

Socio-Pragmatic Variations in Nigerian Gen-Zers' Digital Communication

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the socio-pragmatic variation in the digital communication of Nigerian Generation Z, with a focus on public interactions on Facebook. Drawing on a corpus of naturally occurring posts and comments, the study identified and analyzed emerging linguistic practices, including slangs, acronyms, neologisms, and code-mixing. Grounded in William Labov's Sociolinguistic Theory of Language Variation (Labov, 1966), the analysis revealed how these forms serve interactional functions, including identity construction, solidarity, humor, resistance, and stance-taking. The findings highlighted Gen Z's creative adaptation of linguistic resources in response to digital affordances and sociocultural contexts. This research contributed to emerging scholarship in digital discourse, pragmatics, and youth language, and advocated for further study on localized digital vernaculars in multilingual contexts like Nigeria.

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid evolution of digital technologies has profoundly transformed the way humans communicate. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok have not only redefined modes of interaction but also accelerated the emergence of new linguistic practices, particularly among younger generations. Generation Z (Gen-Z), often described as "digital natives," represents the first cohort to have grown up in an era where digital communication is integral to daily life. Consequently, their linguistic repertoire is distinctively marked by creative adaptations, including abbreviations, acronyms, slangs, neologisms, code-mixing, and multimodal expressions. These innovations serve not only as tools of communication but also as mechanisms for identity construction, social bonding, and cultural expression (Crystal, 2006; Danesi, 2016).

In multilingual contexts such as Nigeria, these dynamics acquire additional complexity. Nigeria has over 500 indigenous languages (Eberhard et al., 2020), alongside Nigerian English and Nigerian Pidgin, which function as lingua francas in diverse settings. Against this backdrop, Nigerian Gen-Zers creatively merge local and global linguistic resources to produce new digital vernaculars. Expressions like *lwkm* ("laugh wan kill me die"), *sapa* (poverty), *japa* (migration), *hug transformer* (a darkly humorous metaphor for death), and *e choke* (overwhelming excitement typify blending nature of the Nigerian Gen

Zers language on digital platforms. These structures are usually coined from drawing resources from English, Nigeria Pidgin and indigenous languages. This underscores the relationship between the indigenous traditional semantics and internationalization.

Research in sociolinguistics has confirmed that linguistic variation is systematized and embodies social meanings (Labov, 1966; Tagliamonte, 2016). In digital discourse, variation is not merely stylistic but indexes pragmatic functions such as humor, stance-taking, sarcasm, solidarity, or resistance (Papacharissi, 2015; Zappavigna, 2012). For Nigerian Gen-Zers, these socio-pragmatic functions are particularly salient: their digital expressions signal sincerity (*no caps, tbh*), humor (*lol, lwkmd*), sarcasm (*savage, breakfast*), relational intimacy (*bae, lml, fam*), or socio-economic realities (*sapa, muller*). In this sense, Nigerian Gen-Z digital communication represents a pragmatic system in its own right, an emerging register that encodes generational identity, creativity, and resilience within local sociocultural and economic realities.

While a growing body of scholarship has explored African multilingualism (Aboh, 2022; Adebija, 1994; Igboanusi, 2001) and youth language in urban contexts (Androutsopoulos, 2014; Ndiribe & Aboh, 2020), limited attention has been paid to the socio-pragmatic dimensions of Nigerian Gen-Z's digital practices. Existing studies of internet slang often emphasize global trends in English-dominant contexts (Thelwall et al, 2010; Tagliamonte, 2016), yet localized digital vernaculars in Africa remain underexplored. As such, there is a pressing need to document, categorize, and analyze the unique forms and meanings of Nigerian Gen-Z lingo, especially within public online interactions.

This study, therefore, addresses this gap by examining socio-pragmatic variations in the digital communication of Nigerian Gen-Zers, focusing specifically on their interactions on Facebook. Drawing on Labov's (1966) Sociolinguistic Theory of Language Variation, the study investigates three dimensions: (1) the recurrent linguistic forms common in Nigerian Gen-Z online discourse; (2) the pragmatic themes expressed through these forms; and (3) the broader socio-pragmatic implications and communicative values they encode. By situating Nigerian Gen-Z digital vernaculars within a sociolinguistic framework, this research underscores the legitimacy of these practices as authentic and systematic forms of communication.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to both theory and practice. Theoretically, it expands the application of Labovian variationist sociolinguistics to digital and multilingual African contexts, highlighting how language variation intersects with technology and generational identity. Empirically, it provides one of the first systematic accounts of Nigerian Gen-Z digital lingo, enriching scholarship in pragmatics, discourse studies, and youth language. Practically, it enhances understanding of how youth mobilize linguistic resources to navigate social realities, construct identities, and sustain digital communities in a rapidly changing world. The principal aim of this study is to investigate the contemporary Gen-Z lingo in Nigerian Gen-Zs' digital communication, from a socio-pragmatic perspective. The specific objectives of this study include are to identify the recurrent linguistic forms common among Nigerian Gen-Zs in online communication; to understand the pragmatic themes of these linguistic forms in online discourses among Nigerian Gen-Zs, to analyze the socio-pragmatic implications and communicative values inherent in these digital linguistic practices among Nigerian Gen-Zs.

