

A Discourse Analysis of Gen Z and Gen Alpha Slang in Xiaoma's Guest Speech to High School Students

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Abstract

This study explores the morphological word-formation processes and discursive functions of Generation Z and Generation Alpha slang in a spoken educational context through a guest speech delivered by content creator Xiaoma to high school students at Westtown School. Although previous studies have examined youth slang primarily in digital and social media communication, little attention has been paid to its use in face-to-face educational discourse. Using a qualitative discourse-analytic approach, the study analyzed a transcribed segment of the speech (2:10–6:50). Mattiello's (2008) framework was used to classify the slang items according to their word-formation processes, and the students' non-verbal responses were examined throughout the speech. Thirty-nine single-word slang items were identified and classified into seven word-formation processes. Conversion was the most frequent word-formation process, followed by suffixation, clipping, acronyms and initialisms, compounding, word manufacture, and variation. Behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement was evident in the students' smiles, laughter, applause, eye contact, and head nodding during the speech. These findings highlight the value of contemporary slang in creating more engaging educational discourse and extend current understanding of youth slang beyond digital communication.

Keywords: *Discourse analysis, Gen Z slang, Gen Alpha slang, Word-formation processes, Student engagement, Educational discourse*

1.1 Introduction

Language evolves as a result of constant cultural and social changes, and one of the most important manifestations of this is slang. Holmes (2001) has argued that slang is an informal vocabulary and term used to convey a sense of who one is and to which group one belongs. Despite its general exclusion from formal contexts, slang remains widely used in daily communication, particularly among younger generations, where it is used as a tool for cultural expression and a sense of unity (Eble, 1996).

This trend has been accelerated by generational changes. Generation Z (born 1995-2009) grew up with mobile technologies and social media, whereas Generation Alpha (born 2010-2024) has been shaped by AI-driven digital technologies and streaming environments and smartphones

from early childhood (Putri et al., 2025). Both generations have contributed to the rapidly evolving slang vocabulary that spreads online and appears in face-to-face contexts, such as classrooms and public lectures, where educators and speakers embrace modern slang to foster engagement and connection (McCrindle, 2024).

This study views slang as both a linguistic phenomenon and a communicative resource. It analyzes a guest speech by Xiaoma, a language expert, delivered to high school students at Westtown School, serving as an educational presentation focusing on his use of Gen Z and Gen Alpha slang expressions and their role in shaping student engagement. To achieve this, the study adopts a qualitative discourse-analytic approach. Mattiello's (2008) framework is employed to classify the morphological word-formation processes of the selected slang expressions, while discourse analysis is used to examine their contribution to student engagement.

1.2 Research Problem

Although slang among younger generations has attracted considerable scholarly attention, previous studies have focused primarily on its use in social media and online communication. Despite growing scholarship on youth slang, limited research has examined how Gen Z and Gen Alpha slang function simultaneously as a linguistic resource and a discourse strategy for student engagement in spoken educational settings. This gap is particularly evident in studies investigating the morphological word-formation of slang expressions and their role in promoting student engagement in these settings. Therefore, this study seeks to analyze the morphological word-formation processes and examine the discursive roles of Gen Z and Gen Alpha slang expressions employed in Xiaoma's speech.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What morphological word-formation processes characterize the Gen Z and Gen Alpha slang expressions used in Xiaoma's speech?
2. How do the Gen Z and Gen Alpha slang expressions used in Xiaoma's speech contribute to student engagement?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

This study aims to:

1. Analyze the morphological word-formation processes of the Gen Z and Gen Alpha slang expressions used in Xiaoma's speech.
2. Examine how the Gen Z and Gen Alpha slang expressions used in Xiaoma's speech contribute to student engagement.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study contributes to discourse analysis by expanding the understanding of how contemporary youth language functions in spoken educational discourse and the ways such expressions can be used to foster student engagement. It also provides insights into the communicative role of slang in educational settings, helping educators better understand students' linguistic practices and their role in teacher-student communication.

2. Literature review

2.1 Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis (DA) is a qualitative and interdisciplinary approach that studies spoken and written language within its social and communicative contexts (Gee, 2014). The term discourse analysis was first introduced by Harris (1952), who suggested that linguistic analysis should go beyond isolated sentences to examine how language is used in speech and writing. Since then, discourse analysis has grown into a wide field that explores how people use language to form meaning, develop relationships, and achieve different communicative purposes.

DA has become common in educational research as communication plays an important role in teaching and learning. Educational discourse includes the language used by teachers and students during interaction, as well as how these interactions affect students' learning.

