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Analyzing the use of Slang by Gen z in Pakistan

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Abstract

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This study focuses on identifying and describing slang words as are used by Gen z in Pakistan. The researcher has found language change among youngsters and has analyzed it as a natural process mentioned by Labov (2001) as a sociolinguistics phenomenon. Data has been collected from social media programs and Gen z students have been interviewed about their use of slang words. All the slang words are noted and most frequently used are analyzed. It is found that Gen z people use slang in their daily informal conversation, with their friends. But in formal or academic settings these are not approved by the elders and teachers. The documentation of slang words in this paper is a valuable addition in sociolinguistics study in Pakistan and opens new vistas for more studies in this field here.

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INTRODUCTION

The use of slang in sociolinguistics research is still an important area because of language change in society. In "Language Evolution and Slang Words in Contemporary Times", Oktavian Mantri emphasizes that every living language naturally undergoes transformation over time. It is an unavoidable process affecting all structural aspects of language like vocabulary, sounds, grammar, and sentence structure (PBS, 2005). While the pace of this evolution may differ geographically, its occurrence is both inevitable and often purposeful (Jones & Singh, 2005). Spontaneous language changes, particularly among younger speakers in multicultural settings have been as Winford (2020: 51–57 added views by, (Weinreich, 1953; Myers-Scotton, 1993) in Language Innovation in Bilingual Environments. Labov (2001) discusses language variation as a continuum influenced by awareness, markedness, and stereotypes. He questions the centrality of identity in driving linguistic change, emphasizing instead the density of social contact (Labov, 2001; cited in Trudgill, 2008: 244). Trudgill (2008) argues that identity alone doesn't instigate change but operates alongside unconscious patterns of interaction, while living in society.

This study detects, identifies and describes language change in Pakistan. Language change that has occurred in the form of use of Slang by Gen z. Bucholtz (2011) integrates ethnographic data with linguistic analysis to examine how white youth in a California high school construct racial and cultural identities through speech styles ranging from African American Vernacular English to "Valley Girl" English. Winford, Eckert, Labov, and others, provides a holistic approach for analyzing slang and language innovation among youth in bilingual and multicultural settings. Studies show that social meaning influences perception at an unconscious level, whether through stereotypes (Hay & Drager, 2010) or ongoing sound changes (D'Onofrio, 2014). Paola

Clara Leotta and Tamari Dolidze, (April 2022) emphasized the importance of adaptability of language in new situations in *Language Change, New Millennium, and the Watershed in the Use of English*. "We all agree that language, like any living being, undergoes constant change and evolution to adapt to the needs of its users." Lilit Lamsehat Panjaiten and Aditya Nur Patria (2024) mentioned in *social media and Language Evolution: The Impact of Digital Communication on Language Change*. As youth culture becomes increasingly digital, scholars (Tagliamonte, 2016; Androutsopoulos & Stæhr, 2018) show how young people skillfully shift styles in online spaces, refuting the idea that digital talk degrades language. Prevalence of English and global interactions of people through social media and other forums brought the English words being used in distorted meanings.

Here language change is studied with the focus on the use of slang by Gen z. Slang is an informal word or phrase, and it seems to be used in speech more often than in writing. It can be specified in a specific group of people or in a context, therefore, the meanings of words may not be obvious to everyone. Slang is often learned outside the classroom, as part of informal, trendy talk. Cultural immersion, living in English influenced regions and the increased use of social media has become the factors of using slang. (Kit Kittelstad , 2022). How speakers assign new meanings to styles and shifts has been all studied by (Coupland, 2010; Agha, 2015). (Wagner, 2012). Longitudinal studies, such as those in Copenhagen (Madsen et al., 2016; Stæhr), follow youth, social environments. Tagliamonte (2016) and others (Androutsopoulos & Stæhr, 2018) show that youth use a mix of styles in digital communication, (Leander & McKim, 2003;).

