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AI-Mediated Communication Systems and the Evolution of Gen Z Conversational English Grammar Practices in Digital Environments

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Abstract
As digital communication increasingly relies on Information and Communication Technology and AI-mediated platforms, the grammatical practices of Generation Z require examination beyond traditional linguistic frameworks. This study explores how Gen Z individuals perceive and adapt English grammatical norms within both conventional and AI-integrated digital environments. Utilizing an exploratory qualitative design, data were gathered through one-on-one interviews with 18 Gen Z participants and evaluated using reflexive thematic analysis. Findings reveal that digital natives treat grammar as a highly adaptable user interface tool. In formal ICT settings and AI interactions, standardized syntax is strategically deployed to project professional credibility and ensure precise data transmission. Conversely, informal algorithmic social networks demand the deliberate subversion of traditional grammar to accelerate communication pacing and foster an authentic digital aesthetic. Ultimately, this generational linguistic code-switching highlights a sophisticated digital literacy where users actively regulate information friction to meet platform-specific demands. These insights provide a critical foundation for IT professionals and developers engineering future AI-mediated communication systems. ..
Keywords generation z, AI-mediated communication, grammatical adaptation, information systems, digital aesthetics

Introduction

There remains a critical gap in the current literature regarding how Generation Z personally perceives, negotiates, and applies English grammatical norms within modern, AI-mediated Information and Communication Technology (ICT) environments, as most existing research approaches grammar from a strictly educational or

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linguistic viewpoint rather than the lived experiences of digital natives (Gawne & Vaughan, 2021; Flores & Rosa, 2015; Curzan, 2014; Beers Fägersten, 2012; Garil, 2024). Generation Z, comprising individuals born between the late 1990s and early 2010s, operates natively within digital landscapes structured by instant messaging, algorithms, and social media platforms (Twenge, 2017; Montclair, 2021). These specific ICT settings heavily promote relaxed syntactical structures, abbreviated phrasing, and informal lexicons (Crystal, 2008; Tagliamonte & Denis, 2008). Contemporary investigations highlight that such digital ecosystems actively mold students' linguistic confidence and their routine grammatical applications (Estoque, 2023; Ceneciro, 2025). However, conventional grammatical standards maintain an essential role in academic, corporate, and formal virtual spaces, creating a complex dual-system of communication for today's youth (Baron, 2020; Garil, Abbas, & Limen, 2024). The emergence of generative AI and algorithmic interfaces has further revolutionized this dynamic. People naturally adapt their language when engaging with AI, utilizing accommodation strategies such as simplifying structures or actively adjusting their formality (Ahmad et al., 2026). Users increasingly calibrate their grammatical complexity, tone, and lexical richness in response to the communicative affordances of artificial intelligence (Ahmad et al., 2026). Consequently, AI-mediated messages often exhibit a trend toward conciseness and template-driven structures, as individuals subconsciously mirror AI-generated output (Okta & Nurnisaa, 2026). Rather than signaling a degradation of language, this phenomenon is increasingly recognized as an adaptive linguistic evolution spurred by the intersection of human conversational creativity and machine intelligence (Rajpurohit, 2026). While these digital environments provide innovative avenues for expressing identity, they concurrently raise concerns regarding the potential erosion of formal language proficiencies required in professional arenas (Tahir et al., 2025).

Furthermore, specific ICT platforms dictate distinct linguistic transformations. Applications such as Instagram actively encourage the integration of emojis, slang, and code-mixing as primary modes of expression (Conny et al., 2024). Distinct conversational genres—ranging from visual to highly performative—emerge uniquely across varied interfaces like TikTok, Reddit, Twitter, and Kaskus (Pirdaus & Vera, 2025; Androutsopoulos, 2011; Androutsopoulos, 2006). In these spaces, Gen Z leverages digital networks for profound linguistic experimentation, utilizing multimodal communication, memes, and rapid abbreviations to foster peer connectivity and construct digital identities (Philipp & Sułkowski, 2025; Tagliamonte, 2016; McCulloch, 2019). This includes sophisticated linguistic strategies like cross-cultural hybridization and the blending of languages, such as complex Chinese-English code-switching (Zhang & Yang, 2025). Historically, proper grammar functioned as a primary marker of literacy and professional credibility (Crystal, 2006; Weaver, 2010). Today, however, the deliberate subversion of traditional rules functions as an alternative linguistic economy driven by algorithmic speed and rapid identity signaling (Baron, 2008; Adalia et al., 2025; Chavez, Anuddin, Mansul, et al., 2024).

