

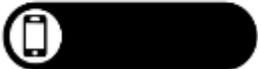
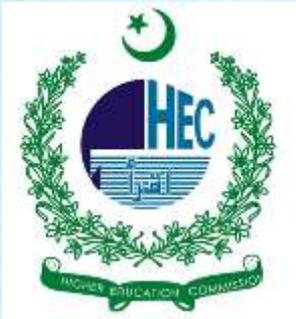
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**DEVIATION OR INNOVATION: AN EXPLORATION OF
GENDERED LEXICAL CHOICES AMONG GENERATION
ALPHA IN PAKISTAN**



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Abstract

Language is a vibrant system that frequently emerges, as every generation molds its lexical and semantic value according to its collective experiences. In multilingual societies such as Pakistan, succeeding generations form linguistic practices through media, education, and peer influence. Sociolinguistics grounds provide solid acumen into how language variation reflects deviation vs innovation. This study focuses on exploring the gendered lexical choices used by Generation Alpha in Pakistan, to determine whether these linguistic patterns represent deviation from standard/traditional lexical norms or a buildup of innovative language practices. It further pursues to understand how lexical choices are influenced by gender in socio-contextual adaption. The research explores how Generation Alpha elucidates gender identities through everyday lexical choices by applying theoretical frameworks of “William Labov’ (1972)” sociolinguistic variation theory and “Deborah Cameron’s” (1992) work on language and gender. To execute the process, this search has utilized the parallel coinciding mixed-method approach. A questionnaire survey of 100 respondents was conducted from students aged 10 to 18 from 4 different private school in Gujrat, 25 students from each school. The findings have indicated that Generation Alpha does not only deviate from standard linguistic forms but they fervently innovate new lexical forms that sharply reflect their gender and identity. The study contributes to the broader field of Sociolinguistics and Gender Studies by exuberating link between language shift, youth comfort and gender based lexical representation.

Keywords: Alpha Generation, innovation, deviation, foregrounding, gender.

1. Introduction

Language has been seen shifting and changing its course with the passage of time and need. The pace and direction of change today hits different from prior generations. Children born into Generation Alpha are growing up in a galaxy where language has been foregrounded and usage of slangs is not new or thrilling; it is normal and common. Simultaneously, the way they interpret and learn language is closely connected to their real life experiences. This shift has raised important questions about vocabulary development, specifically the ways in which new words are adapted, created or replaced which at the same time is a guarantee of life and growth of any language as Labov (1972) has opined that the variation is inherent in the linguistic system. For previous generations, language learning was highly formal and mostly shaped by family and society. In contrast, Generation Alpha often adapts language through Short videos, captions, comments, voice chats, and gaming instructions which provides a constant linguistic input. Children do not simply use this language; they actively own it while chatting, playing, and sharing content with friends, age fellow and social media friends. According to Paul Simpson (2004), Foregrounding typically involves a stylistic distortion of some sort, either through an aspect of the text which deviates from

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a linguistic norm or through repetition or parallelism.

Over the time, these repeated interactions shape out their vocal habits and lexical choices. Lexical innovation refers to shift in vocabulary that appear when new words are introduced/merged or when existing words are used in novel ways. Among Generation Alpha, such innovation is specifically visible in practical settings. Children shorten words, mix languages, borrow expressions and assign new meanings to pre-existing terms. In many cases, these changes aid them to interact in a free zone with maximum ease. It also help children to express identity (gender), emotions, and group belonging. From the lens of Generation Alpha, Lexical innovation is a natural response to a fast-paced and interactive environment. In the era of deviation, the importance and value of standard language is definite as Jan Mukařovský (1964) says that the standard language is the background against which the aesthetically intentional distortion of the linguistic components of the work is perceived.

However, concerns arise when slangs and embedded language begin to dominate all forms of communication. Teachers and parents often report that children rely too much on informal expressions even in academic writing and verbal tasks. Commonly observed issues are spelling mistakes, limited vocabulary range, and difficulty in constructing detailed discourse. These issues highlights that where innovation helps and supports certain types of language skills, it may also leads to deviation and ultimately it will affect the traditional language exposure. The challenge, therefore, is not the foregrounding of standard language itself, but the absence of proper knowledge in how and where different types of languages should be used. The change of language carries it's worth and place as Crystal (2003) states that the only languages which do not change are the dead ones.