According to Cazden (2001), classroom interaction is central to the learning process because it serves as one of the main ways that knowledge is presented, discussed, and negotiated.

2.1.1 Discourse Analysis and Student Engagement

In discourse analysis, language is viewed as a tool for conveying information while also helping to manage interaction and encourage participation (Walsh, 2011). Speakers' lexical choices, humor, and conversational style can affect audience responses during communication (Gee, 2014). In education, these linguistic choices may promote behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement by encouraging participation, creating positive emotional responses, and stimulating attention and deeper understanding (Fredricks et al., 2004).

2.2 Student Engagement

Student engagement refers to the degree to which students actively invest in their learning. It is commonly divided into three dimensions: behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement.

First, behavioral engagement describes students' observable participation in the learning process. It is reflected in a range of learning behaviors, including regular class attendance, participation in discussions, completion of assigned tasks, as well as persistence when learning becomes challenging. Such behaviors highlight students' commitment to learning and their engagement in the learning process (Fredricks et al., 2004). Evidence suggests that higher levels of behavioral engagement are associated with positive academic outcomes, together with continued effort and lower dropout rates (Wang & Degol, 2014).

Second, emotional engagement describes students' feelings toward the learning environment and the people within it. Students who are emotionally engaged often experience interest, enjoyment, enthusiasm, together with a sense of belonging in the classroom (Fredricks et al., 2004). Students who develop positive emotional experiences often show greater participation in classroom activities while maintaining their motivation throughout learning (Jia et al., 2024). Emotional engagement further fosters learning involvement and enhances students' ability to cope with academic challenges (Skinner et al., 2008).

Third, cognitive engagement concerns students' mental effort during learning. It is reflected in several learning strategies, from critical thinking and problem-solving to monitoring progress and connecting new ideas with prior knowledge (Fredricks et al., 2004). Instead of relying on memorization, students prefer to understand ideas. This supports meaningful understanding, independent thinking, and long-term academic success (Greene, 2015).

Together, these three dimensions offer a broader understanding of student engagement in educational settings.

2.3 Gen Z Language

This generation has grown up in an era of rapid progression of technology, social media, and mobile communication platforms, where the internet is a vital part of everyday life, shaping their values, habits, and interactions, unlike any other generation. The characterization of Gen Z communication styles through the creativity, brevity, and high level of flexibility. Language changes on social media platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, and Facebook does not only facilitates interactions but also shapes the linguistic environment in which the communication of Gen Z occurs and are visible through the use of slang, abbreviations, clipped words, code-switching, meme-based expressions, and symbolic communication using emojis and GIFs (Marzona, 2025).

2.4 Gen Alpha Communication

From Gen Z to Gen Alpha, Gen Z is known as the first generation to grow up in an environment that is highly driven by the internet, which created the framework for the first digital approach to communication styles. On the other hand, Gen Alpha is the first generation to have completely grown up in the digital age, from a young age immersed in social media, tablets, iPads, smartphones, and AI-powered assistants, the consumption and technological aspiration have already been impacted by them. Contrasting prior generations, their slang develops

primarily through digital platforms, with changes that outpace traditional language evolution. Some studies have shown that Gen Alpha's slang is influenced by platforms where communication is not only written or spoken, but also visual using emojis, videos, hashtags, and trends to express themselves in new ways (Putri et al., 2025).

2.5 Morphological Word-Formation Processes

The field of morphology examines word structure together with the development of new words. Speakers continue to reshape vocabulary as language changes over time and this process is clearly reflected in slang, where speech communities regularly introduce new expressions (Handayani & Wibowo, 2024).

According to Mattiello (2008), English slang is formed through 15 morphological processes. These include compounding, combining two or more words to form a new word; prefixation, adding a prefix to the beginning of a word; suffixation, adding a suffix to the end of a word; final combining forms, where a bound form is attached to another word to create a new expression; infixation, inserting an element inside a word for emphasis; conversion, changing a word's grammatical function without changing its form; back-formation, forming a new word by removing an apparent affix from an existing word; reduplicatives, repeating or slightly changing a word or syllable; acronyms and initialisms, formed from the first letters of a group of words; blending, combining parts of two words into one; clipping, shortening a longer word while keeping its meaning; elliptic rhyming slang, omitting part of a rhyming phrase while keeping the same meaning; reversed forms, reversing the letters or sounds of a word; variation, involving changes in spelling or pronunciation without greatly changing the meaning; and word manufacture and fanciful formations, creating completely new words that are not based on existing ones.