Grammatical conformity—or the intentional lack thereof—remains deeply situational within digital networks. Digital natives recognize the necessity of standardized English for high-stakes digital or academic tasks while simultaneously embracing fluidity in peer-to-peer virtual spaces (Lea & Street, 1998; Tannen, 1994). Sociolinguistic frameworks suggest that technology-mediated language choices are critical to identity formulation; nonstandard grammar can project authenticity and relatability online, whereas rigid compliance may signal competence or, inversely, social distance (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Chavez, 2022). Moreover, a speaker's emotional delivery and grammatical choices collaboratively shape lasting impressions in both human-to-human and human-computer interactions (Garil et al., 2024). The perceived misuse of grammar in formal ICT channels often results in harsh judgments regarding credibility and intelligence, yet casual digital adaptations enhance social cohesion in relaxed virtual settings (Lunsford & Lunsford, 2008; Garil, Entong, & Muarip et al., 2024).

Addressing this duality, this study aims to systematically investigate Gen Z's attitudes and behaviors regarding grammar within AI-mediated and conventional ICT communication frameworks. By examining how grammatical choices influence self-expression, communication styles, and interpersonal dynamics (Thurlow, 2011), this research unpacks the algorithmic and generational linguistic trends shaping modern speech (Eckert, 2012). The continuous integration of advanced technological teaching strategies and AI in educational settings further emphasizes the need to understand these shifting sociolinguistic perceptions (Calzada, 2024; Carpio et al., 2024). Employing an exploratory qualitative design utilizing reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Divinagracia, 2024), this research provides a grounded perspective on how modern digital infrastructures and AI-driven platforms are actively redefining the conversational English practices of today's youth.

Methods

Research Design

This study utilized an exploratory qualitative research design to investigate how Generation Z conceptualizes, applies, and adapts English grammatical conventions within contemporary Information and Communication Technology (ICT) environments and traditional face-to-face interactions. Because digital linguistic adaptation involves highly subjective negotiations of identity and platform-specific affordances, a qualitative framework was

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deemed optimal. This approach provided the necessary analytical depth to capture the nuances of how grammar choices influence self-expression, peer connectivity, and communication efficiency across various algorithmic and interpersonal networks.

Population and Sampling

The study cohort consisted of eighteen (n = 18) Generation Z participants, aged 18 to 25, who actively utilize English as a primary medium for daily communication. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select individuals who are heavily engaged across diverse communication channels, including algorithmic social media platforms, instant messaging applications, and AI-integrated academic or corporate ecosystems. To guarantee a comprehensive and multifaceted perspective on digital linguistic practices, the sample deliberately included a balanced cross-section of young professionals and university students representing various socio-cultural and academic backgrounds.

Instrument

Data collection was facilitated through a semi-structured interview protocol explicitly mapped to the research objectives. The instrument was engineered to elicit participants' lived experiences and perceptions regarding the necessity of grammatical conformity, specifically probing how structural language choices impact virtual self-expression, social perception, and communication flow in both standard and technologically mediated contexts. Prior to full-scale data collection, the interview guide underwent a pilot-testing phase with two Gen Z individuals to validate its clarity, thematic relevance, and conversational flow. The core questions guiding these qualitative inquiries are detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. Semi-Structured Interview Guide for Digital Linguistic Practices

Research Objectives	Corresponding Interview Questions
To explore the perspectives of Gen Z individuals on the importance of grammar in their daily English conversations across ICT and offline channels.	How important do you think proper grammar is when you communicate in English with your peers or within online digital spaces? Can you detail a specific scenario where adhering to correct grammar was critical, versus a situation in a digital or offline space where it felt unnecessary? What is your emotional or cognitive response when another user or platform points out grammatical errors in your direct messages or public social media posts?
To examine the casual or attentive treatment of grammar and how this shapes communication styles, self-expression, and interactions in technology-mediated and everyday settings.	In what distinct ways does your application of grammar (whether highly structured or intentionally casual) alter how you express your identity in digital interactions or face-to-face conversations? Do you believe your grammatical choices influence how algorithms or human peers perceive your competence in academic, professional, or digital social networks? Why or why not? How does the collective treatment of grammar among your peer group dictate the overall pacing, style, and flow of your networked conversations?