According to him language constantly changes, because it exists only through its users. He seems to be supporting the idea that lexical preferences represents natural linguistics evolution rather than deviation. One of the most influential digital spaces for Generation Alpha is online gaming. Children learn phrases that help them react fast or communicate efficiently with teammates. When children repeatedly use slangs or super interested expressions, they may find it tough to adjust their language in more formal or standard polite settings. This transfer highlights the importance of understanding how context shapes vocabulary use. According to Sapir-Whorf (1956), the lexical preferences of Generation Alpha may showcase not only linguistic variation and diversity, but also shift in cognitive and cultural frameworks, shaped by digital environments, supporting a weak interpretation of linguistic relativity. Regional variations and gender demonstrate that lexical deviation is context-dependent and socially patterned rather than haphazard or meagre.

McCrinkle (2005) has marked generation Alpha as most digitally connected, highly educated, and globally connected, socially aware and inclusive. From early infancy they have been equipped with almost all digital tools. They are exposed enough to vast information and learning opportunities. Their global connections shape out the world view for them. They have grown up in diverse and interconnected atmosphere. Generation Alpha frequently encounters English words, slang, and expressions from different cultures. This exposure can be beneficial and healthy, as it introduces linguistic deviation and helps them develop an awareness of global communication. At the same time, it can reduce the use of local languages and traditional vocabulary, especially in multilingual societies. Different levels of deviation is described by Geoffrey Leech (1969) as deviation may occur at various levels of language such as grammar, lexis, phonology, and semantics.

Cultural and linguistic identity may gradually weaken when children prefer digital English

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expressions over standard vocabulary. Children are not losing their ability to learn language; rather, they are learning it another way. Emojis, voice notes and visual cues have become part of semantics and complementary spoken and written discourse. These tools can enhance communication rather than limiting it with the scaffold of proper guidance and information. Creation and adoption of abbreviated forms, neologism, semantic shift, code borrowing and mixing indicates either the lexical deviation or innovation from standardized lexical norms ease, comfort and fashion trends. This shift from traditional standards to non-traditional ones further leads to foregrounding. Paul Verdonk refers (2002) to foregrounding as “Foregrounding refers to the ways in which certain aspects of a text are made more prominent than others.” This study aims at focusing on understanding both the deviation and innovation of lexical choices among Generation Alpha. It also aims to analyze how digital and social environments reshape vocabulary and how children respond to these effects. Language development is influenced by multiple factors, including domestic background, education, and socialization. Online platforms are only one part of this big screen, though an intensely powerful one.

William Labov explained linguistics change in his book “Principles of Linguistics Change” (1994) as linguistic change is not random but is systematically related to social factors. By examining lexical innovation in a balanced and natural way, this article tries to contribute about the relationship between digitalization and language development. Generation Alpha stands tall at the nucleus of this transformation and expansion. The realities of modern lives, shaped by screens, peers, and global connections reflect the vocabulary expansion. The need for attentive, responsible and informed engagement with digital communication lies under the umbrella that studies their lexical innovation offering valuable insight into the future of language and its usage. McCrindle (2014) has further suggested that education and support system must adapt to their digital learning outcomes. Socially it is mandatory to get engaged positively with Gen Alpha’s digital literacy. He focuses that fostering resilience, empathy and skills are essential for their future roles.

1.1 Problem Statement

In Pakistan and other South Asian countries, mostly classrooms are now fully equipped with digital instruments that extend the boundaries of thought and cognition. Phonological deviation, geographical deviation and grammatical deviation is seen visibly in this generation’s speech discourse. Children belonging to Generation Alpha enter classrooms with vocabulary shaped by online games, social media platforms, video content, and informal digital communication. Students are now learning a large portion of their English lexicon outside the classroom through non-formal online interaction. This situation has created a noticeable gap between standard language instruction and formal language usage. Teachers across urban and semi-urban Pakistani schools often notice that students depend heavily on digital codes, abbreviated forms, and gaming expressions during classroom discussions and written discourse. As a result, students struggle with spelling accuracy, sentence development, and the use of contextually suitable vocabulary.

