

New Terminologies in the Colloquial Arabic Used by Generation Z: A Semantic and Pragmatic Analysis

Maha Abdulaziz Alwusaidy¹ & Amal Alwasidi²

Abstract

This study explores the spread of 10 innovative expressions in colloquial Arabic by Generation Z and the role of social networking sites, especially X, in their outbreak. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to notice the frequency and the nature of their usage from a semantic and pragmatic point of view and the role of social media in their spread. To achieve this purpose, 40 young people (age span 11-27) living in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia took part in this study. A survey, specifically designed for this study, is used as well as a data miner to scrape the expressions' number of occurrences in the social network site X for one year. The research findings suggest that there is a wide spread of these terminologies in Arabic among Gen Z and a significant rate of agreement on their pragmatic meanings.

Keywords: Generation Z, Colloquial Arabic

1. Introduction

Human languages create new words mostly as a result of interactions between communities of different languages or different dialects. Recently, technological advancements have played a vital role in the spread of new terminologies. Saudi culture is heavily reliant on colloquial dialects, where their spread is based on the communication modes being used and the intersectionality of its users. How people connect has grown in popularity through social media sites, texting, and internet messaging. Generation Z, the first generation never to know the world without the internet, values diversity and finding their unique identities." (Katz, 2022). The purpose of this research is to recognize the extent to which the spread of Generation Z's terminologies is worth knowing to anticipate the possibility of adding them to the Arabic colloquial dictionary. This research aims to investigate some Gen Z slang words in the Saudi community. It shows new pragmatic meanings that have emerged for some words and phrases and the nature of their spread amongst this age group. The study focuses on 10 popular innovative words and phrases used in Arabic and writing in Arabic orthography. They are transcribed into English in this paper: /əlbɛst/, /kræf/, /dʒæhfɛlni/, /sɪŋt/, /eks/, /taksik/, /krendʒ/, /dʒɛbt əlfɪd/, /mɛn kɪsɛk/, /mɛtʔxr blmɛnhædʒ/.

This research aims to shed light on the new terminologies used by youth in colloquial Arabic from a semantic and pragmatic point of view and the role of social media in their spread. It hypothesizes that there is a set of expressions that newly entered Arabic and are known to be Gen Z words. It seeks to achieve this goal by answering the following questions:

1. What are Gen Z Arabic new terminologies and what are the semantic and pragmatic meanings associated with them?
2. How far does Generation Z frequently use them?
3. What is the role of social media in the spread of the new colloquial terminologies in Arabic and what is their origin?

¹ King Saud University, Riyadh/ Saudi Arabia

² College of Languages and Translation, Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

To answer these questions, 10 terminologies, that the researchers noticed to be used in colloquial Arabic frequently, are investigated focusing on their origin, their semantic and pragmatic meanings, and the possibility for them to be adapted in Arabic.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory

Before diving into the analysis, it is important to draw the theoretical framework within which the research falls. The relevance theory was developed by the French scholar Sperber and his colleague Wilson in 1995. The theory originated from Paul Grice's work and was influenced by his ideas. It has subsequently evolved into a stand-alone pragmatic framework. "Relevance theory is a cognitively oriented pragmatic theory that aims at providing a psychologically realistic account of utterance interpretation" (Hall, 2018). They point out that the concept of relevance, which is essential to human consciousness, is a key feature in explaining communication between humans. The theory focuses on how communication conveys meaning through contextual relevance. It suggests that people derive meaning not just from the actual words used, but also from the context, shared knowledge, and the most relevant interpretation that leads to successful communication. According to the relevance theory in pragmatics, there is a gap between what is said and what is implicated (Carston & Uchida, 2012). Based on this, the new terminologies that enter any language take a long time to be encoded and appropriately implicated. However, the researchers assume that with social networking tools, it becomes a rapid process since these social networking tools are basically context-based.

2.2 Literature Review

Reviewing the literature, it has become evident that little attention is given to the language spoken by the youth as a rising generation. Most of the few studies found are recent ones and relevant to the language teaching of Generation Z. Some researchers tackled the language of this generation from a sociolinguistic point of view like code-mixing. Tarihoran, Naf'an, and Sumirat, Iin Ratna (2022) investigated the impact of social media on the use of code-mixing by Indonesian Generation Z who mixes English with Indonesian. The study was carried out at Raya University and the results showed that social media affected code-mixing between Indonesian and English for Gen Z. It is clear that this situation was not even noticed in the older Indonesian generation.