2.6 Previous Studies

There have been several studies that examined the communicative functions of contemporary slang and its role in promoting engagement.

Nazir (2024) investigated the use of humor and slang in social media discourse and discovered that through informal language communication becomes more relatable and emotionally appealing. The study also emphasized that the interaction between content creator and their audience strengthens through slang serving as a communicative resource.

Correspondingly, Windasari et al. (2025) observed the tactical use of youth slang in TikTok live marketing and found an increase in audience engagement and an established rapport through the use of slang.

More recently, Tudlas et al. (2026) explored the use of Generation Alpha slang in junior high school classroom discussions from a discourse-analytic perspective. The study found that students used contemporary slang to express identity, strengthen peer relationships, and facilitate classroom interaction. The findings indicated that slang can contribute to more dynamic and participatory educational discourse when used appropriately.

2.7 Research Gap

Overall, previous studies have shown that slang is shaped through various morphological processes and serves important communicative functions, particularly in promoting interaction and engagement. However, most research has focused on digital communication, with limited attention to the use of Gen Z and Gen Alpha slang in spoken educational discourse. Accordingly, this study examines both the morphological features and the discursive roles of Gen Z and Gen Alpha slang in Xiaoma's speech.

2.8 Theoretical Framework

This study adopts a qualitative discourse-analytic perspective to examine how Gen Z and Gen Alpha slang function within spoken educational discourse. Student engagement is examined through its behavioral, cognitive, and emotional dimensions by interpreting students' observable responses to Xiaoma's use of contemporary slang. In addition, the study employs

Mattiello's (2008) framework to classify the morphological word-formation processes of the selected slang expressions. Together, these theoretical perspectives provide the foundation for analyzing both the morphological features and the communicative role of Gen Z and Gen Alpha slang in shaping student engagement.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design to analyze the discourse used in Xiaoma's speech. By examining the selected video segment (2:10–6:50) which represents the core interactive portion of the speech where the slang expressions were concentrated, this study explores the morphological word-formation processes underlying the slang expressions and examines their discursive roles in shaping engagement among high school students.

3.2 Data Source

The primary data source for this study is a publicly available YouTube video uploaded to the channel Xiaomanyc, titled "Professor Shocks High School by Speaking Gen Z Slang." The video presents Xiaoma, a well-known language content creator and polyglot, delivering a guest speech to high school students at the Westtown School. Throughout the speech, Xiaoma uses slang expressions from Generation Z and Generation Alpha to highlight the importance of language learning.

3.3 Data Collection

The data for this study were collected through several steps. First, the selected YouTube video was watched repeatedly to clearly understand the speech, the language choices made by the speaker, and the non-verbal reactions of the students. Repeated viewing supported the identification of relevant linguistic features and ensured a more comprehensive understanding of the discourse. During the observation process, notes were taken regarding Xiaoma's use of Gen Z and Gen Alpha slang expressions, including the contexts in which these expressions were employed and the non-verbal reactions exhibited by the students. In addition, a preliminary transcript of the selected video segment (2:10–6:50) was generated using the NoteGPT platform. The transcript was subsequently reviewed and manually corrected to ensure that the slang expressions were accurately represented. Particular attention was paid to the slang expressions used by Xiaoma and the accompanying non-verbal reactions of the students. The transcribed data were then identified, and categorized according to Mattiello's (2008) framework of morphological word-formation processes. These categorized data were subsequently used to examine the discursive roles of Gen Z and Gen Alpha slang expressions in shaping student engagement throughout the speech.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed qualitatively using a discourse analysis approach. In line with the study objectives, the analysis was carried out in two phases. First, the identified Gen Z and Gen Alpha slang expressions were analyzed based on Mattiello's (2008) framework of morphological word-formation processes. Each expression was examined to determine the process involved in its formation. Second, the slang expressions were analyzed through discourse analysis to examine their discursive roles in shaping student engagement throughout the speech. The study focused on how these expressions captured students' attention, fostered emotional engagement, and encouraged participation. Therefore, non-verbal reactions exhibited by the students, including laughter, applause, and other recorded reactions, were taken into account to inform the interpretation of student engagement. Finally, the findings were interpreted and presented descriptively to provide a comprehensive understanding of both the morphological characteristics and the discursive functions of Gen Z and Gen Alpha slang expressions used in Xiaoma's speech.

4. Findings and Discussion

This chapter presents the findings and discussion of the data collected from Xiaoma's speech. The identified Gen Z and Gen Alpha slang expressions were analyzed to determine their morphological word-formation processes and to examine their discursive roles in shaping student engagement. The analyzed data were then organized and discussed in accordance with the research objectives and the theoretical framework adopted in the study.

