# *Punctuation Drop and Syntax Restructuring: Linguistic Innovation among Gen Z*

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## *Abstract*

*Language is ever evolving, majorly shaped by the cultural and societal contexts. The present youth (Gen Z) plays an important role in this evolution process through punctuation drop and syntax restructuring. These phenomenon occur credited to the habituated usage of digital platforms for daily communication and in some regional contexts, for instance the countries with English as a second or third language, because of competence with their first or second languages. This study conducted an analysis of punctuation usage and syntax restructuring practices in Gen Z, with the aim of understanding the reasons of normalized punctuation drop and syntax restructuring. The study is created by concentrating on platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram and Snapchat chiefly. Future academics might attain a profound comprehension of the reasons of negligence of punctuation and syntactic structures, the ailing point causing it and ways to recompense it among upcoming generations in Pakistan.*

*Key Words: Punctuation drop, Syntax restructuring, Gen Z, digital communication, emojis*

## 1. Introduction:

**Background:**

Language is an evolving and ever developing system, shaped by social, cultural and generational shifts, according to the time and society in which it retains. Historically, languages has undergone a series of changes in reaction to these influences (McCulloch, 2019). As a global language, English language is perpetually shaped by the social, technical and geographical contexts of its speakers. In current times, the increasing influence of digital communication has significantly altered the Linguistic patterns of English language. Dimock (2019), constitutes digital natives as the inciting point, for the changes in everyday English language usage. Today's generation primarily Gen Z (born 1997 – 2012) has increasingly adopted informal digital communication styles, particularly in texting and social media, where traditional punctuation is often omitted and repurposed (Fonteyn, 2023). Crystal (2018) argues that "digital communication's global reach and immediacy enable linguistic innovations to spread rapidly," reshaping lexical and syntactic norms. This digital influence has blurred the syntactic rules, normalizing digital norms through the use of

abbreviation slangs or dropping the use of punctuation in communication. The scope of this issue is global, however, it grasps a different approach in countries, with English as a second language, for instance; South Asian countries like Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, deal with this issue from digital influence as well as literary gaps. This study deals with punctuation drop and syntax restructuring in Generation Z, a shift in informal communication, where punctuation marks are omitted intentionally, due to its perceived formality or emotional weight.

**Problem Statement:**

The fast development of digital communication has restructured the modes of language production, circulation and consumption. The dropping of punctuation and the reorganization of syntax in the daily online communication represent one of the most obvious language changes of Generation Z. Although the existing literature has provided the importance of digital platforms in the formation of participation, visibility, and identity (Castells, 2012; Zhong, 2021), little focus has been given to the fact that linguistic changes take place in the virtual space. The formerly strict rules of punctuation and syntax are being transformed by Gen Z into flexible expression and creativity and soft resistance.

Conventionally, punctuation has been conceptualized as a syntactic structure and a rhetoric articulation (Crystal, 2008). Digital practices by Gen Z, however, re-appropriate punctuation in emotional or stance-taking or positioning of relationship ways. The lack of full stop or excessive use of ellipses or the strategic use of not using capital letters can give an indication of informality, intimate, irony or even distance. Equally, syntax reorganization, i.e. sentence fragments, run-on, and word-toying can also be seen as a tool of humor, unity, and playful identity (Androutsopoulos, 2015; Tagg, 2015). The practices erase the distinction between spoken and written registers proving that digital communication is not just incorrect writing, but a new, unique discursive mode that is conditioned by new cultural logics.

They are global patterns, available on a variety of platforms, including Tik Tok, Instagram, WhatsApp, and X, but they also obtain certain cultural overtones in South Asia. In a more multilingual setting like in Pakistan, India and Bangladesh where English, Urdu, Hindi and regional languages mix freely, the boundaries between punctuation drop and syntax play and code-mixing and hybridisation become blurred. Loss of a period, the discontinued clause, or reformulated sentence in the Roman Urdu or Hinglish does not only indicate the lack of formality, but also registers the generational identity and cultural hybridity. In this respect, linguistic norms reestablished by Gen Z seem to be more than fashionable: a silent protest against the normative, claims of peer solidarity, making the choice between the global digital culture and the local language (Fairclough, 2013).