Another significant issue is the gradual decline in the use of indigenous vocabulary and culturally rooted expressions. Exposure to global digital content encourages children to prioritize English-based digital lexicon, often at the expense of their first languages. In South Asian multilingual classrooms, this shift affects not only language competence but also cultural identity and linguistic confidence. Students may feel more comfortable using digital English expressions than expressing ideas clearly in either English or their native languages. Gender based lexical choice is also an

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important aspect of discussion in the current study. Generation Alpha's have relished almost equal opportunities in the frame of technology, exposure and literacy, but their choices of lexicon vary in the realm of real scenario. This difference has also supported the core idea of deviation theory and Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. By shaping vocabulary this way they also practice internal deviation, while satisfying their identity and gendered preferences.

1.2 Research Objectives:

The main objective of this study is to investigate whether Generation Alpha's slang choices in Pakistan causes linguistic deviation from standard norms or display emerging innovation within current discourse. This study also aims to check the gender-biased lexical choices. The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- To identify whether these forms deviate from standard traditional forms.
- To analyse gender-based and gender biased differences in lexical choices.

By addressing these objectives, the study seeks to contribute to a realistic understanding of language innovation vs deviation in Gen Alpha's lexical choices.

1.3 Research Questions:

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. In what ways does Generation Alpha prefer linguistic innovative forms (slang) over standard equivalents in peer group contexts?
2. To what extent does gender-based lexical preferences differ in their selection of emphatic or informal lexicon choices?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Relationship between Language Variation and Gender

The relationship between language and gender has long been central to sociolinguistic research. Early work by Robin Lakoff (1975) argued that women's language reflects social power imbalances, proposing features such as hedges, tag questions, and politeness strategies as markers of "women's language." Later, Deborah Tannen (1990) suggested that male and female speech reflects different conversational styles—"report talk" versus "rapport talk." More contemporary scholars such as Janet Holmes (2013) and Jennifer Coates (2015) emphasize that gendered language use is not biologically determined but socially constructed. Gender functions as active and identity-based category, meaning that lexical choices reflect social place rather than fixed norms. In the Pakistani context, research on gendered discourse specific to generational transition has shown that lexical differences often showcase cultural expectations, politeness norms, and power structures.

2.2 Slang as Sociolinguistic Innovation

Slang has traditionally been viewed as non-standard or deviant language. However, sociolinguistic research suggests that slang functions as a marker of group identity and social belonging (Eble, 1996). Studies on Generations indicate that digital media gives a mushroom growth to lexical innovation, which as a reaction allows slang to spread rapidly across communities. Repeated use of one slang often leads to its foregrounding and normalization. Ultimately it shifts it from marginal or bare minimum usage to mainstream acceptance. This supports the idea that slang may not simply host norm violation, but rather linguistic innovation in progress.

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2.3 Foregrounding vs Deviation

The concept of deviation in stylistics is primarily associated with Geoffrey Leech's (1969) work on deviation and foregrounding. Leech argues that deviation from linguistic norms creates salience, drawing attention to particular forms. Foregrounding occurs when linguistic elements stand out against expected norms. However, deviation does not always imply error; it may signal creativity or innovation. Over time, repeated deviations can become conventionalized and integrated into the linguistic system.

2.4 Generational Theory and Generation Alpha

The term Generation Alpha was introduced by Australian demographer Mark McCrindle (2009). McCrindle argues that Generation Alpha (born from 2010 onward) is the first fully digital-native generation, shaped by smartphones, social media, and algorithm-driven content. According to McCrindle (2021), Generation Alpha's identity is strongly influenced by global digital culture, which impacts communication patterns, vocabulary, and social norms. Their exposure to international content results in hybrid lexical forms and rapid adoption of internet slang. However, while generational theory describes social traits, there is limited empirical linguistic research analyzing how Generation Alpha's lexical choices function within specific cultural contexts like Pakistan.