Bushra Edam (2019), an Iraqi researcher, investigated how social networking sites affect vocabulary usage in daily conversation and the innovation of terms among young Iraqis. according to study results, the majority of young Iraqis use these certain terms in daily life and on social networking sites. Results suggest that the political, economic, religious, and social climate of the Iraqi nation is closely linked to the way this new language is used in the community. This present paper aims to fill in the gap by considering new expressions used by youth in the Saudi community.

Pikhart, M., & Klímová, B. (2020) explored in their research the gap in second language acquisition research regarding the use of technology by the savvy Generation Z, who heavily rely on mobile applications for their educational process. Forty college students took part in the study. The results demonstrate that Generation Z students are no longer drawn to the current eLearning platform because they want to cooperate and engage with one another in ways that they are accustomed to from other social media platforms, as well as take part in the creation of the platform's content. We can notice that multimodality and language learning have vast domains for investigation.

However, the study of semantics and pragmatics relevant to multimodality lacks attention in the literature. What the new terminologies that enter the language, how existing words' meanings are affected, and how far these words' meanings are common are all questions that need answers. This present research aims to fill this gap in the field of semantics and pragmatics taking the colloquial Arabic language as an example.

3. Methodology

The research has a quantitative-qualitative approach. In the qualitative analysis, the lexical and pragmatic meanings of the colloquial terminologies will be analyzed based on the contexts presented in the data. For the quantitative part, the frequency of the terminologies in terms of averages and percentages will be presented.

3.1 Participants

The present study sheds light on a language phenomenon of Generation Z. The term Gen Z, in short, is introduced by the sociologists of generations, referring to people born in the late 1990s and raised in the 2000s. So, the age span of this generation nowadays is from 12-27 years old. The survey used in this research ensures the age falls within this limitation.

3.2 Data Collection Procedures

To answer the research questions scientifically, two types of data collection methods are used. The first method used in this paper is a multiple-choice question survey that is distributed to 40 participants to see the familiarity of these terminologies outside of the social media world for this particular generation in the Saudi context. The survey includes 3 sections: the first is the consent form, and the second is for the age range. The third section includes 11 multiple-choice questions for the meanings of these 11 phrases. Each question has 4 alternative meanings for the given phrase. Alternatives vary from semantic meaning to pragmatic meaning to other somehow related meanings.

The second method is scraping data from X (known previously as Twitter). The data is scraped from X to see the number of occurrences the expressions are used in Arabic as well as to help the researchers investigate their pragmatic meanings in actual communication. The feature of advanced search in X as well as a scraper called Brand24 enable the researchers to elicit data from the social network X. By using Brand24, one can create a report that includes the number of word occurrences and graph analysis of its usage within the timeframe that we are interested in. The data can then be downloaded as a PDF or Excel file.

3.3 Validity of the Survey

To ensure the validity of the instrument, the survey has been given to 7 participants from the targeted age group (Gen Z) as well as to another random sample from an older age group generation. A Welch Two Sample t-test is used to see if there is a significant variance between the responses of the two groups. The result came ($t = -3.5128$, $df = 15.219$, $p\text{-value} = 0.9985$). So, we can adopt the research hypothesis since there is a true difference in the means that is greater than 0 and a 95% confidence interval.

3.4 Model of Analysis

The model of analysis is based on the explicit and implicit assumption of relevance theory. The survey is analyzed using RStudio to calculate the mean and frequencies of responses related to words' meanings and will be linked to the pragmatic adjustment of relevance theory.