Despite their visibility and pervasiveness, these practices remain under-researched. Much of the scholarship so far has focused either on cataloguing internet slang (Mahfouz, 2020) or analyzing youth culture sociologically (Shah & Ahmed, 2025), without critically examining punctuation drop and syntax restructuring as discursive and ideological acts. Very little work has explored how these

linguistic shifts contribute to meaning-making, identity construction, and the reconfiguration of linguistic authority in both global and regional contexts.

Therefore, there is a compelling need to study how Gen Z's use of punctuation drop and syntax restructuring functions as a discursive strategy of communication, identity performance, and ideological negotiation. This study will investigate how these practices operate conversationally to build solidarity, express urgency or detachment, and challenge dominant ideologies of "standard" language across global and South Asian digital contexts.

**Research Objectives:**

This study aims to tackle the following objectives.

* To know the reasons of punctuation drop.
* To identify the threats posed to English language by punctuation drop.
* To suggest ways to overcome punctuation drop.
* To understand the role of technology and digital communication in promoting punctuation drop?

**Research Questions**:

This study by the end of it, will answer the following questions.

* Why punctuation drop is so common in Gen Z?
* What dangers does punctuation drop pose to English language and how we can overcome it?
* What is the role of technology and digital communication in promoting punctuation drop?

**Significance:**

The importance of this study is that it tries to comprehend the linguistic trends that prevail in Gen-Z writing in the digital era. Through the analysis of punctuation drop and syntax restructuring, the study does not only cover a superficial writing habit, but also reveals the way communication styles are being changed by the technological progress.

This paper will discuss the possible threat of punctuation drop to English language. It can be fast and convenient in a casual environment, but on the other hand, being used constantly without punctuation, one can undermine clarity, coherence, and grammatical awareness. In the long run, it can demarcate formal and informal writing and cause difficulties to those who have to work in both. The identification of this problem is important to both teachers and linguists and communication experts.

Besides this, this study puts the role of educational institutions in dealing with this change. In many cases, the institutional level of negligence in the form of inappropriate curricula, inadequate emphasis on writing proficiency, or inadequate application of digital tools, where needed, adds to the issue. In cases in which the schools do not uphold the importance of proper punctuation and structured writing in both conventional and contemporary settings, they fail to provide a clear-cut on how the student ought to balance out creative and linguistic precision. This outlook points to

the fact that it is not just the Gen-Z students who are problematic but also the system that is supposed to prepare the kids with versatile communication abilities.

Besides, the study has educational implications because it will enlighten teachers, curriculum developers and policymakers on the changing literary practices of young learners. The research does not merely offer a judgment on punctuation drop but offers a chance to comprehend the reasons why Gen-Z has adopted it. This mediocrity between old grammars and new expression is essential to the maintenance of English as an instrument of utility as well as expression.

Another reason why this study Is significant is the role of technology. Mobile phones, social networks and instant messaging apps have made it acceptable to use short and quick communications. The study can be added to the field of digital linguistics and communication by studying the ways these platforms promote brevity and reconfigure language. It shows the impact of technology in mediating language options and speeding up the change of writing conventions.

Lastly, the relevance of the study is that it is practical. The study can offer positive solutions by investigating the causes and effects of punctuation drop. These are propagating digital literacy initiatives, advocating contextual consciousness, and educating about ways to sustain elucidation without subjugating contemporary styles of writing. By doing this, the research can be useful both academically and socially as it will fill the gap between the academic research and the practice of communication in daily life.

**Delimitation:**

The paper is confined to researching punctuation drop and syntax restructuring in online communication by the generation Z in Pakistan. It is not the concern of the whole gamut of grammar and spelling mistakes but rather on how the digital landscape has promoted and condoned the lack of punctuation and variations of sentence structure. This is a limitation that makes the research accurate and applicable to the dynamic nature of language within virtual space among younger people.

The other limitation is that the research focuses on the written communication. Though the speech patterns of Gen-Z can also be used as indicators of informality and restructuring, the research is limited to the digital type of writing, including texting, posts in social media, instant messaging, and other online communication. The limited scope of the research prevents the needless generalizations and gives more attention to the context in which punctuation drop is most prominent.

