B. Cultural Content Preferences

Prefers foreign

|   |                   |      |     |              |
|---|-------------------|------|-----|--------------|
| 4 | movies over local | 82.5 | 6.4 | <b>Gen Z</b> |
|---|-------------------|------|-----|--------------|

Listens to local

|   |                         |      |      |                   |
|---|-------------------------|------|------|-------------------|
| 5 | music more than foreign | 35.0 | 95.0 | <b>Millennial</b> |
|---|-------------------------|------|------|-------------------|

#### C. Understanding Slang Words

Knows modern

|   |                                    |      |     |              |
|---|------------------------------------|------|-----|--------------|
| 6 | slang (OOTD, SLAY, FYP, BTW, etc.) | 85.0 | 7.5 | <b>Gen Z</b> |
|---|------------------------------------|------|-----|--------------|

Knows 2000s

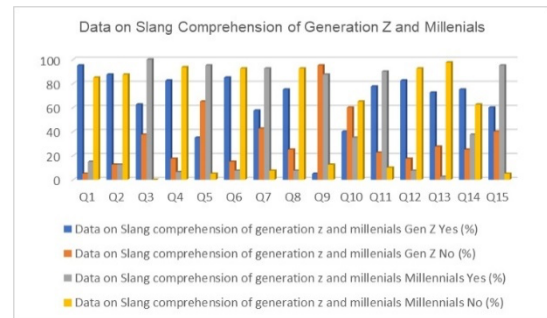
|   |                                   |      |      |                   |
|---|-----------------------------------|------|------|-------------------|
| 7 | slang (CLBK, SANTUY, WOLES, etc.) | 57.5 | 92.5 | <b>Millennial</b> |
|---|-----------------------------------|------|------|-------------------|

#### D. Habits & Attitudes towards Slang

|       |                                     |      |      |                   |  |
|-------|-------------------------------------|------|------|-------------------|--|
|       | Frequently                          |      |      |                   |  |
| 8     | uses slang in daily life            | 75.0 | 7.5  | <b>Gen Z</b>      |  |
| <hr/> |                                     |      |      |                   |  |
|       | Finds it difficult                  |      |      |                   |  |
| 9     | to adapt to slang                   | 5.0  | 87.5 | <b>Millennial</b> |  |
| <hr/> |                                     |      |      |                   |  |
|       | Searches                            |      |      |                   |  |
| 10    | slang meanings online               | 40.0 | 35.0 | <b>Gen Z</b>      |  |
| <hr/> |                                     |      |      |                   |  |
|       | Peer circle                         |      |      |                   |  |
| 11    | influences slang use                | 77.5 | 90.0 | <b>Millennial</b> |  |
| <hr/> |                                     |      |      |                   |  |
|       | Slang is                            |      |      |                   |  |
| 12    | important in digital communication  | 82.5 | 7.5  | <b>Gen Z</b>      |  |
| <hr/> |                                     |      |      |                   |  |
|       | Uses slang                          |      |      |                   |  |
| 13    | more than formal language in chat   | 72.5 | 2.5  | <b>Gen Z</b>      |  |
| <hr/> |                                     |      |      |                   |  |
|       | Has                                 |      |      |                   |  |
| 14    | misunderstood slang in conversation | 75.0 | 37.5 | <b>Gen Z</b>      |  |
| <hr/> |                                     |      |      |                   |  |
|       | Interested in                       |      |      |                   |  |
| 15    | learning trending slang             | 60.0 | 95.0 | <b>Millennial</b> |  |

*Note: % = percentage of Yes responses*

#### Graph of Research Results



Based on questionnaire data conducted on 40 respondents from two groups, namely Generation Z and Millennials, it was found that there is a clear difference in their ability to understand slang words in the digital era. All of the following percentages were calculated from each group (n = 40).

#### 1. Use of Social Media and Technology (Questions 1–3)

These findings are consistent with the sociolinguistic theory proposed by Wardhaugh, which suggests that social factors, such as age and generational groups, have a direct influence on language use. This includes the choice of communication platforms that ultimately form exposure to specific language variations.