Despite robust global research on youth CMC and growing work on Nigerian Englishes, few studies offer corpus-based, socio-pragmatic accounts of Nigerian Gen-Z discourse on mainstream platforms with fine-grained functional mapping (seriousness/sincerity, humour/sarcasm, secrecy/taboo, commendation, affect, and relational address). Our study addresses this gap by: (i) systematically identifying

recurrent forms in public Facebook interactions, (ii) linking forms to pragmatic themes and interactional work, and (iii) interpreting socio-pragmatic implications through Labov's theory of socially conditioned variation. In line with Labovian principles, we treat Gen-Z digital forms as legitimate, patterned resources whose distribution is tied to community norms, platform affordances, and local sociocultural pressures.

THEORY AND METHOD

Research in digital communication has distinctively positioned social media as the major source of new language cultures, empowering their circulation and the eventual registration as novel communication resources (Androutsopoulos, 2014; Herring, 2013). These social media perform as a petri dish where original language elements form a kind of function pairing. For instance, slang, acronyms, and orthographic play are used not only to provide clarity of meanings but also for stance-taking, affect display, and identity marking (Bucholtz & Hall, 2025; Eckert, 2012; Zappavigna, 2012). However, this practice is heightened in the multilingual Nigerian society since the international online conventions are unavoidably integrated with the local repertoires, therefore generating a hybrid, "glocal" language which is community-specific in meanings and goes beyond the digital platforms (Androutsopoulos, 2007; Blommaert, 2010).

2.1 Youth, Indexicality, and the Socio-Pragmatic Value of Variation

Variationists, pioneered by Labov (1966, 1972), and functionalist sociolinguists maintain that linguistic variation is not random noise; rather, it is systematized resources and embodies comprehensive social meanings (Labov, 1966, 1972; Coupland, 2007). This model by Labov is basically centered on the varied structures in a face-to-face community – vowel shifts, r-deletion – correlating language choices with macro-sociological factors, such as class, age, and gender.

In the digital threshold, the Labovian principles require significant adjustment. According to Tagliamonte (2016), digital contexts provide a mediated platform, where social variables like network tie strength and platform affordances become as crucial as traditional demographics. The pace of language adoption and the obvious features of digital practices promote the procedures of indexicality. Users are active style builders (Eckert, 2012), not just passive consumers. They curate their language output to index specific personae. The online platform gives room for a kind of "identity shopping" that adopts language variants or dismisses them with unprecedented pace, based on their indexical power. The concept of enregisterment, Agha (2007), describes how linguistic forms accrue conventionalized social meanings through repeated uptake, public commentary, and meta-pragmatic awareness (Squires, 2010). For Gen-Z, digital platforms provide the perfect feedback loop for this process.

For example, transnationally circulating markers, such as *tbh* (to be honest) or *no cap* (sincerity), perform epistemic and affective stances, indexing sincerity, alignment, or subtle contestation (Kiesling, 2009). The frequent appearance of such tokens in Nigerian digital discourse confirms their enregistered meaning as sincerity markers. However, our study focuses on the localized markers that link specific Nigerian forms to powerful, context-specific social personae—such as the savvy, streetwise identity indexed by terms like *savage* or the resilience embodied by *woke*. Understanding these indexical linkages is central to mapping the Gen-Z style (Tagg, 2015; Zappavigna, 2012). The research, therefore, moves beyond simply identifying variation to analyzing the socio-pragmatic utility of that variation in Nigerian youth identity construction.

2.2 Digital Pragmatics: Humor, Affect, and Negotiating Digital Face

Studies on Computer-Mediated Discourse (CMD) underscore the relevance of paralinguistic markers when organizing digital rapport, affecting display, and controlling conflicts. The limitations of text-based communication call for an innovative pragmatic process to replace the cues – intonation, gesture, facial expression – lost in the online shift (Crystal, 2006).

Linguistic elements like laughter markers: *lol*, *lmao*, strategic teasing, sarcasm, and the employment of ironies that are meme-based are crucial organizational devices (Dyner, 2009, 2012; Papacharissi, 2015). These operations are hardly practiced in isolation; they function as stance bundles, co-occurring with emojis, GIFs, and multimodal cues to coordinate affiliation and boundary work in fast-paced interaction threads (Bamman et al., 2014; Meredith, 2017). A particular comment may be using a slang, emoji, and an orthographic elongation at the same time to achieve an optimum affective force.

The global trend is under serious localization and intensification in the Nigerian environment. The international *lmao* transforms into the more contextually intense *lwkm* which means “laugh wan kill me die”, which is often integrated with the native idiomatic expressions in order to achieve a higher degree of humorous or evaluative meaning. This linguistic practice exemplifies a guided adherence to the native expressivity tradition, where emotional display in communication is often more overt and hyperbolic than in Western digital contexts. By analyzing these bundles, the study seeks to understand how Nigerian Gen-Zs negotiate their digital presence while maintaining a high-energy digital relationship.