4. Results and Discussion

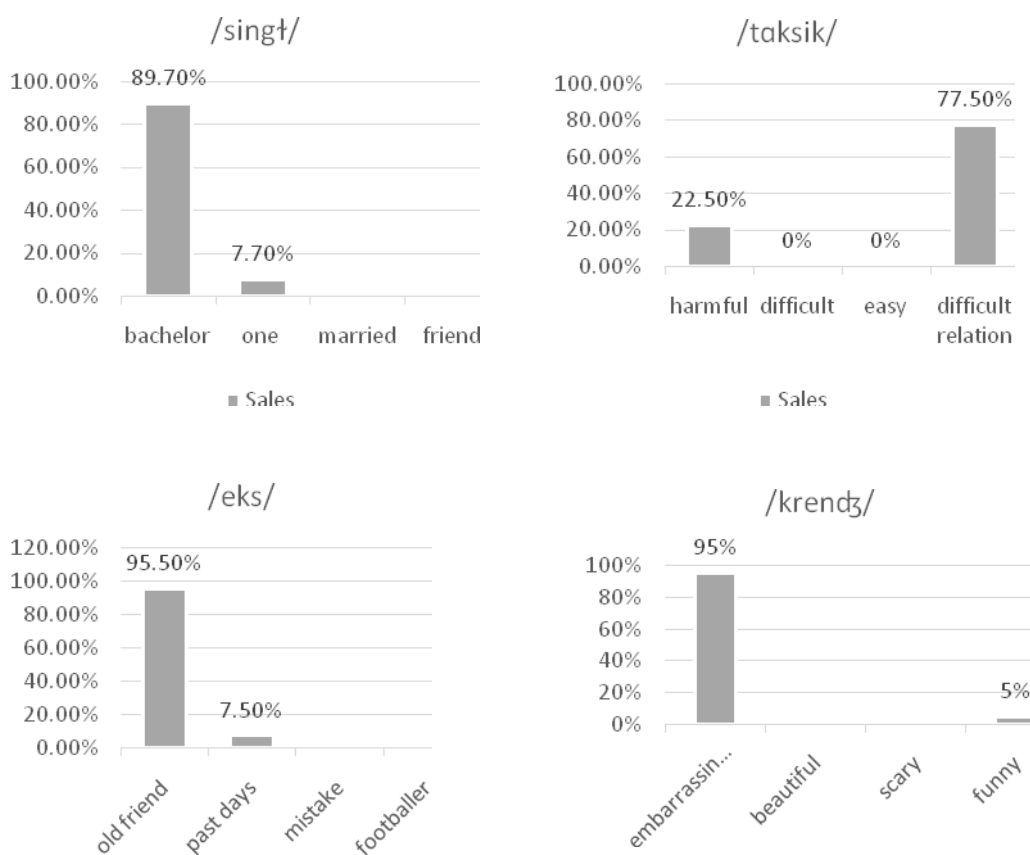
4.1 An Analysis of the spread of the terminologies in the Saudi Context.

The analysis of the survey has shown that the average of participants who answered correctly is ($M=35.3$ of 40) with a percentage of 88% correct answers for the terminologies' actual meanings to Gen Z.

Remarkably, for the three phrases /əlbɛst/, /kræf/, and /dʒæhfɛlni/, all participants selected the actual pragmatic meaning with 100% agreement on their meanings. For /əlbɛst/, they all selected the meaning of “close friend”. It is clear that the origin of this word is English but is frequently common for them to be written in Arabic letters as was in the survey. The meaning selected for /kræf/ by all participants is “love without being able to tell the other half”. Surprisingly there is 100% agreement in this pragmatic meaning, although they were given the semantic meaning “accident” amongst the alternatives. The term /dʒæhfɛlni/ has also shown a 100% consensus on the meaning of “shocked me with a sudden action”. This word originates from a Saudi footballer's name who shocked the other team with a goal. Since that football match, the term /dʒæhfɛlni/ has been used for this meaning.

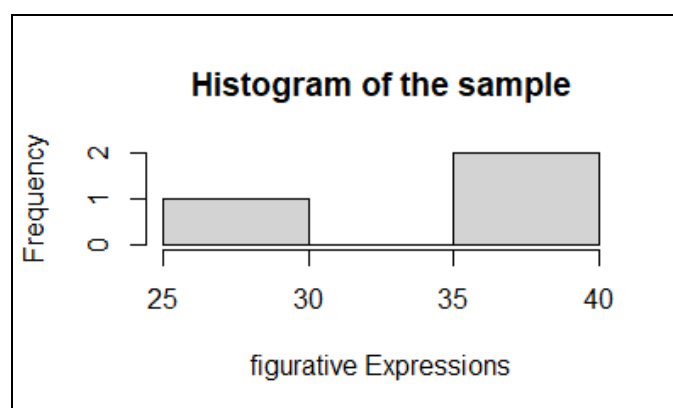
The other group of terms that have also shown a high frequency in their usage among participants are /sɪŋɡl/, /ɛks/, /taksɪk/, and /krɛndʒ/. For these words, there is a strong agreement in their meanings with 89.7% of participants choosing “bachelor” for /sɪŋɡl/, 77% of them selecting “corrupt relation” for /taksɪk/, 92.5% answering “old friend” for /ɛks/, and 95% choosing “embarrassing and disgusting” for the term /krɛndʒ/. These terms are adopted from English and known to be written in the Arabic orthography for this Gen Z as can be also evident in the scraped data.