Data Gathering Procedure

The data acquisition phase comprised individual, semi-structured interviews executed either in person or via digital video conferencing platforms, thereby adapting to the participants' logistical preferences and geographic availability. Each interview session spanned approximately 30 to 45 minutes. Prior to participation, all subjects were comprehensively briefed on the study's scope—specifically its focus on human-to-human and digital language use—and subsequently provided informed consent. To ensure absolute transcription fidelity for the qualitative analysis phase, all dialogues were audio-recorded with explicit participant authorization.

Data Analysis

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The transcribed textual datasets were subjected to reflexive thematic analysis, systematically adhering to the rigorous six-phase methodology delineated by Braun and Clarke (2019). The analytical progression commenced with extensive data familiarization through iterative transcript reviews. This was followed by the generation of initial codes designed to isolate meaningful linguistic behaviors, AI-mediated communication adaptations, and digital grammar perceptions. These preliminary codes were subsequently aggregated into broader potential themes.

To ensure conceptual coherence, the themes underwent rigorous review and refinement, resulting in distinct categories that accurately reflected the participants' digital communication experiences. Upon finalization, the themes were definitively named and defined. The concluding phase involved synthesizing the narrative report, integrating verbatim participant excerpts to substantiate the overarching thematic findings. Throughout the entire coding sequence, the researchers maintained active reflexivity to mitigate subjective bias. Furthermore, computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (NVivo), alongside targeted manual coding techniques, was deployed as a robust data management architecture to optimize the organization and thematic development of the dataset.

Results

Objective 1: To explore the perspectives of Gen Z individuals on the importance of grammar in their daily English conversations across ICT and offline channels.

Theme 1: Contextual Grammar Adaptability for Academic and Professional ICT Platforms

Ten respondents highlighted that adhering to proper English structures becomes crucial when navigating formal digital environments, such as emailing professors, submitting online job applications, or participating in professional virtual workspaces. They noted that precise grammar minimizes digital miscommunication and projects a highly credible, professional persona across these networks. Conversely, encountering grammatical corrections in these formal ICT settings was generally appreciated, as it actively fostered digital literacy and boosted their confidence for future high-stakes virtual communications.

"When I have to send an email to a professor about a deadline, I make sure my grammar is completely optimized. I do not want to look careless because it might affect how seriously they process my request."

"Applying for a remote job means double-checking every sentence in my digital resume. Bad grammar can make you look completely unprofessional on these platforms, even if your technical skills are solid."

"If someone points out an error nicely in a professional chat, I actually appreciate it. It serves as a free grammar check that helps me improve my future online communications."

Theme 2: Global Connectivity and Mitigating Misunderstandings in Multiplayer Digital Networks

Another group of ten participants emphasized the utility of standardized grammar when engaging with international peers across online gaming servers and global messaging networks. Because localized internet slang often fails to translate accurately across different digital communities, users consciously clean up their syntax to establish a reliable communicative middle ground. This structural adaptation ensures seamless cooperation and prevents critical misunderstandings during fast-paced multiplayer interactions or cross-cultural digital exchanges.

"Since a lot of us interact with users from other countries online, utilizing proper grammar acts as a universal protocol so our messages do not get misunderstood. It does not have to be perfect, just highly understandable."

"When I log into multiplayer online games, I type in clear English so my international teammates will not get confused. The team operates much better when our chat inputs are universally understandable."

Theme 3: Algorithmic Relatability and the Vulnerability of Public Digital Spaces

In stark contrast to formal spaces, five respondents pointed out that grammar is largely irrelevant on algorithmic social media feeds where speed, humor, and relatability take absolute precedence. On platforms driven by rapid content consumption, intentional grammatical subversions often enhance the aesthetic or comedic value of a digital post. However, making unintentional structural errors on public platforms occasionally resulted in feelings of embarrassment, prompting participants to defensively self-edit or double-check their captions to avoid public scrutiny from internet peers.