2.3 Multilingual Repertoires, Translanguaging, and Resistance

Nigeria’s rich linguistic diversity, with about 500 distinct local languages (Eberhard et al., 2020), together with the popular use Nigerian English and Nigerian Pidgin, provides an ideal context for mega-diversity (Vertovec, 2007). In this environment, youths show an extraordinary translanguaging competence (García & Wei, 2014).

Translanguaging is the tradition of using varied linguistic resources in one communicative occasion with no regards for discrete linguistic boundaries. According to Blommaert, (2010); Pennycook, (2010), it is not just an indication of language deficiency, rather, it is a legitimate sociolinguistic strategy. The Nigerian young users fluidly draw on English, Nigerian Pidgin, and indigenous languages to achieve precision, intimacy, or play (Igboanusi, 2001). This metrolingual practice (Pennycook, 2010) enable flexible movement across linguistic resources without strict boundary maintenance, aligning with interactional needs and audience design (García & Wei, 2014).

The code-mixing in Nigerian digital platforms serves powerful indexical purposes. It often indexes cosmopolitanism, (displaying familiarity with global English-based slang) streetwise competence (through the strategic use of Nigerian Pidgin terms), while simultaneously affirming in-group solidarity. More critically, this fluid linguistic practice actively resists the prescriptive and often punitive ideology of Standard English, a colonial legacy that often marginalizes the creativity of the indigenous tongues (Bamgbose, 1995; Adegbija, 2004). The digital space therefore acts like a decentralized platform that encourages linguistic liberation, where hybridization is cultural, and linguistic prescriptivism is looked down upon, through popular, spontaneous practices. This research seeks to catalog the specific indigenous and Pidgin resources leveraged and their corresponding pragmatic functions.

2.4 Digital Affordances, Orthographic Play, and Lexical Innovation

The operational nature of social media: threaded replies, hashtags, tagging, and character constraints, heightens the ever-changing structural conventions (respellings, elongations, letter-number blends) as well as the speedy lexical novelties (Sebba, 2012; Varis & Blommaert, 2015). These innovations are a direct reaction to the technological affordances of the spaces themselves (Herring, 2013).

Crucially, the orthographic stylizations deployed, like *iykyk*, reduplication for the sake of emphasis, and emphasized punctuation and the use of graphical stylizations (e.g., capitalizing letters for shouting, deliberate 'misspellings' like *izzue*) are no longer "errors"; rather, they are pragmatically designed to feature cue stance while targeting a specific audience (Herring, 2013). They serve as visual cues that reinforce the affective and social meanings of the texts.

The success metrics of these platforms (likes, shares, virality) incentivize the creation and rapid stabilization of novel Gen-Z lexical forms (Tagg, 2015). The Nigerian digital platform is specifically loaded with this neologism, where terms are used not only for naming things, but also for condensing complex sociocultural realities into single, communicable lexical units.

Terms like *sapa*, meaning "poverty or financial struggle" and *japa*, meaning "to emigrate or flee the country" have meanings beyond just slang; they are linguistic shorthand for deep socio-economic and migration remarks and shared national trauma. They crystallize emergent public concerns into powerful, compact, and highly shareable tags (Aboh, 2022; Deumert, 2014). For instance, saying "*sapa* is dealing with me" carries a weight of recognition and solidarity far beyond saying "I am broke." The semantic density of these neologisms makes them very powerful resources for both humor and critical stance-taking against the traditional convention. This study aims to systematically analyze the thematic categories of these neologisms and their role in framing shared Nigerian experiences.

2.5 Taboo, Boundary Work, and Cryptic In-Group Communication

Research in impoliteness and taboo in online spaces found that erotic slangs, euphemism and perplexing choices have effects on identity, flirtation, ethical conservations, and protection of group interests (Culpeper, 2011; Dynel, 2012). A fundamental work of these variants is to maintain boundaries. As powerful watchdog resources are forms like the indigenized idioms *hug transformer* which means "a darkly humorous metaphor due to frustration, making reference to suicide by electrocution" or *iykyk*. These carry a profound kind of meaning and are socially resourceful members of communities, although they maintain linguistic unintelligibility to the non-community members, which in this context are the older generations and the prescriptivists.

This double functioning encourages the consciousness of secrecy, group identity, and community solidarity through making a language 'gated society' (Bucholtz, 2000). There is always an increased demand for this cryptic form of language use, especially in situations where parental and institutional monitoring is obvious. It therefore helps the Gen-Zs to talk about uncommon subjects - sex, nepotism and embezzlement, or even psychological struggles - and maintain a level of possible ambiguity (Papacharissi, 2015). This approach stands as a crucial sociolinguistics instrument used by the youth to form resistance against the old generation surveillance and social regulations.

2.6 Nigerian Englishes and Local Innovation

Available studies on Nigerian English (NE) and Nigerian Pidgin (NP) stressed the age-long development, marked by its indigenization processes, lexical expansion and semantic shifts (Igboanusi, 2001; Bamgbose, 1995, 2018). This research is naturally centered on the linguistic choices in literature, government, and city discourse.