This study finds the use of slang words in social environments and on social media. How and where these words come in use is the main objective of the research. The previous research show that this study of language variation in Pakistani context has not been observed and documented in the field of linguistics. Though sociolinguistics is a well-explored field, the innovative and dynamic use of slang among younger generations in Pakistan has not yet been sufficiently documented. Through a qualitative study the trend of the language change especially in Urban areas of Pakistan, among youngsters has been explored. It will spotlight the evolving nature of language in the country and contribute to the broader understanding of how global linguistic trends intersect with local sociolinguistics dynamics.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Widely regarded as the founding figure in modern sociolinguistics, William Labov introduced the concept of "language variation and change" to describe how language evolves under the influence of social conditions. His pioneering work, including research on Martha's Vineyard and the social stratification of New York City speech, emphasized that phonetic and syntactic variations correlate with sociological variables such as socioeconomic class, age, and gender. William Labov is considered the founder of modern sociolinguistics. He preferred the label "language variation and change" to describe his work studying how language varies based on social factors. Labov was inspired to establish the theoretical relationship between language, individuals, and communities. Labov also formalized the key laying the foundation for studying how language transforms across communities. He highlighted that such transformations are often linked to social prestige and collective behavior, rather than isolated linguistic shifts. Ender and Kaiser (2017) added to the view that dialects and variations are dependent on pragmatics and social contexts.

The Nature and Evolution of Slang

Sociolinguistics agreed on the description that Slang is a form of informal speech that often emerges in specific social circles as a shorthand for shared ideas, humor, and identity. Its origins span centuries, with historical phases such as: a coded language among criminals; as jazz culture, which introduced terms like “cool” and “cat”; then counterculture, which popularized expressions such as “groovy” or “far out” and lately Post-2000 digital boom, where acronyms and abbreviations (e.g., “pol.sc.”, “pak.st.”, “PIPS”) proliferated across academic, social, and political domains. The 21st century has seen more changes in use of language. In the contemporary era, especially among Gen Z, the innovation of slang has accelerated, with language being rapidly reinvented through online communities. Slang often mirrors the cultural, emotional, and political tone of its time.

Slang is known for its: Casual and playful character, deviating from standard grammar; Ephemeral popularity, often going viral before disappearing; Expressive creativity, enabling users to forge stronger group identities, a means of asserting belonging and emotion. (Rgot. Ally, 2025) Oxford Languages reports that over four-fifths of youth aged 16 to 24 frequently integrate slang into their daily communication. Notably, 65% of them see slang to express who they are. These figures confirm slang's centrality in shaping peer communication and modern identity performance. In Social scenario, being familiar with slang offers several benefits like, better communication, it also reflects the shared values and ideologies of different groups.

Fashion of slang on Internet

This digitally influenced vocabulary reflects not just global popular culture but also showcases how digital content is shaping informal modes of expression. For many European youths, such online interactions serve as tools to articulate humor and identity via new-age slang. With the dominance of digital communication, a new class of vocabulary—often referred to as the Internet lexicon—has surfaced. These include abbreviations, memes, and expressions frequently used in chats, forums, and gaming platforms. Popular terms in recent years include: “lzz” – refers to the ability to flirt or charm effectively, made famous through TikTok, “Mid” means something average, “Aura Points” , a satirical way to quantify one's vibe or presence online. Millennial slang from earlier years, such as “fam”, “lit”, and “sus”, has blended into Gen Z culture, continuing the cycle of reinvention. (August 8, 2017) Slang isn't typically taught in classrooms—it's picked up through peer groups, media, and cultural exposure.

Films, music, and ads use slang to connect with audiences. Modern slang doesn't just come from poets or leaders; today's youth shape and spread it online and life situations as well. Every region creates its own informal terms, reflecting local identity and culture. These expressions vary by age and place, making slang a key area in language and culture studies. With the rise of the internet, a new digital slang has emerged abbreviations and phrases used across social media, games, and chats. Learning slang often means being part of the culture, not just reading about it. (Millennial Slang, October 4, 2020). Slang is woven into art, literature, history, media, and ads, adding emotion and meaning to everyday language. While historical figures like poets and activists shaped slang in the past, today's youth, especially on social media, freely create and spread new terms. Each generation brings fresh slang into culture, often reusing old words with new meanings—like *busted*, *sick*, or *hip*. While these terms evolve, they can cause confusion between age groups. Staying updated

with current slang helps bridge this communication gap. "Evolution of Slangs: Yes or No" (Aligicia Herrera, Oct. 2024).