2.5 Digital Media and Language Change

Digital communication platforms (TikTok, YouTube, Instagram) contribute significantly to lexical arrangement, style, trend and diffusion. Scholars argue that online environments facilitate rapid normalization of innovative forms. Slang terms such as "rizz," "sus," and "bet" circulate globally, blurring national linguistic boundaries. In multilingual societies like Pakistan, digital slang often gets mixed up with English and Urdu, resulting in code-mixing and hybrid lexical innovation.

2.6 Research Gap

While extensive research already exists on Gender and language, Youth slang, Deviation and stylistics and Generational theory, yet there is a clear gap in research that combines gender-based lexical analysis with deviation and foregrounding theory and focuses specifically on Generation Alpha in Pakistan. This research addresses this gap by examining whether frequently used slang or non-standard terms among Generation Alpha showcases norm violation or linguistic innovation, along with gender emancipation.

3 Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative research design, as the nature of lexical innovation requires both observation of language use and personal choice. Deviation theory is applied in this research to explore the external and internal factors causing lexical deviation vs innovation. The research investigates Generation Alpha's lexical choice/slang showcase deviation or emerging innovation in real life stream and whether gender influences lexical choice or no.

3.1 Research Design

The study follows a cross-sectional survey method to collect data from participants. The research has applied a forced-choice lexical task where students were bound to select one lexical item from

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paired alternatives, either standard word or slang.

3.2 Participants

Sample size: 100 students (50 male and 50 female), 25 students each from 4 different private schools in Pakistan (Allied Schools System City Campus (girls wing), Allied Schools System City Campus (boys wing), Allied Schools System Jinnah Campus (boys wing), Allied Schools System Shahdaula Campus (girls wing). Random students were selected from grades 8, 9 and 10 for survey conduction. Their social backgrounds were also not same. (Age range: 8 to 15 years) Sampling technique: convenient sampling is executed. The participants are divided by gender to examine variation.

3.3 Data Collection Instrument

A well-structured questionnaire consisting of 30 lexical pairs. Each pair includes one slang form and one standard equivalent. Standard and lexical equivalent slangs were selected from Instagram, twitter and newspaper. Participants select one option per pair. For example:

Rizz	Charm
Sigma	Dominating
Bro	Friend
Aura	Vibe
Idk	I don't know

4 Data Analysis and Discussion

The collected data is analyzed using descriptive statistics. The analysis is guided by deviation and foregrounding theory by Geoffrey Leech (1969). It also follows sociolinguistics variation principles and linguistics relativity theory (1920s to 1940s) associated with Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf (1930s to 1940s).

4.1 Ethical Considerations

Ethical guidelines are followed throughout the study. Permission is obtained from school authorities. Students' identities are kept anonymous, and data is used strictly for academic purposes.

4.2 Data Analysis

The data collected from student's questionnaires reveal clear patterns of lexical deviation among Generation Alpha learners. These patterns reflect the strong influence of lexical choices on vocabulary use, particularly in English language classrooms in Pakistan. The analysis is organized around major themes that emerged from the data, highlighting both innovation and deviation along with gender biased choices in language.

4.3 Patterns of Positive Lexical Innovation vs Deviation

One of the most noticeable findings is the confidence with which students use English vocabulary during classroom interaction. Many students demonstrate familiarity with a wide range of informal English expressions learned through online videos, games, and social media platforms. Teachers reported that students are more willing to participate orally in class compared to earlier cohorts, especially during group discussions and informal speaking activities. This suggests that digital

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exposure may reduce anxiety associated with second language use, supporting earlier claims that informal digital environments encourage risk-taking in language learning (Crystal, 2011).