More recent research acknowledges the important part the Gen-Zers play; active driving force for lexical and pragmatic innovations through blending the global and local resources for digital functionalities, branding and resistance (Aboh, 2022; Deumert, 2014). Contrary to the traditional media, the new media space gives immediate decentralized validity, letting young people's linguistic variants to maneuver the gatekeeping process of lexicography and formal education. The compression of such compounded socioeconomic conditions into simple lexical items – *sapa* or *japa* – is a remarkable proof of the shift from linguistic description to language action. The online vernacular is not just a decomposed code; it is a very efficient, culturally sensitive, and ideally compounded vocabulary which gives room for the Gen-Zers to represent their actuality on their own conditions. This research, hence, places the Nigerian Gen-Zers' digital language as the cutting edge of language change in Nigeria, revealing the mechanics through which the world technology blends with the indigenous language genius to design a systematic, pragmatic and richly referential system of communication. The last stage of the study will synthesize this available research to create an understandable socio-pragmatic mapping of this developing digital discourse.

To understand the emergence and functions of the Nigerian Gen-Z lingo on digital platforms, this study adopts William Labov's Sociolinguistic Theory of Language Variation (Labov, 1966). Labov's foundational work in sociolinguistics highlights the systematic relationship between linguistic variation and social variables, including age, class, gender, and ethnicity. This theory argues that linguistic variations are never accidental but socially and systematically conditioned and very meaningful. This provides deep insight into how language changes over time within a particular community. Labov's perspective is specifically useful for this study because Nigerian Gen-Zers' lingo on online platforms are greatly influenced by the identity of the generation, advancement in technology, and sociocultural dynamics. Instead of seeing these linguistic variances as aberrations of the perceived standard, Labov rather insists that all language variations are legitimate. This very study did not treat the Nigerian Gen-Zers' linguistic forms as a deviation but as authentic, functional and systematized forms of interaction, which confirms an evolution in social identities.

This theoretical approach backs the analysis of how time (age) and digital traditions affect language innovations and evolution. It equally agrees with current academic and cultural studies, which take cognizance of the different linguistic forms as resources and not deficits. Thus, Labov's theory of language variation gives a robust framework for the analysis of the social and pragmatic dimensions of the uses of language by the Nigerian Gen-Zs, justifying the legitimacy and significance of these language practices.

This research deployed a qualitative analytical approach, which is supported by descriptive statistics in line with the framework and principles of Labov's sociolinguistic theory of language variation of 1966. This design was adopted to be able to relate the socio-pragmatic notations inherent in the Nigerian Gen-Zers' language choices on the digital spaces and also identify different forms across pragmatic themes. Despite the quantitative measures, like the frequency counts and categorical distributions being integrated in the analysis, greater focus was still on context-centered analysis of linguistic elements.

The data consisted of a purposive sample of 70 recurrent Gen-Z linguistic items (slangs, acronyms, neologisms, and code-mixed forms) extracted from naturally occurring Facebook interactions among Nigerian youths. A total of 702 Facebook posts and comment threads spanning January to July 2025 were studied, and from this, a purposive sampling of the 70 most salient and recurring items was made. These items were deliberately selected because of their salience, high frequency, and pragmatic functionality within Nigerian Gen-Z discourse, rather than as an attempt to compile an exhaustive corpus of all possible expressions. The 70 items were selected based on both their high frequency of occurrence in the dataset and their pragmatic salience in conveying communicative functions central to Nigerian Gen-Z discourse. This purposive sampling strategy aligns with sociolinguistic practice (Labov, 1972; Androutsopoulos, 2014), where the goal is not exhaustiveness but representativeness of socially salient forms in a particular community.

The 70 expressions were systematically organized into a coding sheet under four variables:

1. Gen-Z Lingo (lexical item)
2. Pragmatic Theme (e.g., humor, secrecy, anger, intimacy, show-off)
3. Example in English or digital context (e.g., "tfw I forgot my password")
4. Socio-pragmatic Meaning (interpretation of the communicative function).

Coding was done manually by both authors, and intercoder agreement was checked on 20% of the data to ensure reliability of thematic categorization. Intercoder agreement was calculated using Cohen's kappa ($\kappa = 0.82$), indicating substantial reliability in the thematic categorization. Disagreements were discussed and resolved collaboratively, leading to refinement of categories.

The analysis was done in three stages: 1. Distribution of items across pragmatic themes was calculated (e.g., proportion of humor-related vs. secrecy-related forms), 2. Selected items were examined within their Facebook interactional contexts to demonstrate how pragmatic meanings emerge. 3. Findings were interpreted through Labov's variationist lens, situating the linguistic items within broader sociolinguistic variables (age, group identity, digital affordances). By combining quantitative distributions with qualitative interpretive depth, this study provides both an empirical mapping of Nigerian Gen-Z lingoes and a socio-pragmatic account of their communicative values.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The following section presents a comprehensive analysis of the 70 purposively sampled linguistic items extracted from Nigerian Gen-Zers' interactions on Facebook. In alignment with Labov's (1966) Sociolinguistic Theory of Language Variation, these forms are examined not as deviations from a standard, but as systematic and functional resources used to navigate digital affordances and sociocultural realities. The data is categorized into thematic clusters to illustrate how specific linguistic choices—ranging from global acronyms to indigenized neologisms—index various pragmatic functions such as identity construction, solidarity, humor, and resistance. Table 1 by mapping these lingoes to their corresponding socio-pragmatic meanings, the table highlights the creative "glocal" hybridity that defines the contemporary digital repertoire of Nigerian youth.