Framework Based on Frans Van Coetsem's Model

The conceptual framework for this study draws on the influential work of Frans van Coetsem, as detailed in *Theories of Language Contact* (Contact, 2020). His framework is grounded in a psycholinguistic orientation, aiming to explain how languages change through interaction by focusing on speaker agency and the concept of linguistic dominance.

Van Coetsem's (1988, 2000) psycholinguistic model explains language change through speaker behavior, highlighting *linguistic dominance* over social power. He classifies contact-induced changes into two types: **borrowing** (mainly vocabulary, e.g., *taco* from Spanish into English) and **imposition** (structural changes from a speaker's native language affecting a second language). (Teacher, 2017) His framework stands out for its clarity, offering a more precise and interdisciplinary approach to understanding language contact. This research also adopts contributions from sociolinguistic perspectives to understand how social dynamics shape language practices. Van Coetsem's framework is employed to investigate the processes that give rise to slang in youth communities, especially under conditions of bilingualism and social hybridity.

This framework, drawing heavily from Van Coetsem's psycholinguistic model and complemented by sociolinguistic insights from Winford, Eckert, Labov, and others, provides a holistic approach for analyzing slang and language innovation among youth in bilingual and multicultural settings. It brings together structural, cognitive, and social dimensions of language to explain how contact, identity, and context drive linguistic change. *Theories of Language Contact* (Contact, 2020). It explores how social context shapes language contact and reviews key linguistic models. Van Coetsem's (1988, 2000) model is highlighted as a more consistent and accurate explanation of contact-driven language change. (Donald Winford) (page 51-7 05 February 2020) as the basis, specifically focusing on:

Language innovation and language change in bilingual settings.

Labov proposes a continuum of awareness, among indicators, markers, and stereotypes since (1) the presence or absence of stylistic use and (2) the presence or absence of metapragmatic awareness. Recent studies view youth not just as an age group, but a shifting social category shaped by culture and relationships, where language becomes a key tool for identity and negotiation, especially in multicultural settings. "[G]eneration is a social, not a chronological category", Comaroff and Comaroff (2006, p. 274) argue in this sense; consequently, "some people never become youth, [while] others seem unable to outgrow the label, even in middle age". Youth may be more usefully seen as a 'shifter' (Bucholtz, 2002). Sociolinguistic research now emphasizes not just language change, but *sociolinguistic change*—how speakers assign new meanings to existing styles (Coupland, 2010; Agha, 2015). Scholars like Jaffe (2009) and Snell (2010) explore how linguistic features signal stances and shape social alignment. While youth are central to this process, adults too follow stricter norms as they settle into stable identities (Wagner, 2012). Long-term studies, such as those in Copenhagen (Madsen et al., 2016; Stæhr), track youth across school, leisure, and family, offering a fuller view of their linguistic world. . Ethnographic work, like Bucholtz's (2011) *White Kids*, reveals how youth use varied linguistic styles to negotiate identity based on race and culture. Globally, slang evolves due to digital

connectivity, pop culture, and social change. New terms like *hashtag*, *woke*, and *ghosting* reflect shifting identities and spread rapidly across cultures, especially through English and online media. Sociolinguists stress the need to analyze how linguistic features convey stance and social alignment in interaction (Jaffe, 2009; Snell, 2010). Research has expanded from tracking language change to exploring *sociolinguistic change* (Coupland, 2010; Agha, 2015). Tagliamonte (2016) and others (Androutsopoulos & Stæhr, 2018) show that youth use a mix of styles in digital communication. Offline and online engagements are interconnected social spaces (Leander & McKim, 2003; Nørreby & Møller, 2015). Bucholtz (2011) explores how youth in a California high school use varied linguistic styles to build racial and cultural identities. This highlights how language functions as a tool for identity negotiation across social groups.

Factors that are involved in these changes are, new technology, new terms, changes in society, as attitudes toward identity, relationships, and the influence of pop culture. Slang terms often evolve rapidly, especially among younger generations. New words emerge as ways for groups to express shared experiences, and older generations may find the language confusing or unintelligible. As the world becomes more interconnected through digital media and globalization, slang terms or technological terms can spread rapidly between languages and cultures. For instance, words like "selfie" or "hashtag" are now used globally, and some English terms have been incorporated into other languages.