The study is also confined in terms of geography and culture to the use of English language online. It does not explore the practice of punctuation in other languages or seeks to compare Gen-Z writing to writing in several different linguistic backgrounds. Rather, it limits to English used by youths in online communication and this makes the results more consistent and easy to handle.

Moreover, the research does not purport to study all the technological platforms at a fine detail. Although the examples can be made with references to such popular platforms as WhatsApp, Instagram, Tik Tok, or Twitter, the aim is not to analyze the platform but observe the overall

tendency in punctuation drop and syntax reorganization in digital communication platforms. This makes the study general enough to get general patterns without narrowing down to platform-specific features.

Finally, the area of assessment of impact is limited in this study. Although it also realizes the possible threats of punctuation drop to English language clarity and grammar, it does not strive to forecast the fate of English language in its entirety. Rather, it just stays within the confines of examining the present-day online writing trends among Gen-Z and their effects on literacy, as well as the potential solutions to excessive reliance on punctuation-free communication.

## 2. Literature Review:

A sentence is the largest structure of grammar existing independently: a group of words that conveys a complete thought. When in writing, it starts by beginning with a capital letter and ends with a terminal punctuation mark (period, question mark, or exclamation point) (Huddleston & Pullum, 2019).

Kolln and Funk (2019) in Understanding English Grammar believe that "a sentence is a group of words expressing a complete thought, anchored by a subject and verb, and concluded with appropriate punctuation (e.g., period, question mark) that signals the end of the thought and guides the reader's interpretation. Punctuation, such as commas, semicolons, and colons, organizes sentence elements by indicating pauses, separating clauses, or connecting related ideas. For instance, commas in a complex sentence separate dependent clauses from the main clause, clarifying the syntactic hierarchy and preventing misinterpretation". The given definitions illustrate the importance of punctuation marks in the completion of a sentence, demonstrating its necessity with respect to the syntactic rules.

Punctuation has existed since the invention of writing. Punctuation marks were originally used to indicate points, where the reader needed to pause. Punctuation guides the reader through the syntactic structure, making complicated sentences easier to breakdown. For instance, parentheses or dashes can isolate non-essential information, while semicolons link closely related independent clauses, maintaining syntactic cohesion (Quirk & Crystal, 2010).

Punctuation marks like question marks or exclamation points indicate a sentence's illocutionary force (e.g., questioning, exclaiming). Dropping these marks can obscure whether a sentence is a statement, question, or command, leading to miscommunication of the syntactic function (Biber & Conard, 2019).

Example: "You are coming" (missing question mark) could be mistaken for a statement rather than "You are coming?" The absence of the question mark obscures the interrogative structure.

The increasing influence of digitalization has marked evolution in today's generation's (Gen Z) language. Today's generation primarily Gen Z (born 1997 – 2012) has increasingly adopted informal digital communication styles, particularly in texting and social media, where traditional punctuation is often omitted and repurposed (Fonteyn, 2023).

Jabeen and Nawaz (2025), say that "as digital natives, Generation Z has been immersed in the internet, social media, and mobile technologies, which have facilitated novel avenues for language experimentation and invention. Gen Z, with unparalleled access to global digital communication platforms, is significantly influencing the English language, especially through its innovative manipulation of Syntax – structure of sentences."

In digital environments valuing conciseness and promptness, users are always recontextualizing and creating novel linguistic forms to adapt. Social networking platforms inherently promote innovation by amalgamating words, abbreviating sentences or changing the basic syntactic rules (Danesi, 2016).

The arguments given above prove the pivotal point as Bybee (2015), says "language change is an integral part of language and an inevitable outcome of language use".

This research deals with the interposition of digitalization in language and the syntactic changes occurring in everyday language. Fonteyn (2023), Dolot (2018) and Crystal (2018) have elaborated the effects of digital communication in language that are focused on reshaping lexical rules. This change results in syntactic restructuring, where boundaries blur and meaning relies more on modern visual cues than traditional punctuation. The minimal employment of punctuation serves as marker of tone, immediacy, intimacy and informality rather than a grammatical oversight highlighting the triviality of following syntactic rules among Generation Z. This study aims to comprehend global English language changes among Generation Z in syntax and punctuation with a focus on South Asian countries, where second language gap enhances such influences.