Question number 1 measures how often respondents use gadgets or social media to communicate. The

results show that 95% of Generation Z answered 'yes', while only 15% of Millennials did answered it. This significant difference indicates that social media plays a central role in daily communication patterns of Generation Z, while Millennials prefer to use various means of communication and not rely entirely on social media.

Question number 2 examines how frequently respondents use modern applications such as Instagram, TikTok, X, and Snapchat. The results reveal a considerable difference between the two generations: 87.5% of Generation Z reported using these apps regularly, while only 12.5% of Millennials reported doing the same. The high numbers in Generation Z match their nature as a generation that grew up with the development of video-based social media platforms and short content. On the other hand, the Millennial Generation is more familiar with the various platforms that emerged in their time. This can be seen in question number 3, where all respondents from Millennials (100%) said they have used Facebook, BBM, Twitter, or Telegram, while only 62.5% of Generation Z do so.

## **2. Cultural Content Preferences (Questions 4–5)**

Question number 4 about movie viewing choices shows that 82.5% of Generation Z prefer movies from abroad, while only 6.4% of Millennials choose movies abroad. Different results were also seen in question number 5 about music choices: 95% of Millennials listen to local music more often, while only 35% of Generation Z say the same.

These differences in preferences have a direct impact on the extent to which a person is exposed to language. Generation Z who often use content from abroad has greater access to foreign words. These words are then used in everyday conversation as slang, such as the English term that now appears widely on TikTok and Instagram. This finding is supported by supported previous studies conducted by Sukatmo (2022) and Rufaida (2023), which explain that the use of foreign languages, particularly English, in daily communication has become increasingly common among young Indonesians.

### **3. Understanding Slang (Questions 6–7)**

These findings support Partridge's theory (1933), which describes slang as a form of informal language and serves as a marker of identity and social belonging within a group. Since each generation develops distinctive slang expressions influenced by its era, intergenerational understanding becomes naturally limited.

Question number 6 tests how well we understand modern slang that is now widely used on social media, such as Yapping, BTW, OOTD, SLAY, FYP, GRWM, STECU, and BADMOOD. The results were very different: 85% of Generation Z claimed to know about these terms, while only 7.5% of Millennials gave the same answer. These findings clearly demonstrate that modern slang comprehension is strongly influenced by exposure to digital platforms. Question number 7, which tested the understanding of slang terms from the 2000s such as CLBK, PHP, KUDET, SANTUY, WOLES, MANTUL, and KECE, the result was different: 92.5% of Millennials

understood these terms, while only 57.5% of Generation Z understood them. Although more than half of Generation Z still knows about the old slang, a difference of nearly 35 percentage points suggests that it is generation-dependent and closely tied to the culture that shaped it.

### **4. Habits and Attitudes to Slang (Questions 8–15)**

Question number 8 examines the frequent use of slang in daily communication. The findings show that 75% of Generation Z actively use slang, while only 7.5% of Millennials do so. According to Wardhaugh (2006), different types of social groups will form different linguistic norms according to their environment and social experiences. For Generation Z, slang is not just a variation of choice, but has become part of the everyday communication value that reflects their group identity.

Question number 9 regarding the difficulty of adapting to current slang reinforces these findings. Only 5% of Generation Z have difficulty adapting, while Millennials reach 87.5%. The high level of adaptation difficulties in the Millennial Generation

is in line this finding is consistent with Mannheim's (1952) theory, which emphasizes that each generation is shaped by distinct social experiences and historical contexts which shape their mindset and ways of communicating. The Millennial generation has gone through a period of change from face-to-face to digital communication with the development of various languages from the previous era, so that the emergence of digital slang that occurred very quickly became difficult to follow.