4.1 Findings

To address the first objective of the study, an analysis of the selected segment of Xiaoma's speech was conducted. A total of 39 single-word Gen Z and Gen Alpha slang items were classified according to Mattiello's (2008) framework of word formation. Table 4.1 presents the identified slang items and their corresponding word-formation classifications.

Table 4.1. Word-Formation Classification of Identified Single-Word Gen Z and Gen Alpha Slang Items

Word-Formation Process	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Slang Terms
Conversion	13	33%	Chat, Drip, Meta, Cooking, Hit, Bet, Stan, Flex, Slaps, Sauce, Mid, Legit, Mog
Suffixation	9	23%	Vibing, Boomer, Cheugy, Aired, Ghosted, Pressed, Chopped, Salty, Goated
Clipping	5	13%	Bro, Delulu, Sus, Fam, Rizz
Acronyms & Initialisms	5	13%	W, IRL, DLC, OD, FR
Compounding	4	10%	Lowkey, Highkey, Deadass, Brain Rot
Word Manufacture	2	5%	Skibidi, Wizlord
Variation	1	3%	Finna
Total	39	100%	—

The analysis identified seven word-formation processes: conversion, suffixation, clipping, compounding, acronyms and initialisms, word manufacture, and variation. To determine the relative frequency of each category, the percentages of the classified slang items were calculated. The percentage distribution of the identified word-formation processes is presented in **Figure 4.1**.

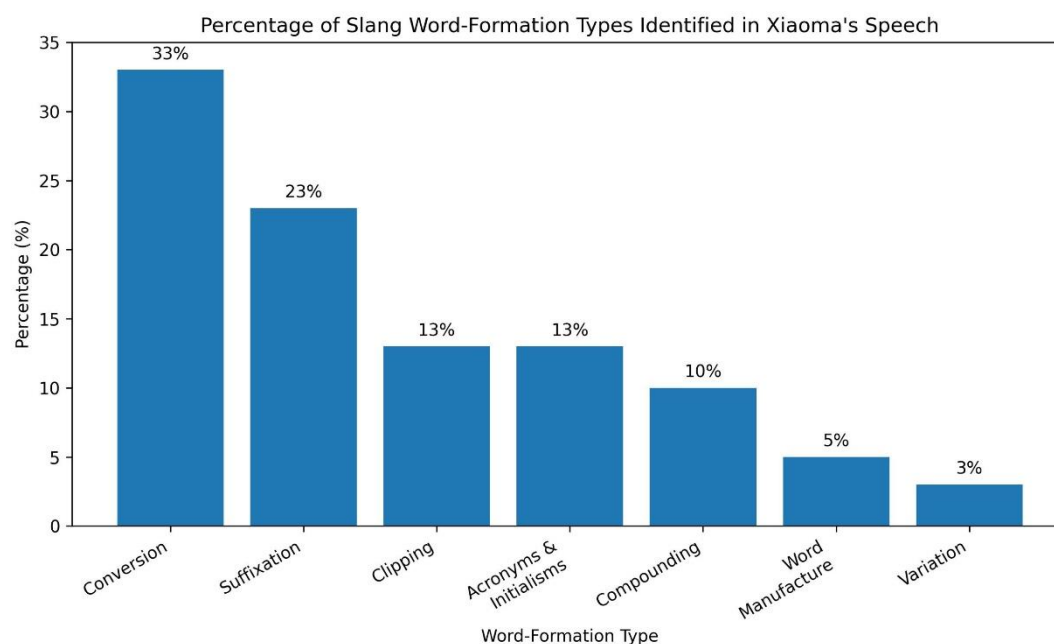


Figure 4.1

Percentage Distribution of Word-Formation Processes Identified in Xiaoma's Speech

Figure 4.1 shows that conversion was the most frequently occurring word-formation process, accounting for 33% of the identified slang items. This was followed by suffixation 23%. Clipping and acronyms and initialisms each accounted for 13% of the data, while compounding represented 10%. Word manufacture accounted for 5%, and variation was the least frequent process, accounting for only 3% of the identified slang items.