Table 1. Socio-Pragmatic Analysis of Nigerian Gen-Z Digital Lingoes

S/N	Gen Zs' Lingoes	Pragmatic	Examples	Socio-pragmatic
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		Themes		meaning/functions
1.	Lol	Humour / Rapport	"Lol u sef no try"	Softens interaction, maintains rapport, signals casual amusement.
2.	Lwkmd (Laugh wan kill me die)	Humour / Identity	"This gist lwkmd ☹"	Exaggerated laughter localized in Nigerian Pidgin; solidarity marker.
3.	Savage	Sarcasm / Irony	"That reply was savage"	Brutal honesty or merciless wit; signals defiance and boldness.
4.	Shade	Sarcasm / Mockery	"She just threw shade"	Indirect insult or subtle critique; preserves face while mocking.
5.	Breakfast	Sarcasm / Metaphor	"Everybody must chop breakfast"	Euphemism for heartbreak or disappointment; normalizes shared experience.
6.	Slay	Show-off / Admiration	"She dey slay steady"	Praises fashion, beauty, or lifestyle success.
7.	Lit	Excitement / Show-off	"The party was lit 🔥"	Signals hype, energy, or thrilling moments.
8.	Foh (Fuck outta here)	Anger / Dismissal	"Man, foh with that talk"	Rejects, dismisses, or confronts opposing views strongly.
9.	Hug transformer	Anger / Dark humour	"Oya go hug transformer"	Euphemism for death wish; dismisses someone harshly.
10.	Omg (Oh my God)	Surprise / Emotion	"Omg I can't believe this"	Expresses shock, awe, or disbelief.
11.	Weak me	Surprise / Exaggeration	"That story weak me"	Signals being overwhelmed, amused, or left speechless.
12.	Stfu (Shut the fuck up)	Anger / Hostility	"Bruh, stfu already"	Aggressively silences another; asserts dominance.
13.	Smh (Shaking my head)	Disappointment / Disapproval	"Smh, Nigerians no dey change"	Expresses disdain or disappointment without elaboration.
14.	Sus (Suspicious)	Secrecy / Caution	"That move looks sus"	Labels behaviour as shady, doubtful, or untrustworthy.
15.	Iykyk (If you know, you know)	Secrecy / Exclusivity	"That reference, iykyk"	Creates in-group exclusivity; requires shared knowledge.
16.	DL (Down Low)	Secrecy / Hidden acts	"He dey run things on the DL"	Refers to concealed or private behaviour (esp. sexual/romantic).
17.	Cd (Condom)	Secrecy / Sexual	"Guy, carry cd if you dey go there"	Euphemism for condom; avoids direct mention in mixed groups.
18.	Bobby	Obscene / Body reference	"See her bobby"	Refers to breasts; sexualized commentary.
19.	Gbola	Obscene / Vulgarity	"E show gbola"	Refers to male genitals; taboo yet humorous in-group use.
20.	Pussy / Puna	Obscene / Sexual	"Na wetin make am love her puna"	Sexual reference to female genitals.
21.	Knack	Obscene /	"He knack am last"	Euphemism for having sex.

		Sexual act	night”	
22.	Fag	Obscene / Identity insult	“He dey behave like fag”	Homophobic slur; derogatory usage in peer banter.
23.	Bruh	Relationship / Solidarity	“Bruh, you serious?”	Casual male bonding or camaraderie marker.
24.	Sis	Relationship / Solidarity	“Go sis, I see you”	Female solidarity; mutual encouragement.
25.	Mumscy	Relationship / Affection	“How mumscy dey?”	Affectionate reference to one’s mother.
26.	Popsy / Pman	Relationship / Affection	“Popsy don call you”	Affectionate reference to one’s father.
27.	Fam	Relationship / Kinship	“You’re my fam”	Denotes closeness, loyalty, or chosen family.
28.	Bae (Before Anyone Else)	Relationship / Romance	“My bae fine die”	Romantic endearment; intimate partner reference.
29.	Loml (Love of my life)	Relationship / Romance	“She’s my loml”	Strong romantic endearment; deep affection.
30.	Ate	Commendation / Admiration	“She ate that performance”	Signals excellence; someone did exceptionally well.
31.	GOAT (Greatest of All Time)	Commendation / Praise	“Messi is the GOAT”	Superlative praise; ultimate recognition of skill.
32.	Love to see it	Commendation / Affirmation	“Black excellence, love to see it”	Affirms positive outcomes; community solidarity.
33.	It’s giving	Commendation / Evaluation	“It’s giving queen vibes”	Signals resemblance or vibe evaluation; trend-driven.
34.	Killed it	Commendation / Admiration	“She killed it on stage”	Praises outstanding performance or achievement.
35.	Mahd	Commendation / Approval	“This track is mahd”	Signals amazement, admiration, or approval in Nigerian slang.
36.	Woke	Conventional / Awareness	“Stay woke”	Signals socio-political awareness, vigilance, or progressive mindset.
37.	RN (Right Now)	Present / Immediacy	“I’m tired rn”	Indicates urgency or immediate context.
38.	High	Intoxication / Feeling	“He’s high again”	Refers to being under the influence of drugs/alcohol.
39.	Dripping	Compliment / Show-off	“You’re dripping today”	Connotes fashion excellence or physical attractiveness.
40.	Fashy	Let go / Dismissal	“Leave am, e don fashy”	Means to forget, abandon, or dismiss something.
41.	Idk (I don’t know)	Uncertainty	“Idk what to say”	Expresses doubt, ignorance, or lack of knowledge.
42.	Cos (Because)	Conjunction	“I stayed home cos rain”	Informal contraction for “because,” used for brevity.
43.	DM (Direct Message)	Networking / Private talk	“Slide into my DM”	Refers to private messaging, often with flirtation or networking intent.
44.	Ghost	Neglect / Withdrawal	“He ghosted me”	To ignore, cut off communication, or disappear.
45.	Kinda	Comparison / Moderation	“I’m kinda tired”	Softens statement; expresses partial agreement or