Question number 10 about the habit of looking up the meaning of slang on the internet shows that 40% of Generation Z and 35% of Millennials say they do. This relatively small difference suggests that although Generation Z is more familiar with modern slang, there are still some of them who need to look for sources to understand the new terms that keep popping up. Meanwhile, the Millennial Generation who are looking for the meaning of slang is most likely driven by their unfamiliarity with the new slang, these findings align with Sari's (2023) argument that social media has become a primary source for

understanding the language changes in the digital era.

Question number 11 examines the influence of peer groups on the use of slang. The findings show that many Millennials and Generation Z respondents acknowledge this influence. As many as 90% of Millennials and 77.5% of Generation Z admit this. Both percentages are considerably high and reflect Wardhaugh's (2006) view that social factors, such as social groups, strongly influence language variation. The difference between Generation Z and Millennials lies in the way they interact with their circle of friends. Generation Z interacts more through digital communities that are not limited by geographic location, while Millennials interact more in-person through face-to-face meetings.

Question number 12 about the perception of the importance of slang in the digital age shows a significant difference between Generation Z and Millennials. As many as 82.5% of Generation Z consider slang important for digital communication, while only 7.5% of Millennials think so. This difference can be explained by

Partridge's view that slang is used as a marker of group identity and solidarity. Generation Z uses slang to show their membership in a digital community, so they consider slang to be very important. On the other hand, the Millennial Generation does not feel the need to use slang as an identity marker in digital communication.

Question number 13 about the preference of using slang over formal language when chatting shows that many Generation Z prefer slang. As many as 72.5% of Generation Z prefer slang in informal digital communication, while only 2.5% of Millennials do the same. This difference is closely related to Partridge's (1933) perspective that slang emerged among younger generations as a way to distinguish themselves from older generations. In addition, Chintya et al. (2024) highlight that the use of Indonesian in the digital era has shifted toward informal variations, particularly among younger generations who interact actively in digital spaces.

Question number 14 about the experience of misunderstanding the meaning of slang in conversation

shows that many Generation Z have experienced this. As many as 75% of Generation Z admitted to misunderstanding slang, while only 37.5% of Millennials experienced the same thing. This difference can be explained by Partridge's (1933) theory that slang is highly dynamic and constantly evolving. The more a person engages in slang conversations, the more likely they are to misunderstand the meaning of the words. Therefore, Generation Z, who are more actively engaged in slang communication, are more likely to experience misunderstandings in slang interpretation.

Question number 15 about the trending interest in learning slang shows that many Millennials are interested. As many as 95% of Millennials say they are interested in learning slang, compared to 60% of Generation Z. Although Millennials have a lower understanding of modern slang, they have a high interest in learning it. Ramadhani and Pujiyatno (2025) describe this phenomenon as a consequence of rapid social media and digital technology development, which continuously encourages the emergence of new slang expressions

unfamiliar to older generations. This high interest shows that the main obstacle for the Millennial Generation is not motivation, but in the access and intensity of exposure to the digital ecosystem which is the main source of the latest slang developments.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

This study reveals a significant difference between Generation Z and Millennials in understanding slang in the digital age. These differences contribute to an intergenerational communication gap in digital communication, where Generation Z prefers to use digital slang, while Millennials are more comfortable with formal digital communication.

Generation Z has a better ability to understand modern slang such as Yapping, SLAY, and FYP. This is because they grew up with a high intensity of social media use, especially TikTok and Instagram. Millennials tend to be more familiar with old slang such as CLBK and MANTUL, but have difficulty with modern digital slang. They are undergoing a digital adaptation process that makes them less quick to

keep up with the latest slang developments.

Some theories support this finding, such as Sociolinguistics & Language Evolution, namely that age and social groups influence the language used. Anastasya Shinta Ramadhani and Ambar Pujiyatno also mentioned that technology and social media play a significant role in the development of slang. Socio-Historical context refers to life experiences shaped by different social and historical backgrounds that influence language understanding. This aligns with Karl Mannheim's theory of generations. Slang also serves as a tool to create a specific group identity, as Partridge (1933) argued.

Overall, the study shows that technological developments not only create new language variations, but also affect people's adaptability to technology, ultimately leading to a gap in language understanding between generations.

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