3.  **Research Methodology**

The research methods were a **combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches** as the study aimed to learn more about the usage of punctuations by the Generation Z and the development of their sentence structure. Such a mixed-method design will enable the researchers to measure the frequency of such language changes, as well as examine the attitudes and beliefs behind them. Consequently, the research is able to capture the more general trends as well as the more specific causes of the shifts in digital communication. The respondents of this study are the representative of the Gen Z generation, who are students of the university and are thus a perfect target population to conduct such research because they actively use online platforms. Online learning and social media, messaging and social media apps often involve these students in informal writing. They also portray a wide spectrum of cultural and English language proficiencies enabling the study to capture a very broad spectrum of both academic and social backgrounds of the same generation.

The researchers used **convenience sampling** based on factors of accessibility and willingness to take part. This technique is particularly convenient in research that deals with modern language application since it leads to the gathering of data in time and in the most cost-effective manner.

The participants were represented in various universities and were sampled based on the fact that they have regular use of online communication in their daily lives.

A **structured questionnaire** that would allow recording both quantitative and qualitative information was used as the main data collection instrument. It included yes-no questions to determine the frequency of punctuations omissions and syntactic alterations as well as the open-ended questions to reveal the motivations, views, and perceptions of the participants concerning the changes. The combination provided clarity and depth in the answers which was suitable to the mixed-method approach. Information was obtained by use of online questionnaires which were simple to fill and provided anonymity to the participants. The survey was distributed on university networks and social media, and within a short period of time, it reached a heterogeneous cross-section of Generation Z students. Thereafter, the answers were thoroughly summarized and discussed to determine patterns, tendencies, and relationships that applied to the use of punctuation, development of sentence structure, and the impact of digital technology. The methodology will ensure the findings of the study have a base on real-world information and is highly applicable to the current transformation of the language.

## 4. Data Analysis

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Male | 12 | 29.3% |
| | Female | 28 | 68.3% |
| Highest qualification | Higher secondary | 4 | 9.8% |
| | Bachelors | 35 | 85.4% |
| | Higher | 2 | 4.9% |
| Communication Platforms | WhatsApp | 38 | 92.7% |
| | Instagram | 10 | 24.4% |
| | Snapchat | 3 | 7.3% |
| | Twitter | 0 | 0% |
| Usage of punctuation in online texting | Always | 1 | 2.4% |
| | Often | 10 | 24.4% |
| | Sometimes | 9 | 22% |
| | Rarely | 14 | 34.1% |
| | Never | 9 | 22% |
| Reasons of punctuation drop in digital messages | For casualty | 8 | 19.5% |
| | To save time | 15 | 36.6% |
| | Influenced by trends | 1 | 2.4% |
| | For better tone | | |