				uncertainty.
46.	Tgif/Tgis	Jubilation / Gratitude	"Tgif! Weekend at last"	Celebrates end of work/stress, expresses relief.
47.	Fgs (For God's sake)	Emphasis / Frustration	"Hurry up, fgs"	Adds intensity or emotional force to statements.
48.	Muller	Wealth / Money	"He's chasing muller"	Slang for money, wealth, or financial success.
49.	It's the _ for me	Emphasis / Sarcasm	"It's the audacity for me"	Highlights a specific trait for irony, admiration, or mockery.
50.	Tush / Posh (Zhuzh)	Class / Show-off	"Her style is so tush"	Denotes elegance, sophistication, or classiness.
51.	Llnp / Wllnp (Long life and prosperity / Wishing long life and prosperity)	Celebration / Greeting	"HBD, LLNP"	Used in celebrations (esp. birthdays); expresses goodwill.
52.	IRL (In Real Life)	Reality / Offline context	"We met IRL"	Distinguishes between online persona and offline reality.
53.	Crash	Relationship / Affection	"She's my crash"	Refers to having a crush (romantic interest).
54.	Do sb/sth dirty	Disappointment / Betrayal	"He did me dirty"	Expresses unfair treatment, betrayal, or disloyalty.
55.	Pepper	Show-off / Envy	"Pepper dem"	Flaunting success to provoke envy; rooted in Nigerian pop culture.
56.	Low key / High key	Moderation / Intensity	"I lowkey miss her" / "I highkey love this"	Expresses subtle vs. open intensity of feelings.
57.	H / hech	Feeling / Slang	"I need H"	Euphemism for hunger or sometimes drug reference, depending on context.
58.	Blast	Euphemism / Fun	"We had a blast"	Refers to great enjoyment or fun; also metaphorical exaggeration.
59.	E choke	Surprise / Exhilaration	"That performance e choke"	Signals overwhelming amazement, shock, or excitement.
60.	Sapa / Sakpa	Lack / Poverty	"This sapa no go kill me"	Nigerian slang for being broke or financially struggling.
61.	Japa / Jakpa	Migration / Escape	"Everybody dey japa"	Refers to fleeing abroad or escaping hardship.
62.	Gbasgbos	Defeat / Chaos	"Na gbasgbos everywhere"	Describes conflict, violent exchange, or chaotic situations.
63.	Kpai	Death / Finality	"He kpai for road"	Euphemism for dying, often used humorously or dramatically.
64.	Tbvh (To be very honest)	Sincerity	"Tbvh, I'm not interested"	Strengthens honesty, adds emphasis to truth-telling.
65.	Btw (By the way)	Emphasis / Topic shift	"Btw, did you see her?"	Signals digression, adds side comments or emphasis.

66.	Tfw (That feeling when)	Seriousness / Intensity	"That feeling when you study all night and still fail the test."	Conveys disbelief, shock, or emotional intensity in describing a situation.
67.	No caps	Seriousness / Sincerity	"I am telling you the truth, no caps."	Affirms sincerity or credibility; signals that the statement is factual or not exaggerated.
68.	Tbh (To be honest)	Seriousness / Sincerity	"To be honest, I don't enjoy this class."	Prefaces a sincere, blunt, or potentially difficult remark.
69.	Like seriously	Seriousness / Emphasis	"Like seriously, you forgot my birthday?"	Expresses genuine surprise, frustration, or emphasis depending on context.
70	Lmao (Laughing my ass off)	Humour	"That joke was so funny, I am laughing my ass off."	Expresses amusement; functions as a marker of shared humor in interaction.

Table 2 to provide a systematic overview of the linguistic landscape, the identified lingoos were categorized into ten distinct thematic clusters based on their primary communicative functions. This distribution highlights the functional diversity of Nigerian Gen-Z digital discourse, showing that while "Show-off/Commendation" and "Miscellaneous" categories represent the highest frequencies at 15.7% each, other significant themes such as "Secrecy/Taboo" (14.3%) and "Relationship/Solidarity" (12.9%) also play a crucial role in group identity. This quantitative breakdown, rooted in Labovian principles, demonstrates that these variations are not random but are socially and systematically conditioned to serve specific interactional needs within the digital community.