The second objective of the study examined how Gen Z and Gen Alpha slang contributed to student engagement. The analysis drew on students' observable non-verbal responses throughout the speech, such as smiling, spontaneous laughter, and applause, together with sustained eye contact, head nodding, and attentive body language which indicates that the use of slang promotes behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement. The findings are aligned with Gee (2014) and Walsh (2011), who argue that language acts as a source of interaction and encourages participation. Fredricks et al. (2004) identify behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement as the main dimensions of student engagement. These findings are supported by previous studies by Nazir (2024), Windasari et al. (2025), and Tudlas et al. (2026), which reported that contemporary slang encourages audience engagement by making communication more relatable and interactive.

4.2 Discussion

The analysis reveals that Xiaoma's speech combines contemporary Gen Z and Gen Alpha slang with an educational message about the importance of language learning. The identified slang expressions represent a range of morphological word-formation processes, while their use throughout the speech extends beyond informal vocabulary to serve as a communicative resource that promotes an engaging educational discourse. Together, these linguistic and discursive features illustrate how contemporary slang contributes not only to the formation of youth language but also to student engagement in spoken educational settings.

The findings support Mattiello's (2008) framework by showing that the morphological processes identified continue to characterize contemporary Gen Z and Gen Alpha slang. The predominance of conversion, followed by suffixation and clipping, suggests that contemporary youth slang develops mainly through the adaptation of existing vocabulary. Familiar words frequently acquire new meanings, reflecting the continuous evolution of youth slang and communication. Although the remaining processes occurred less frequently, they also

demonstrate the variety of ways in which contemporary slang is formed. Unlike most previous studies, which have examined these processes mainly in online communication, the present study shows that they are also evident in spoken educational discourse. This suggests that the same morphological patterns found in digital spaces are not limited to online interaction but are also part of face-to-face communication in educational settings.

Xiaoma's incorporation of Gen Z and Gen Alpha slang throughout the speech played an important role in enhancing students' emotional, behavioural, and cognitive engagement. The students reacted through smiles, laughter, applause, sustained eye contact, head nodding, showing immediate involvement. A striking example occurred when Xiaoma introduced the invented slang terms "lowkey" and "delulu" in an educational setting. This moment transformed the speech atmosphere, triggering spontaneous collective laughter and applause. As Fredricks et al. (2004) state, such affective responses (smiling and laughing) and behavioural signals (applause) are not passive; but rather, they reflect heightened enjoyment and positive affect that sustain attention and reduce affective filter. The visible reactions of the students highlighted their active engagement and revealed the effectiveness of Xiaoma's linguistic choices in creating a positive, participatory learning environment.

From a discourse-analytic perspective, Xiaoma's adoption of slang expressions that reflected students' daily linguistic practices reduced the social distance between the speaker and the students rather than maintaining the formal style usually associated with educational presentations. This created a more conversational atmosphere where students were more willing to engage with the speaker. This finding aligns with Walsh's (2011) perspective that language serves not only as a tool for conveying information but also as a tool for managing and encouraging participation as well as interaction. It further echoes Gee's (2014) claim that speakers construct meaning and social relationships through their linguistic choices.

The students' non-verbal responses were consistent with the three aspects of student engagement outlined by Fredricks et al. (2004). Emotional engagement was evident in students' smiles, laughter, as well as applause. Similarly, behavioral engagement was visible in close attention, eye contact, and concentration. At the same time, cognitive engagement appeared in the students' understanding of the slang terms used and their ability to connect them to the overall message of the speech. During Xiaoma's use of items such as "finna" and "salty", the students maintained eye contact and nodded in response. These reactions reflected their understanding of the expressions in the context of the speech. Therefore, their responses suggest active involvement in the discourse and align with the three dimensions of student engagement. These findings support Nazir's (2024) study that slang deepens audience engagement by making communication more emotionally appealing and relatable. They also support Windasari et al.'s (2025) finding that informal youth language fosters rapport between speakers and audiences. Although these studies examined digital communication, the current findings suggest that similar discourse strategies are also effective in face-to-face educational contexts. Moreover, the findings extend those of Tudlas et al. (2026), who found that Gen Alpha slang facilitated classroom interaction. While Tudlas et al. emphasize students' own language use, this study reveals that the speaker's intentional use of slang can also stimulate student engagement.

5.1 Conclusion

The widespread use of Gen Z and Gen Alpha slang in everyday communication represents the evolution of language. Looking at these expressions in an educational setting presents a broader understanding of slang function where they are no longer limited to informal or online communication. Instead, they can support interaction, strengthen engagement, and make educational discourse more accessible to young audiences. Applying both morphological and discourse analysis helps explain slang functions in spoken educational settings and may guide future studies on youth language and classroom communication. Such research may also

broaden current knowledge of how contemporary forms of expression continue to influence communication in educational environments.

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