"On social media apps, perfect grammar hardly matters. We type fast, use keyboard shortcuts, and even viral memes break traditional rules to boost relatability."

"I lowkey get embarrassed when another user corrects my grammar publicly on my feed. It makes me feel like they are hyper-focusing on the syntax rather than the actual digital content I posted."

"People hardly judge the syntax online. They care way more if the media is aesthetic, funny, or fits the current internet vibe."

Objective 2: To examine the casual or attentive treatment of grammar and how this shapes communication styles, self-expression, and interactions in technology-mediated and everyday settings.

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Theme 1: Digital Aesthetics and the Accelerated Flow of Informal Networks Ten participants explained that discarding traditional grammar rules—such as utilizing all-lowercase text, dropping punctuation, and heavily integrating emojis—significantly accelerates the pacing of casual peer-to-peer messaging. This deliberate linguistic subversion functions as a creative digital aesthetic that matches the relaxed energy of internet culture. Applying formal grammar in these fast-paced networks often disrupts the conversational flow, making the user appear overly serious, aggressive, or artificially robotic to their peers.
"When I message my friends on Discord, grammar simply does not exist. We send all-lowercase texts, use internet slang, and it makes the entire digital exchange feel natural and fast."
"Breaking the standard rules on purpose is a huge part of my online aesthetic. Lowercase texts make my digital presence look calm, whereas adding a period can feel weirdly aggressive."
"If everyone in the server types super properly, the data flow feels formal and slow. Dropping punctuation makes the chat interface feel much more casual and rapid."

Theme 2: Digital Code-Switching and Navigating Professional Perception
Ten respondents described a conscious process of linguistic code-switching designed to manage how human peers and digital networks perceive them. They recognized that deploying correct grammar in digital workspaces or formal group chats commands respect, signals competence, and ensures their data input is taken seriously. While they maintain highly casual styles offline or in private channels, they intentionally adopt structured, corporate-sounding syntax whenever the digital environment demands a professional tone.
"I realized people on these platforms take you way more seriously if your text inputs use correct grammar. So now I actively code-switch between a casual aesthetic and a professional format depending on the interface."
"Sending a digital message with bad grammar in a professional workspace makes you seem less confident. People equate standard English with competence, which is just part of navigating digital professionalism."
"Using formal grammar in a casual group chat gives off major corporate energy, almost like you are sending an automated work email instead of just chilling with friends."

Theme 3: Information Friction and the Threshold of Digital Meaning
Despite their clear preference for casual digital communication, five respondents cautioned that excessive grammatical distortion creates information friction, requiring users to reread messages simply to extract the intended meaning. While minor typos are easily bypassed by the reader, severe structural errors compromise the fundamental goal of digital communication, leading to user confusion and disengagement. Ultimately, these digital natives prioritize clarity; they value authentic, easily processed information over both rigid grammatical perfection and overly chaotic internet slang.
"Too much algorithmic shorthand or bad grammar causes serious confusion. If a user types without any punctuation, I have to process the text twice just to decode their meaning."
"Honestly, I do not believe my grammar defines my identity. As long as the primary message transmits clearly and people process my point, I do not care if my commas are perfectly aligned."
"Casual syntax is completely fine until it twists the core data of the sentence. If I have to reread a notification three times to understand it, I instantly lose interest in the thread."

Discussion

This study sought to investigate how Generation Z navigates, perceives, and modifies English grammatical conventions within both conventional and AI-mediated Information and Communication Technology (ICT) environments. Moving beyond traditional educational paradigms, the findings present a novel perspective on Human-Computer Interaction (HCI), revealing that digital natives treat grammatical syntax not as a rigid set of rules, but as a highly adaptable user interface tool used to optimize digital communication, manage professional perception, and regulate information flow across varied algorithmic platforms.
The results demonstrate that Gen Z's application of grammar is deeply contextual, functioning as a critical mechanism for establishing credibility within formal digital architectures. When operating within professional ICT ecosystems such as academic portals, remote workspaces, or corporate email networks participants consciously deploy standardized grammar to minimize digital miscommunication and project competence. This aligns perfectly with recent findings that users actively calibrate their structural complexity and tone to meet the communicative affordances of specific digital platforms and artificial intelligence interfaces (Ahmad et al., 2026; Okta & Nurnisaa, 2026). Rather than perceiving formal grammar solely as an academic requirement, Gen Z utilizes it as a strategic asset to navigate AI-driven template structures and high-stakes digital interactions successfully (Baron, 2020; Garil, Abbas, & Limen, 2024).