Studies show that language is evolving through digital media. Crystal (2006) notes the internet's role in reshaping linguistic norms, while Boyd and Ellison (2007) highlight social media as a space for identity and informal learning. Tagg et al. (2017) explores how words drive innovation. Though most slang originates in English-speaking countries, social media spreads it widely, influencing language use across Europe and beyond. Every generation has its own *slang* — very informal language or specific words used by a particular group of people. You'll usually hear slang spoken more often than you'll see it put in

METHODOLOGY

It is a descriptive, qualitative study observing slang words used/spoken by youngsters. Most frequently used slang words attract the attention of the researcher provoke to investigate them. Such words will be collected from social media platforms like TikTok, YouTube, Facebook and Instagram. The data is collected and organized to analyze. Online interviews from university students in Islamabad about using slang are conducted.

Data

Slang words and terms are picked from social media platforms from different clips and videos and are also collected from Gen z group students from universities in Pakistan.

Social media is the main source to promote slang words and phrases all over the world. A clip from YouTube shows how a quiz is dramatized with a few new terms.

A) **Program title: Gen Z Lingo! GirlsOnly**, the host asks the guest for new meanings of some words, that she is unable to reply. The host describes those words. Terms collected are: Bet, Slay, Hits Different, W, Bope.

B) Omer Salim Podcast. Umer Salim is an Actor, Host, and Entertainer based in Islamabad. Umersaleem.official@gmail.com

A You tube talk (Part 1, Part2) by Omer Salim, with a girl, representing Gen Z. by using slang in her conversation. The following words and phrases have been traced in her spoken lines. Ghost, Low Key, Duh, Red Flag, Buzz Killer, Green Flag, Period, Famz, straight up man, Ex...., No vibes ---effect, Gaslighting --- ghosting, Bro ---- address anyone, Lit af --- MA-----, OMG, =====,

No cap --- true, no cover, Savage -- looking bright, extreme,

Green flag ---- everything positive, for real ----- Hus ----husband, hubby, Flex ---- flaunt, Dump----left, Famz---- family n friends, Boss lady, Chillax----- chill and relax

As she creates a lot of fun and sarcasm, hitting the society she lives in the program. Frequent use of slang words has made the program truly Gen Z specific. Many of such words are given below as are picked from that clip.

C) A TikTok presents the program on slang.

Brain rot, "Scene on hai = I'm in!", "Takkar ka banda/bandi", "Toxic scene hai, "Bari vibe hai", "Cringe scene", "No cap, you're bussin"

You'll usually hear slang spoken more often than you'll see it put in writing, though emails and texts often contain many conversational slang words. The generations are categorized as: The Lost Generation from 1890, and goes to IGen / Gen Z 1995 to 2012

D) A survey based on interviews is conducted to find the impact of this language change in general in society. In qualitative research type, the suggested sample size is 12-30 persons for interviews (Guest et al. (2006), Creswell (2013)

13 of the students and youngsters are consulted to ask the meaning or the context in which they use slang. Short interviews will be the mode of knowing, Popular Gen Z terminologies were noticed in common conversations confirmed on social media platforms, meme archives, online slang dictionaries (like Urban Dictionary), and trending hashtags. This qualitative study combines ethnographic observation with content analysis. A cross section of the young generation, age: 18 to 25, have been interviewed, by asking them questions. And limited research has been conducted on how Generation Z's language specifically contributes to language variation n change in the area.

Questions asked from the chosen youngsters have been formulated according to the research questions and objectives. responses have been categorized one by one. And these answers are discussed and described by the researcher. Words and phrases are categorized based on origin, formation and usage. Cross-platform usage is also noted. Eble, C. (1996) "*Slang and Sociability: In-group Language among College Students*". guides to design questions. The Meaning of Slang Words: A Deep Dive into Informal Language, (Grammarly; 2021). Explore the dynamic world of slang words! Discover their meaning, evolution, and role in modern communication. Learn from case studies and statistics about slang usage among different generations.

Data Analysis

Data collection serves the purpose to achieve research objectives are given below: To identify the slang in use among Gen Z.

The slang in use among Gen Z are identified and calculated and it is found that all these Gen Z members use slang in their conversation but only with their friends and class fellows. A list of slang given by them is prepared and their meanings are described here. In these responses some words like 'slay', 'tea', 'no cap' are repeated. Slang words are not used in the literal sense; rather new connotation is given to the by the group of people using them as their code words.