Students also show creative use of language, often experimenting with new words or adapting existing ones to express emotions and ideas. For example, words commonly used in gaming or online interaction are repurposed in classroom conversations to convey excitement, frustration, or achievement. While such usage is informal, it reflects semantic awareness and pragmatic intent. This aligns with Tagliamonte's (2016) view that lexical innovation is a natural outcome of active language engagement rather than a sign of linguistic decline. Semantic analysis indicates that Generation Alpha often uses slangs "sigma, bro, idk, ikuk, slay, lowkey, pookie, noob, fax, ohio, aura, sus, bruh, rizz, skibidi, bet, opp". Differences of age, gender and region also show that all children do not experience the same level or type of lexical shift and change.

4.4 Descriptive Statistics

1. Frequency Count

<i>Lexical pair</i>	<i>Slang choice</i>	<i>Standard choice</i>	<i>% slang</i>	<i>% standard</i>
1. Brain rot / unchallenging	55	45	55%	45%
2. Skibidi / bad	89	11	89%	11%
3. Rizz / charm	55	45	55%	45%
4. Gyat / attractive	35	65	35%	65%
5. Sigma / dominating	80	20	80%	20%
6. Fanum tax / cheapskate	23	77	23%	77%
7. Mewing / avoid answering	56	44	56%	44%
8. Ohio / bad	46	54	46%	54%
9. Aura / vibe	80	20	80%	20%
10. Delulu / unreal	30	70	30%	70%
11. Sus / suspicious	24	76	24%	76%
12. Bruh / surprise	70	30	70%	30%
13. Bro / friend	78	22	78%	22%
14. Bet / I agree	76	24	76%	24%
15. Bussin / great	40	60	40%	60%
16. Opp / enemy	78	22	78%	22%
17. Chopped / unattractive	51	49	51%	49%
18. Idk / I don't know	85	15	85%	15%
19. Ikyk / I know you know	75	25	75%	25%
20. Slay / killed	70	30	70%	30%
21. Yeet / throwing something	15	85	15%	85%
22. Lock in / focusing	35	65	35%	65%
23. Lowkey / down	73	27	73%	27%
24. Yapping / dismissing	16	84	16%	84%
25. Mog / very dominant	39	61	39%	61%
26. Pookie / best friend	80	20	80%	20%
27. Fax / strong	17	83	17%	83%

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28.	Omega / lower rank	34	66	34%	66%
29.	Noob / newbie	91	9	91%	9%
30.	Womp womp /despair	33	67	33%	67%

The formula of the mean is applied further to extract more precise analysis

$$\text{Mean } (\bar{x}) = \frac{\text{sum of all values}}{\text{number of values}}$$

$$(\bar{x}) = \frac{1626}{30}$$

54.2%

2. Gender-wise Distribution:

Gender biased lexical choice preferences have also been observed. They are mentioned in the table below:

<i>Slang</i>	<i>male choice</i>	<i>female choice</i>
1. Brain rot	42	13
2. Skibidi	54	35
3. Rizz	21	34
4. Gyat	32	10
5. Sigma	45	35
6. Fanum tax	16	7
7. Mewing	10	46
8. Ohio	11	35
9. Aura	39	41
10. Delulu	16	14
11. Sus	10	14
12. Bruh	36	34
13. Bro	43	35
14. Bet	41	35
15. Bussin	21	19
16. Opp	40	38
17. Chopped	31	20
18. Idk	42	43
19. Ikyk	37	38
20. Slay	35	35
21. Yeet	11	4
22. Lock in	29	6
23. Lowkey	45	28
24. Yapping	12	4
25. Mog	30	9
26. Pookie	45	35
27. Fax	13	4

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28.	Omega	22	13
29.	Noob	45	46
30.	Womp womp	18	15

Overall slang preference:

To extract the gender wise preferences again mean is applied

$$\text{Mean}(\bar{x}) = \frac{\text{sum of all values}}{\text{number of values}}$$

$$\text{Mean}(\bar{x}) = \frac{\text{sum of all values}}{\text{number of values}}$$

$$(\text{Male}) = \text{Mean}(\bar{x}) = \frac{892}{30}$$

$$(\text{Female}) = \text{Mean}(\bar{x}) = \frac{\text{sum of all values}}{\text{number of values}}$$

