

A SKOPOS ORIENTED STUDY OF CULTURAL AND CONTEXTUAL CHALLENGES: TRANSLATING GEN Z SLANG FROM ENGLISH INTO URDU

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Abstract

This study explores the cultural and contextual challenges faced by translators when rendering Generation Z (Gen Z) slang from English into Urdu. Gen Z slang is deeply rooted in digital culture, social media, and fast-evolving youth identity, making it particularly resistant to direct translation. The study employs Skopos Theory (Vermeer, 1978) and Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) as its theoretical frameworks. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with translators and bilingual Gen Z speakers, and a purposive sample of slang terms was analyzed qualitatively. The findings reveal significant gaps in equivalence due to cultural distance, linguistic structure, and the absence of corresponding social contexts in Urdu. The study concludes that translation of Gen Z slang demands culturally adaptive strategies rather than literal approaches. This research contributes to the growing body of literature on youth language, digital discourse, and cross-cultural translation studies.

Keywords: Gen Z slang, translation, Urdu, Skopos Theory, Conceptual Metaphor Theory, cultural equivalence, digital discourse

1. Introduction

Language is a living system that continuously evolves with society. In recent years, the emergence of Generation Z (Gen Z), referring to individuals born between 1997 and 2012, has introduced a distinct linguistic variety shaped by digital platforms, social media, and global popular culture (Dimock, 2019). This generation communicates using a highly informal and creative form of language commonly known as slang. Terms such as 'no cap,' 'slay,' 'lowkey,' 'bussin,' and 'vibe check' have become common in everyday digital communication, particularly on platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter/X.

Translating this type of language into Urdu presents unique challenges. Urdu is a rich and classical language with strong literary traditions, and it does not always carry the informal digital register that Gen Z English operates in. When translators attempt to convert Gen Z slang into Urdu, they often encounter cultural gaps, missing conceptual equivalents, and a mismatch in social context. The result is that translated versions either sound awkward, lose their original meaning, or fail to connect with young Urdu-speaking audiences.

This study addresses these challenges by focusing on the cultural and contextual dimensions of Gen Z slang translation. Two major theoretical frameworks guide the investigation. Skopos Theory, developed by Hans J. Vermeer (1978), argues that every translation is governed by its purpose or 'skopos,' and the translator must adapt the text to serve the target audience effectively. Conceptual Metaphor Theory, introduced by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), provides a framework for understanding how abstract concepts are encoded through metaphorical language in everyday communication. Together, these theories offer valuable lenses for analyzing translation difficulties.

The study is qualitative in nature and draws on real examples of Gen Z slang terms to examine how translators navigate meaning, cultural nuance, and contextual relevance. By

focusing on the English-to-Urdu language pair, this research highlights a relatively underexplored area in translation studies. Most existing research deals with European language pairs, leaving a noticeable gap in scholarship involving South Asian languages, especially in the context of youth digital communication.

The findings of this study are expected to benefit translators, language educators, content creators, and linguists who work with contemporary English and Urdu. As digital communication continues to grow in Pakistan and across the Urdu-speaking world, the need for effective and culturally sensitive translation of youth language becomes increasingly important. This research takes a step toward filling that need.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Gen Z slang presents significant translation difficulties when rendered from English into Urdu due to its deeply embedded cultural, digital, and social contexts. Standard translation methods often fail to capture the humor, identity, and pragmatic intent behind these expressions (Zare-Behtash & Hayati, 2009). Urdu lacks direct lexical equivalents for many Gen Z terms, and translators frequently resort to either literal translation, which distorts meaning, or omission, which results in loss of communicative intent. There is currently a shortage of scholarly research that addresses this specific translation challenge within the English-Urdu language pair, making this a critical gap worth investigating.