Table 1.

Slang word	Slang meaning	Dictionary meaning
BET	nice, like, okay/ I dare you	Gamble/ wager
SLAY	Looking great	Kill/murder
HITS DIFFERENT	Extraordinary, catchy,	Seems different
SUS	Suspicious	shady
W	Wining	Carries no meaning
BOPE	good/ catchy	Equipment in gas industry
GHOST	End abruptly/ block kr dey	Phantom/specter
LOW KEY	Done in understated way/ a desire to downplay, subtly or discreetly, often with a hint of embarrassment	Modest
DUH	Very obvious/ yes of course	Point out something stupid
CRINGE	Sarcastically	
RED FLAG	Emabrassing, awkward	Apprehension/ mannerly.
	Something negative in a relation or situation, deal breaker	Warning of some danger
BUZZ KILLER	Spoiling mood	Ending up an activity like buzz off
GREEN FLAG	Reliable/good/consistent	Safety/ permission
PERIOD	Stop	Duration
FAMZ	Family and friends	New acronym

These words and phrases are described here with reference and context these are used in.

Table 2.

Slang word	Meaning and description	Dictionary meanings
Beef	I've a beef with you, some complaint, or issue	The meat of cattle, typically cows, bulls, or steers, used for food
Tea	to gossip or personal information, particularly sensational or private details. It's often used in the "spill the tea,"	A hot drink used all over the world
for real (fr)	a slang phrase that emphasizes genuineness or sincerity. I'm not lying, telling the truth	Truly, sincerely.
No cap	something genuine or truthful.	Creation of hip hop culture in African American regions. Meaning not lying.
Bro	To address anyone	Short form for brother
Internet is not interneting...	not giving real vibe.	The Internet is not really in working condition
Brain is not braining	not giving real vibe.	Brain is not able to work
Mood	used to express that a situation or feeling is relatable or resonates with someone	A temporary state of mind or feeling

Aura	means someone is perceived as cool, confident, and stylish, possessing a distinctive "air" or "presence".	Distinctive atmosphere surrounding a given source
Its giving	used to describe when something, like a person's style, a situation, or an experience, gives off a particular vibe or feeling	Bestowing
Aesthetic	Naturally pretty, well set. For something to be "aesthetic", it is pleasing to look at, or it's simply beautiful.	Related to beauty/ set of rules underlying artistic work
delulu,	delusion. Live in the fantasy world	Slang term from delusional
ate	Performed exceptionally	Past tense of eat
Pookie	Loved one, Pookie is one of those flexible slang terms that can mean so many different things.	Term of endearment/nickname
Rizz	Charisma	Short form of charisma, a slang to show the ability of charm and attraction
lykly	If you know you know	Short form of If you know you know
Selfie	One's own click	Take ones own pic.with web cam or smartphone, appearing in 21 st century
Hashtag	A new term introduced.	To fix an identity, phrase preceded by hash, especially on social media sites
Very demure, very mindful	Trending on internet Was defined in 2019 intelligent	Quiet /reserved/ modest/ well behaved/ appealing
Bussin	Really good, this pizza is bussin	Of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) means, exceptionally impressive, used as slang
Flex	Show off. attractive	Using skill, talent or ability
Fam	To be famous	Short form of famous

A very frequently used slang word pookie can be analyzed here. Aya Nakamura-pookie song, utters the word pookie in lyrics. Pookie is used in all cultures globally, meaning varies with context. As with most slang, context is everything. Whether "Pookie" feels sweet, funny, sarcastic, or meaningful depends on who's saying it, how they're saying it, and the relationship one has with the other. It can be decoded according to the speaker and the situation. In the world of memes, "Pookie" is all about being extra, over-the-top affection, that's meant to be funny. The Slang "Pookie" is used a term of affection.

Pookie, according to Oxford Online dictionary is the proper name for a pet.

Table 3.

Slang	Meaning in use as slang	Example
pookie	is often used as an affectionate nickname, like "babe" or "honey." Couples and close friends throw it around to show love and make each other feel special.	Goodnight, Pookie! Sleep tight!