60%

49%

The application of statistical data analyzed that 54.2 percent Alpha generation uses slangs as innovation of language and they are totally aware of its usage and does not consider it a deviation. Further analysis of gender biased analysis sheds more light into the results. Male gender frequency is 60 % and female frequency is 49 %. Another matter that is highlighted through this research is the difference of slang choices according to gender. Female gender has been seen adopting more stoical and sophisticated slangs as per their thought process that was either influenced by language or vice versa. Whereas, male gender has been seen adopting more dominating and rough slangs. It has been proven true by analyzing the terms specific to comfort, ease, fashion and softness. Mostly male Alpha prefer to add up macho and dominating terminology in their lexicon, whereas female Alpha despite of getting almost equal exposure to socially available resources tend to choose what makes them feel expressed and recognized.

5. Discussion

This study discussed the lexical choices of Generation Alpha in Pakistan, focusing on whether their slang usage showcases deviation from standard norms or it lays foundation for emerging linguistic innovation, with addition and specific attention to gender variances. The analysis, grounded in Leech's Deviation Theory and foregrounding principles, revealed several key findings. Firstly, both participants selected non-standard lexical forms (slangs), although the space and choice of usage differed significantly across genders. Males are more inclined to favor playful, creative, and dominant deviations, whereas females expressed a higher selection ratio towards socially comfortable or fashionistas expressive innovations. Secondly, the study highlights that many lexical deviations are not only random deviations of linguistic norms but they also support foregrounding of meaning, gender, and social attachments within peer groups. In conclusion, the findings illustrates that Generation Alpha's lexical choices (standard vs slangs) are both a shadow of linguistic creativity and a marker of social emergence. Gender also plays a major role in shaping patterns of deviation and innovation. These results underscore the value of slang selection not only as a deviation from standard norms but also as a potential driver of linguistic change that is innovation. Researchers, educators, and language planners should identify the shifting and evolving

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nature of language among succeeding generations and consider how gendered linguistic practices change the dynamics of innovation vs deviation in Pakistani society.

5.1 Acceptance of Slang as Innovation

Most commonly used slang forms, such as noob, pookie, slay, idk, ikyk, opp, bet, bro, bruh, skibidi and sigma were adopted widely across participants, demonstrating that these deviations are not random violations or deviations of linguistic norms. Rather, they function as foregrounded innovations, reflecting peer identity, social belonging, personal lexical choices and behavioral concerns.

5.2 Gender-Based Variation

While both male and female Alpha participants used slang commonly, few differences were observed. Male participants preferred to opt the slangs with authoritative meanings like sigma, skibidi, noob whereas female participants showed higher adoption of comparatively soft, socially inclusive and peer-oriented forms like rizz, aura and pookie. This indicates that gendered sociolinguistic patterns keep on changing and reshaping lexical choices.

5.3 Digital and Social Coherence

The normalization of slang is getting hype through digital stations and global setups. Repeated usage in online interactions changes and converts previously deviant lexical terms into accepted innovative forms, supporting the argument that deviation can overcome innovation over time.

5.4 Sociolinguistic Tenure

Generation Alpha has been found highly active in contributing to the evolution of Pakistani English hybrid slang. Their lexical choices signifies the dynamic roleplay between language, identity, and culture, confirming that language is both a reflective and reformative social tool.

5.5 Theoretical Addition

By applying deviation theory, this study focuses that initially what may be recognized as norm violation often later becomes a creative linguistic innovation, which further leads to the foregrounding of social and generational identity. The findings helps to discover the need to consider both frequency of usage and social acceptance when distinguishing or embedding deviation from innovation.

6. Conclusion

Generation Alpha's slang usage, lexical adaptability and innovation exemplify the transformative strength and power of digital-age or innovative language, where foregrounding, deviation and social setup intersect to produce new norms and form. These findings provide insight into new emerging gendered patterns, inspired by need, ease and trend of evolving linguistic landscape in Pakistan. It also offers a foundation for further stylistic and sociolinguistic field research.

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