The relevance theory assumes that interactors try to make an utterance as easy to understand as possible. It is evident, through these terms, that Gen Z cannot find single terms in Arabic that express their meanings as easily as possible. This generation, born alongside the technological revolution, tends to be brief and direct to express a whole situation in a single word. This can be noticed with the word /kræf/ which means “the type of love from one side without the other half knowing”. The word /krɛndʒ/ also has a very detailed meaning that participants agree about which is “feeling embarrassed and disgusted by someone else's behavior”. This exact meaning cannot be expressed in Arabic in one term, therefore, borrowing it from English indicates that Saudi youth rely heavily on the relevance theory assumptions.



The relevance theory also attempts to explain figurative language such as hyperbole, metaphor, and irony (Sperber, Dan; Wilson, Deirdre, 1995). That can be seen in the coinage of the three ironic new phrases /dʒebt əlʕid/, /men kisek/, and /metʔxr blmenhædʒ/. They have a metaphoric meaning and can be considered as new idioms in the Saudi colloquial Arabic. According to relevance theory, irony is an echoic utterance that carries an underlying attitude of rejection, disapproval, derision, or something similar (Sperber & Wilson, 1995). In the next part, we see how this can be applied to the given phrases.

/dʒebt əlʕid/ means “doing or saying something that should not be done or said”. Semantically speaking, /əlʕid/ refers to a day of celebration for Muslims, but contextually, the whole phrase is used to ridicule a behavior. The frequency of this idiomatic expression in the survey can be seen as 39 out of 40 (97%) participants have selected this ironic meaning. The other idiomatic expression /men kisek/ has shown (100%) consensus among participants on the pragmatic metaphorical meaning which is “the information you are giving cannot be trusted”. None of the participants has selected the semantic meaning “from your bag”. According to the theory, the concept of relevance requires the choice of figurative expressions over literal ones if they require less cognitive work to understand or have more contextual consequences (Hall, 2018). That can be seen in these expressions with almost all participants selecting the figurative expressions. /metʔxr blmenhædʒ/ has shown relatively moderate-frequency usage (68%) for the figurative meaning “being late”, and a relatively low frequency (30%) for the literal meaning, provided that the question did not include any contextual hints. The following histogram represents the frequency of these three expressions in the 40 responses.



4.2 The Spread of Expressions in Social Media Context.

Social media networks like X, Facebook, TikTok, and many others provide an actual context to examine the pragmatic meanings of the expressions. A data miner called Brand24 as well as the feature of advanced search on X were used to scrape data for the 10 expressions and was asked to scrape the expressions' occurrences for one year from November 2022 to November 2023.

Expression used in Arabic	Number of occurrences in X in one year	Example
/singt/	1746	“/singtz/! please do not read this!”
/eks/	30	“I am afraid to write something, and my /eks/ is following me”
/taksik/	154	“He is /taksik/, she is /taksik/, everyone is /taksik/!”
/əlbəst/	4937	“The weather is good to hang out with /əlbəst/”
/kræf/	53	“my /kræf /has just engaged”
/krendʒ/	81	“I deleted my previous account because it all has /krendʒ things/”
/dʒæhfəlni/	91	“The train has just dʒæhfəlni when I was about to enter”
/dʒəbt əlʕid/	4200	“I had the SAAT exam today and dʒəbt əlʕid”
/men kisek/	7313	“The news is /men kisek/”
/metʔxr blmenhædʒ/	94	“I have just made the lemon cake; I know I am /metʔxr blmenhædʒ/”

Notice: Expressions and examples are scraped from X as they are written in Arabic. The sentences are translated into English and the terminologies are phonetically transcribed.

The table shows a summary of the reports obtained from the scraper. The scraper is asked to look for their usage only in Arabic and transcription is given in the table. The researchers then excluded the other meanings of the homophonic words in the list, e.g., the expression /eks/ has some other meanings that we are not interested in like (X as a social network and Xbox as a game). These homophones of /eks/ are excluded and only the new meaning that we assume to be used in Arabic “old friend” is considered. The table illustrates the numbers the expressions are used for one year along with real examples from X. However, the numbers might not

be clear-cut but can give an insight into how Arab communicators agree on their pragmatic meanings. The numbers will be higher if other social media networks are included, and a longer timeframe is considered.

5. Conclusion

The present study shed light on the idea that new words have entered Arabic nowadays by youth and the role of social networking tools in their quick spread. The paper might predict future language changes and variations of Arabic by providing evidence of 10 terminologies commonly known to Gen Z. Forty participants participated in the survey, aged from 11- 72, as they were asked to select the appropriate term meaning, given the literal and pragmatic meanings. The frequency of the words has also been looked for in the social network X to provide secondary evidence for the pragmatic meanings of these expressions. Results show that there is a high level of agreement on the word's meanings. The research has also discussed the origin from which these terms are derived (English or Arabic).

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