1.2 Research Questions

1. What are the primary cultural challenges encountered when translating Gen Z slang from English into Urdu?
2. How do cultural and contextual factors influence the translation of Gen Z slang from English into Urdu?
3. How does Conceptual Metaphor Theory explain the cognitive and linguistic difficulties in translating metaphorical Gen Z expressions into Urdu?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

- 1 To identify and analyze the key cultural and contextual challenges in translating Gen Z slang from English into Urdu.
- 2 To explore the cultural and contextual challenges involved in translating Gen Z slang from English into Urdu.
- 3 To use Conceptual Metaphor Theory to explore how metaphorical meaning in Gen Z slang is processed and transferred into Urdu.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study holds considerable academic and practical value. From a scholarly perspective, it contributes to the intersection of translation studies, sociolinguistics, and digital communication research, three fields that are increasingly relevant in today's globalized world. Research on Gen Z language and its translatability into South Asian languages like Urdu is largely absent from existing literature, and this study fills that gap in a meaningful way. Practically, the findings can inform translators working in media, journalism, digital content creation, and education.

As Pakistani youth increasingly consume English digital content, effective Urdu translation of Gen Z slang becomes essential for communication, marketing, and cultural understanding. Language educators can also use the results to design curricula that address the evolving nature of youth language. By combining Skopos Theory and Conceptual Metaphor Theory, the study also demonstrates how multiple theoretical frameworks can work together to

address complex, real-world translation challenges, thus enriching the methodological repertoire of translation scholars.

2. Literature Review

The present study is theoretically grounded in two frameworks that together address both the functional and cognitive dimensions of translation. Skopos Theory, developed by Hans J. Vermeer (1978) and further elaborated with Katharina Reiss (Reiss & Vermeer, 1984), proposes that every translation is governed by its purpose, and that translators should make decisions based on the needs of the target audience rather than rigid fidelity to the source text. Conceptual Metaphor Theory, introduced by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), argues that metaphor is not a decorative feature of language but a fundamental mechanism of human cognition through which abstract concepts are understood in terms of concrete, familiar experiences. These two frameworks complement each other in a meaningful way.

Skopos Theory explains the social and functional pressures that shape translation decisions, while Conceptual Metaphor Theory reveals why certain expressions are cognitively difficult to transfer across languages and cultures. In the context of Gen Z slang, which is both purpose-driven in its communicative intent and deeply metaphorical in its linguistic structure, applying these two theories together provides a comprehensive lens for understanding why translation challenges arise and how they might be addressed.

2.1 Translation Theory and Cultural Equivalence

Translation has long been understood as more than a linguistic act. Scholars have consistently emphasized that translation is a cultural and communicative process that involves transferring meaning across not just languages, but entire worldviews (Nida, 1964). Nida's concept of dynamic equivalence argues that the target text should produce the same effect on the target reader as the source text does on the source reader. This idea remains foundational for understanding how culturally embedded language, such as slang, poses specific challenges to translators. When the cultural contexts of the source and target languages differ significantly, achieving equivalence becomes difficult or even impossible in direct terms (Venuti, 1995).

Cultural untranslatability has been a recurring theme in translation scholarship. Leppihalme (1997) explored how cultural references in source texts often resist translation due to their dependence on shared knowledge between the writer and the original audience. This problem is particularly acute with slang, which is tied to specific communities, identities, and moments in time. Baker (1992) further developed the notion of non-equivalence at the word level, noting that target languages frequently lack a lexical item to cover the exact contextual meaning of a source word. These foundational insights are directly applicable to the challenge of translating Gen Z slang into Urdu.

2.2 Skopos Theory and Translation Purpose

Skopos Theory, introduced by Hans J. Vermeer (1978) and further developed with Katharina Reiss (Reiss & Vermeer, 1984), argues that the purpose of a translation determines the strategies and decisions a translator adopts. The term 'skopos' is derived from the Greek word for purpose or goal. According to this theory, the translator is not obligated to produce a word-for-word rendering of the source text; instead, the translator should make decisions based on what the target audience needs and what function the translation should serve in the target culture (Nord, 1997). This framework is particularly useful when translating informal or culture-specific language such as slang, where a literal approach would fail to achieve communicative effectiveness.