Table 2. Distribution of Nigerian Gen-Z Lingoos by Pragmatic Theme

S/N	Pragmatic Theme	Frequency (N=70)	Percentage (%)
1.	Humour / Rapport	8	11.4%
2.	Sarcasm / Irony	3	4.3%
3.	Show-off / Commendation / Admiration	11	15.7%
4.	Anger / Disappointment	6	8.6%
5.	Surprise / Emotion	5	7.1%
6.	Secrecy / Taboo / Obscenity	10	14.3%
7.	Relationship / Solidarity / Affection	9	12.9%
8.	Seriousness / Sincerity / Intensity	7	10.0%
9.	Miscellaneous (Awareness, Identity, etc.)	11	15.7%
10.	Total	70	100%

Discussion of Findings

This analysis of the Nigerian Gen-Zers' linguistic choices, as presented above, uncovers a dynamic sociolinguistic landscape engineered by pragmatic intentions, cultural identification and the online mediation. These varieties, elementarily used in the context of digital communication, serve multiple sociolinguistic purposes, like relaying seriousness, sincerity, humour, sarcasm, pride, publicity, secrecy, relationships, among others. These purposes are supported by Labov's theory of variation (1966) maintains that linguistic changes are systematic in varied social demography, including age and group identity.

The first group is the linguistic elements such as *tfw*, *no caps*, *tbh*, and *like seriously*, that are used for the expression of seriousness, sincerity, and intensity. *Tfw*,

which means “that feeling when,” is an abbreviation that can equally be seen as a vulgar language to mean “the fuck what,” is used as a contextual intensifier, especially when expressing shock or confusion. *No caps*, which is made popular through the Nigerian hip-hop tradition, the popular Zlatan’s album “No Caps,” signifies truthfulness, fact or certainty, which underscores the speaker’s sincerity. Similarly, *tbh* (*to be honest*) serves to preface truthful or heartfelt commentary. *Like seriously* is multifunctional, oscillating between seriousness and amazement, depending on context. These lingoies signal a performative authenticity, reflecting a desire among Nigerian Gen-Z users to emphasize their truthfulness and factual stance in dialogue (Thelwall et al., 2010).

In terms of humour, expressions such as *lmao*, *lol*, and *lwkmd* (*laugh wan kill me die*) dominate informal discourse. While *lmao* (*laughing my ass off*) and *lol* (*laughing out loud*) are global English vernacular, *lwkmd* is a distinctly Nigerian coinage, transliterated from Igbo expressions like “*ọchị ọjọrọ igbu m*,” showcasing the localization of global forms. These lingoies are often deployed interchangeably with emoji, GIFs, or stickers, functioning as non-verbal markers of amusement in digital interaction (Crystal, 2006).

While plenty of these language practices reverberate with the worldwide youth cultures, the Nigerian Gen-Zers’ discourse, at the same time, maintains a special kind of hybridity that fuses the global with the indigenous. Such abbreviations as *lol*, *lmao*, and *smh* are commonly used in youth communities across the world, functioning as global markers of humour, emotion, and stance in online platforms (Crystal, 2006). On the other hand, Nigerian Gen-Zers indigenize and innovate upon these world repertoires using items like *lwkmd*, *hug transformer*, *sapa*, *japa*, and *e choke*. These are strongly founded in Nigerian Pidgin, Igbo, Yoruba, and the Afrobeat culture. This “glocal” practice depicts what Androutsopoulos (2014) explains as “transcultural flows,” which allows the global language pattern to cut through with the indigenous sociolinguistic realities to generate new forms. In this regard, Nigerian Gen-Zers’ discourse not only takes part in the general digital youth tradition but equally moderates it by exporting indigenized forms whose recognition is on the increase beyond Nigeria through the digital media affordances.

Another salient category is sarcasm, highlighted by lingoies like *savage*, *shade*, and *breakfast*. *Savage* connotes a merciless or brutally honest response or gesture. *Shade* refers to subtle mockery or passive-aggressive insults, often coded in body language or meme culture. *Breakfast* is metaphorically used to denote heartbreak or disappointment, particularly in romantic contexts. These lingoies align with Gen-Z’s broader use of irony and indirect critique to negotiate social relationships and emotions online (Papacharissi, 2015). Show-off and praise are expressed through terms like *slay*, *lit*, *ate*, *GOAT*, *killed it*, and *mahd*. These lingoies convey approval, admiration, or accomplishment. *Slay* suggests fashion or lifestyle excellence, *lit* signals excitement, while *GOAT* (*Greatest of All Time*) acknowledges supremacy in a domain. These evaluative markers resonate with the performative culture of social media, where status and personal branding are often mediated through language (Danesi, 2016).