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In stark contrast to formal digital workspaces, informal algorithmic environments such as social media feeds and gaming servers actively encourage a deliberate subversion of traditional syntax. The study reveals that participants intentionally drop punctuation and utilize lowercase text to accelerate data exchange and construct an authentic, relaxed digital aesthetic. This phenomenon supports existing literature illustrating that specific ICT platforms inherently drive distinct linguistic transformations, fostering hybrid and highly visual language genres (Conny et al., 2024; Pirdaus & Vera, 2025). Furthermore, this linguistic play is not indicative of language degradation. Instead, it represents a complex, adaptive evolution resulting from the intersection of Gen Z creativity and digital platform mechanics (Rajpurohit, 2026). By utilizing multimodal communication strategies including emojis and platform-specific abbreviations youth seamlessly construct their digital identities and foster peer connectivity across virtual networks (Philipp & Sułkowski, 2025; Zhang & Yang, 2025; Tagliamonte, 2016).

A highly novel finding of this study is the conceptualization of "information friction" within digital messaging. While Gen Z overwhelmingly prefers casual syntax for its speed and aesthetic appeal, they maintain a strict threshold for grammatical distortion. When structural subversions become too extreme, they disrupt the primary function of the ICT system which is the efficient and accurate transfer of data. Participants explicitly noted that excessive grammatical errors necessitate reprocessing the text, which diminishes user engagement and creates communicative bottlenecks. This insight adds critical depth to discussions surrounding digital literacy, demonstrating that while digital environments promote expressive freedom, users inherently self-regulate their linguistic inputs to ensure data clarity is not critically compromised (Tahir et al., 2025; Lunsford & Lunsford, 2008).

The primary contribution of this research lies in framing sociolinguistic practices as a core component of Information Systems and Human-Computer Interaction. Historically, studies have evaluated youth grammar primarily through the lens of academic performance or traditional linguistics (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Gawne & Vaughan, 2021). This study breaks new ground by analyzing Gen Z's grammatical choices as a sophisticated method of digital code-switching which serves as a strategic adaptation to the varying demands of AI algorithms, digital corporate environments, and informal virtual communities. By bridging the gap between conversational English practices and modern ICT integration, these findings provide critical insights for developers, interface designers, and IT professionals engineering the next generation of AI-mediated communication systems, emphasizing that future interfaces must anticipate and accommodate highly fluid, context-dependent linguistic adaptations.

Conclusion

Generation Z treats English grammar not as a rigid rulebook but as an adaptive interface tool tailored to specific Information and Communication Technology environments. Grammatical conformity serves as a strategic asset for establishing professional credibility and ensuring precise data transmission within formal digital workspaces and AI-mediated platforms. Conversely algorithmic social networks and casual digital channels demand a deliberate subversion of traditional syntax to accelerate communication pacing and foster authentic digital aesthetics. This advanced linguistic code-switching demonstrates a high level of digital literacy where users actively regulate information friction to prioritize either relational connection or structural clarity depending on the platform constraints.

Interface designers and IT professionals engineering future digital communication networks should integrate adaptive text environments that recognize and accommodate highly fluid user syntaxes rather than enforcing rigid grammatical autocorrection. Educators and digital literacy advocates must reframe communication training to emphasize platform-specific linguistic adaptability and the strategic use of formal syntax as a tool for navigating AI-driven corporate ecosystems. Organizations utilizing generative AI and automated messaging systems should calibrate their communicative affordances to mirror the contextual agility of modern digital natives to ensure better user engagement and seamless human-computer interaction.

Subsequent research must investigate the direct impact of predictive text algorithms and generative AI on the long-term syntactical development of younger demographics across varying digital ecosystems. Exploring how localized internet slang and multimodal communication strategies alter machine learning models of natural language processing presents a critical avenue for advancing information systems. Quantitative assessments measuring the exact threshold of information friction in digital messaging could provide concrete metrics for optimizing user interface designs in fast-paced collaborative virtual networks.

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