	<p>It also shows a playful or funny nickname Sometimes, "Pookie" isn't romantic, it's just a silly nickname among friends. friend who gives everyone funny names. Yeah, "Pookie" might be their way of teasing you.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yo Pookie let's hit the gym!
	<p>A sweet name for a pet that is close to heart. "Pookie" also makes a great pet name, literally. It's the kind of soft, cute nickname people give their dogs, cats, or other pets.</p>	<p>Come here, Pookie! Who's a good boy?</p> <p>Pookie, stop chewing my shoes!</p>
	<p>At times, "Pookie" is used sarcastically, especially when someone's being overly emotional or clingy. It's a playful way of poking fun at cheesy behavior.</p>	<p>Oh no, Pookie didn't text back in 5 minutes! End of the world!</p> <p>Okay, Pookie, let's not get too dramatic now.</p>
<p>On social media, "Pookie" has become a staple in memes.</p>	<p>People use it to exaggerate cuteness or make fun of affectionate behavior in relationships.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When Pookie won't stop calling you during a meeting. <p>Just waiting for my Pookie to send me a goodnight text.</p>

Conclusively, the nickname, pookie, adds humor and playfulness to the relationship without any deep emotional meaning. Pookie is one of those flexible slang terms that can mean so many different things. _{(European Youth Portal Gen Z slang words and phrases of 2024).}

Urban Dictionary is crowdsourced online dictionary for slang words and phrases operating under the motto "Define Your World." The website was founded in 1999 by Aaron Peckam. The nickname, pookie, adds humor and playfulness to the relationship without any deep emotional meaning.

When the word stays in usage, it can lead to some miscommunication between older and younger speakers. That's why understanding the most current slang is a good idea — whether you're in the younger generation or not (kit kittelstad, 2022).

Data and its analysis indicate that slang is used by Gen Z members (1995 -2012). They can understand the connotation well. Whereas elderly people or in academic department these are not understood or accepted even. Interviews with Gen z members have confirmed that they have faced an untoward situation if ever slang is uttered before any of their parents are elders in the family. This point also shows that these words are used in informal conversation of certain group. If ever they utter it out of their circle, they had to explain the meaning.

Slang words are not the product of academic situations and are not to be used in academic writing. With teachers it too becomes awkward. (Teen Slang: Decoding Gen Z by Jackie Baucom Jan.2024).

Research done by Trinity College London found that "80% of Gen Z students use this kind of language. Present research shows that almost all the youngsters interviewed here have shown their active interest in using slang words. It has become code language among that age group. Interviews with Gen z approved that more than

90% of the Gen Z members have acquired this habit of speaking in a lighter tone with each other. Their conversation becomes humorous, meaningful and sarcastic too. Words shown in the table above like 'phones is not phoning', brain is not braining', 'aura' and 'tea' create an atmosphere of understanding as code words among these youngsters. Slang words have become integral to modern communication, especially among younger generations. Terms like "Aura", "pookie," and "lykly," bridged the digital and real worlds, spreading through memes and social media.

CONCLUSION

As technology advances, the internet and social media will continue to shape and create new slang. Platforms like TikTok and Twitter often give rise to new terms that can spread virally, further complicating traditional understandings of language. The need to adapt and understand these will persist, influencing daily communication. There seems a rise in these informal words as new Generations are becoming more self-possessed as compared to their elders. Gen Z slang, its morphological process and the actual usage of the term. There are fourteen morphological processes that have been observed from the data. These are initialism, initialism in a single word, spelling distortion, compounding, compounding of two different languages, fancy formation or new creation, suffixation, connotation, lighter connotation, multiple process, euphemism, reversed form, clipping, and lexical borrowing. In the next discussion there will be an in-depth analysis of the morphological processes that are present in how Gen Z slang words are created, how they use them and the digital culture that reflects it. Slang is more than just trendy lingo, it serves as a powerful tool for communication, identity, and cultural exchange. By studying slang words and their meanings, we can better engage with the vibrant landscape of contemporary language. In a speedy phenomenon of Language Change and terminology in the fields of science, technology, business, medicine, social media, Digital world, Slang have made their appearance with full flex, no cap. Phenomenon of language change is evident in the society where English is being spoken by youngsters in daily life.

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