Anger, disappointment, and surprise are other common pragmatic themes. *Foh* (*fuck outta here*), *hug transformer*, and *stfu* (*shut the fuck up*) are expressions of frustration or disdain. *Hug transformer*, a darkly humorous localism, implies a death wish or telling someone to go away with finality. *Omg* (*Oh my God*) and *weak me* express shock or speechlessness, while *smh* (*shaking my head*) shows disapproval or dismay. These expressions demonstrate affective communication strategies that reinforce shared emotional resonance among users (Zappavigna, 2012). Lingoies like *sus* (*suspicious*), *iykyk* (*if you know, you know*), *DL* (*down low*), *cd* (*condom*), *bobby* (breast), *gbola* (penis), *knack* (to have sex), *pussy*, and *fag* encode secrecy, taboo, and obscenity. Often opaque to outsiders,

these expressions serve to establish in-group solidarity and regulate social boundaries. For instance, *gbola*, derived from the Bini language, and *iykyk*, a cryptic meme phrase, rely heavily on shared cultural knowledge. Such linguistic opacity echoes Labov's (1972) argument that vernacular varieties serve as social identity markers and group membership cues.

Relational bonding and commendation are achieved through terms like *bruh*, *sis*, *bae*, *mumasy*, *popsy*, *lol*, and *fam*. These words function as terms of endearment, familial reference, or solidarity. *Bae* (*before anyone else*) and *lol* (*love of my life*) are digital expressions of intimacy. Compliments such as *ate*, *love to see it*, *it's giving*, *killed it*, and *mahd* express admiration or affirmation and form part of Gen-Z's positivity discourse. Table 1 showcases multi-functional expressions. For instance, *woke* refers to socio-political awareness or modernity. *RN* (*right now*) implies immediacy; *dripping* connotes attractiveness; *high* suggests drug/alcohol influence. *Fashy* (*forget it*), *ghost* (*ignore*), *idk* (*I don't know*), and *cos* (*because*) express uncertainty, detachment, or moderation. *Tgif*, *Tgis*, *fgs*, *muller*, *crash*, and *blast* carry meanings specific to local culture and emotion regulation. Other remarkable lingo includes *e choke* (*to be overwhelmed*), *sapa* (*poverty*), *japa* (*to flee abroad*), *kpai* (*to die*), *gbasgbos* (*chaos*), *lowkey/highkey* (*modesty/exaggeration*), *H* (*hunger*), and *pepper them* (*envy from success*). *Japa* and *kpai* derive from Yoruba and showcase semantic blending and phonological creativity, typical of Nigerian Gen-Z's linguistic innovation (Igboanusi, 2001).

The findings also illustrate how Nigerian Gen-Z discourse can be theorized through concepts such as enregisterment, translanguaging, and stance-taking. Expressions like *lwkmd* (*laugh wan kill me die*) demonstrate enregisterment in Agha's (2007) sense, as they become recognizable and socially circulated signs of Nigerian digital identity. Similarly, the widespread use of *japa* (*to flee*, often for better opportunities abroad) embodies stance-taking (Du Bois, 2007), as it indexes a shared generational commentary on economic precarity, migration, and aspiration. Moreover, the creative mixing of global abbreviations (*lol*, *smh*) with local slang (*sapa*, *e choke*) exemplifies translanguaging (García & Wei, 2014), where linguistic repertoires flow across English, Pidgin, and indigenous Nigerian languages to achieve expressive richness. These practices confirm that Nigerian Gen-Z users are not passive adopters of global digital forms but active agents in shaping sociolinguistic styles that negotiate identity and belonging. In sum, Nigerian Gen-Z lingo is pragmatically rich, socially meaningful, and linguistically innovative. They serve not only as functional tools for communication but also as markers of identity, resistance, and creativity. Consistent with Labov's sociolinguistic insights and broader digital discourse theory, these lingo forms represent a legitimate and systematic evolution in the landscape of Nigerian English.

CONCLUSION

This research has investigated the socio-pragmatic versions in Nigerian Gen-Zers' online interactions. It draws on purposive data sampling of frequently occurring linguistic elements on Facebook. Among the findings of the study is that these are not just random coinages, rather, they are systematized language resources which do diversified socio-pragmatic functions, like humour, sarcasm, secrecy, construction of identity, oneness and stance-taking. In accordance with the theory of language variation by Labov (1966), Gen-Zers' language practices demonstrate how social demographics such as age, online culture, and localized contexts influence linguistic innovation. The Nigerian Gen-Zs show creative potential of adapting international English forms, e.g., *lol*, *lmao*, together with indigenized contents like *lwkmd*, *sapa*, *japa*, representing global interconnectedness and traditional

distinctiveness. Ultimately, these operations reflect the legitimacy of online linguistic resources as meaningful linguistic phenomena and not any form of deviation.

Based on the findings of this study, the researchers recommended that the Nigerian Gen-Zs' online language practices be given their due recognition as correct and legitimate forms of communication instead of being trashed as informal or deviational forms. Researchers of sociolinguistics and digital humanities should continue to study these evolving linguistic styles because they give useful insights into how Gen-Zers navigate identity, solidarity, and innovation in a multicultural community. Educators and policymakers are to benefit from the findings of this study, as it is clear that integrating the awareness of digital languages into literacy and media education can limit the differences between formal instruction and the students' daily conversational demands. Furthermore, expanding research to include comparative perspectives across African and diasporic communities would provide a broader understanding of transnational youth discourse and the role of digital platforms in shaping it. Methodologically, future studies may strengthen this line of inquiry by incorporating ethnographic interviews or user-based perspectives, which would complement textual analyses and reveal how speakers themselves assign meaning to these linguistic innovations.

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