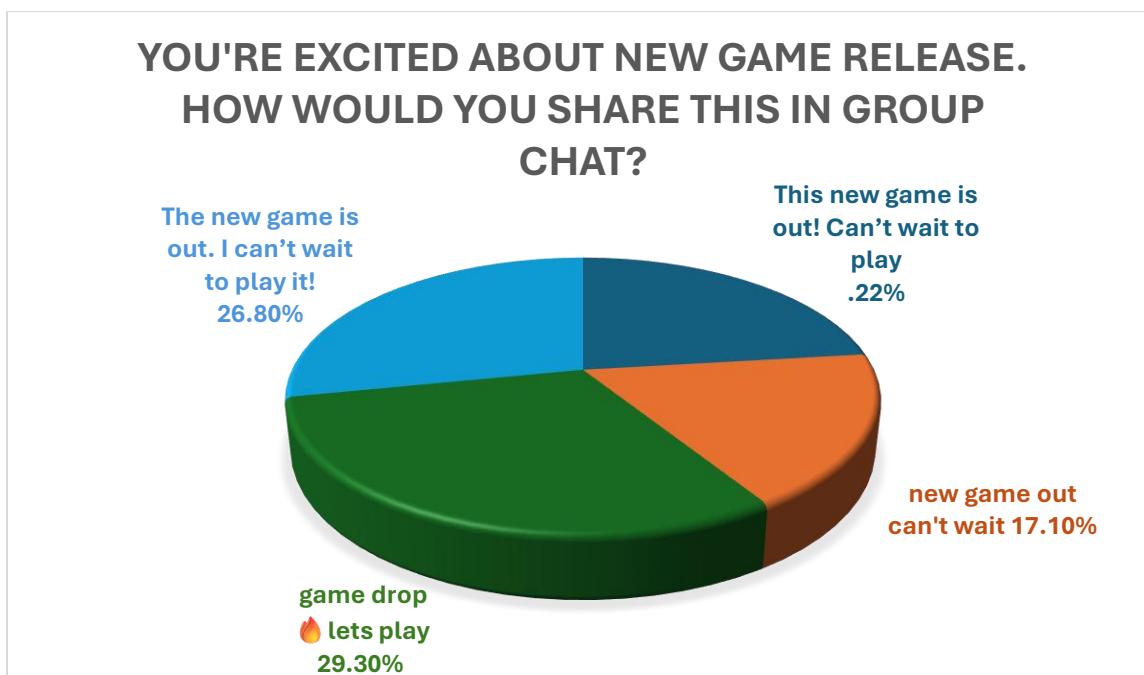| | | 11 | 26.8% |
|---|---|---|---|
| Use of lower case letters in digital messages | Always | 5 | 12.2% |
| | Often | 12 | 29.3% |
| | Sometimes | 10 | 24.4% |
| | Rarely | 12 | 29.3% |
| | Never | 5 | 12.2% |
| Situations to restructure sentences for shortness | While texting friends | 24 | 58.5% |
| | To fit character limits | | |
| | In social media comments | 4 | 9.8% |
| | | 5 | 12.2% |
| Replacement of sentences with emojis and slangs | Always | 7 | 17.1% |
| | Often | 17 | 41.5% |
| | Sometimes | 10 | 24.4% |
| | Rarely | 5 | 12.2% |
| | Never | 4 | 9.8% |
| Pressure to adapt punctuation to match peers | A lot | 6 | 14.6% |
| | Somewhat | 10 | 24.4% |
| | Neutral | 10 | 24.4% |
| | Not really | 12 | 29.3% |
| | Not at all | 5 | 12.2% |
| Effect of punctuation drop and syntax restructuring in understanding conversations | More efficient and relatable | 12 | 29.3% |
| | No effect | | |
| | Causes confusion | 6 | 14.6% |
| | Often cause misunderstanding | 22 | 53.7% |
| | | 4 | 9.8% |
| Changes in your own communication style over past 5 years | Yes (and similar) | 21 | 51% |
| | No (and similar) | 3 | 7% |
| | Others/ Mixed | 17 | 42% |

The study comprises of **Generation Z** mainly focusing on undergraduate university students with the aim of analyzing their **punctuation and syntax restructuring practices in digital communication**. WhatsApp dominates as the main communication medium with Instagram and Snapchat as secondary source of informal conversations in youth participants. The conducted research analyzes that large population rarely or **never use the punctuation in online texting** with

most people dropping the punctuation to convey informal tone, for relatability and to save time. Some of them also feel pressure to use punctuation, so that they could match their peers, **as punctuation drop has become trend in online communication norms**, but many participants also resist trend influence, indicating individuality in writing styles, which means that many individuals themselves drop punctuation being more casual and stylistic in their writings. The majority almost 63.5% believe and acknowledges that because of punctuation drop clarity suffers, reinforcing that informal conversations despite being expressive, risk misinterpretation.

The use of lower case letters in online communications also implies more casualness and emotional neutrality in modern digital tone and hence, more restructuring of sentences also occurs in **informal peer conversations for connectivity**. Nearly 59% (always or often) frequently replace sentences with emojis and slangs, showcasing shift in modern digital communication, like **giving more importance to emotional appeal, connectivity and friendly tone over syntax.** Because of shift in digital communication and driven by technological trends, most of the participants feel changes in their own communication style which suggest linguistic shifts and syntax restructuring in modern generation. Through this study, it is evident that Online Communication or discourse has led to a noticeable decline in standard linguistic norms and punctuation rules.

**If your freind asks what are you doing tonight? How would you respond if you're watching Netflix**

- I'm Watching Netflix tonigt. — 27%
- Watching Netflix — 27%
- watching netflix — 19%
- netflix night lol — 7%
- Netflix — 20%

YOU'RE EXCITED ABOUT NEW GAME RELEASE. HOW WOULD YOU SHARE THIS IN GROUP CHAT?
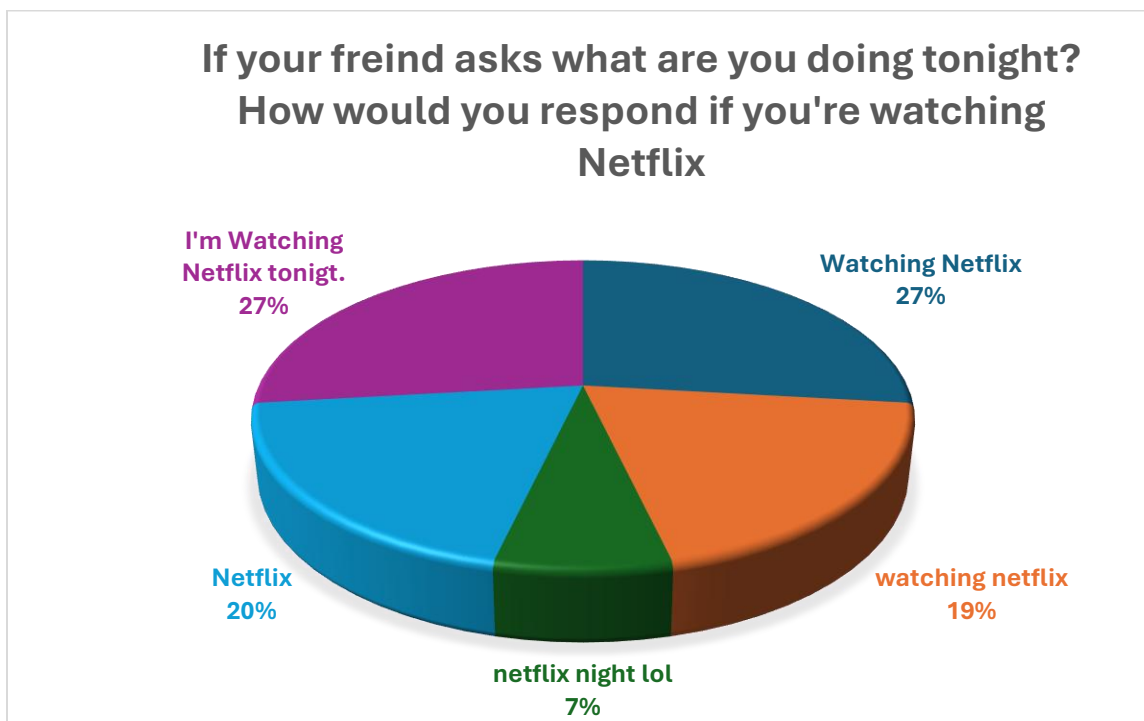
Above figure shows a qualitative insight, highlighting the casual style and novel terms in communication on digital platforms during online chats. The use of emojis and short phrases have overshadowed the proper use of grammar and standard syntactic structures, giving an informal and incomplete tone to the sentences. The short reel culture which has reduced the attention span, caused focus retention and the coginitive impatience in Gen Z is evidently visible in their online communications.

**Conclusion:**

This study concludes that digital means of communication has greatly altered the communication styles chiefly among Gen Z, normalizing the punctuation drop and syntax restructuring. The role of punctuation and rules of syntax are to be seen as a formality, now restricted just for professional or formal use, by Gen Z. While in online communications with their peers, young generation tend to be more expressive, preferring casualty and informality often omitting punctuation and restructuring the sentences by using short phrases, emojis and slangs. The study demonstrates that WhatsApp, Instagram, and Snapchat have become platforms to become more relatable, expressive and trend-followers in online discourses effecting the linguistic standards. The problem needs to be taken in account by the young generations, regulating the use and importance of punctuation, before this trend influence turns into linguistic decay. To preserve linguistic standards, digital literacy should be taught by training students to avoid over reliance on emojis, short phrases and through curriculum in educational institutions.

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