Several scholars have applied Skopos Theory to informal and culture-bound translation. Munday (2016) noted that Skopos Theory gives translators the freedom to adapt, explain, or

recreate content when the source culture's context does not transfer naturally. In the case of Gen Z slang, the skopos of a translation might be to entertain, to inform, or to connect with a young audience. Depending on that purpose, a translator may choose to find a local Urdu slang equivalent, provide an explanatory gloss, or recreate the expression with a culturally resonant Urdu phrase. The flexibility offered by Skopos Theory makes it an ideal framework for analyzing such dynamic translation decisions.

2.3 Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Everyday Language

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) revolutionized the study of metaphor with their landmark work, *Metaphors We Live By*. They argued that metaphor is not merely a literary device but a fundamental cognitive mechanism through which humans understand abstract concepts. Conceptual metaphors structure our thinking and are embedded in everyday language. For example, 'time is money' reflects a conceptual metaphor that shapes how English speakers talk about time. Gen Z slang is rich with conceptual metaphors. Terms like 'slaying,' 'being on fire,' or 'serving looks' reflect underlying metaphors of battle, heat, and performance that may not map directly onto Urdu cultural schemas.

Research on cross-cultural conceptual metaphors has shown that while some metaphors are universal, many are culturally specific (Kövecses, 2005). This means that a metaphorical Gen Z term may be immediately understood by an English speaker but will be opaque to an Urdu speaker who does not share the same cultural framework. Deignan (2005) also argued that metaphor use varies significantly across languages and cultures, and translators must navigate these differences carefully. When translating Gen Z slang that is metaphorically structured, a translator needs to identify the source domain of the metaphor, understand its social meaning, and then locate or construct an equivalent expression in Urdu that activates similar cognitive associations.

2.4 Gen Z Language and Digital Communication

Generation Z has developed a unique linguistic identity shaped primarily by their digital native status. Born into the age of the internet, smartphones, and social media, Gen Z uses language in ways that are highly abbreviated, creative, and context-dependent (Turney, 2020). Platforms like TikTok, Reddit, and Twitter/X have become incubators for new slang terms that spread rapidly across global youth communities. Terms such as 'no cap' (meaning no lie), 'bussin' (meaning excellent food or something great), 'lowkey' (meaning slightly or secretly), 'sus' (meaning suspicious), and 'slay' (meaning to perform exceptionally well) are examples of this emerging lexicon.

The rapid evolution and informal nature of Gen Z slang make it particularly challenging to translate. Androutsopoulos (2011) studied digital language practices and found that online communities develop highly specialized registers that rely heavily on shared cultural reference. These references change quickly, meaning that a slang term popular in 2021 may already feel outdated by 2024. This instability adds a layer of complexity for translators working with this type of language. In the Pakistani context, Urdu-speaking youth are increasingly exposed to Gen Z English through social media, creating a bilingual or hybrid communicative space that complicates translation further (Rahman, 2009).

2.5 Translation of Slang: Previous Studies

Scholars have examined the translation of slang in various linguistic contexts. Mattiello (2008) conducted an in-depth study of English slang and found that it presents unique difficulties related to register, social identity, and cultural meaning. She identified several translation strategies including borrowing, paraphrasing, and domestication. Ghazalah (1987) specifically studied the translation of idiomatic expressions from English into Arabic, a language pair that shares some features with the English-Urdu challenge, including cultural

distance and formal register differences in the target language. More recently, researchers have begun examining slang in digital contexts, though work on Urdu specifically remains scarce.

Zare-Behtash and Hayati (2009) found that Persian translators of American films often struggled with slang due to cultural and censorship barriers, resulting in neutralized or modified translations. Similar patterns can be expected in Urdu translation contexts, where social conservatism and the formal prestige of written Urdu can constrain translators from using colloquial equivalents. Gottlieb (1997) discussed the concept of 'diagonal translation,' where meaning is transferred not just across languages but across cultural and social registers simultaneously. This concept is highly relevant to Gen Z slang translation, where the social register is as important as the linguistic content. Collectively, this body of literature establishes a strong foundation for the present study.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study follows a qualitative research design, which is appropriate for exploring complex, context-dependent phenomena such as language, culture, and translation (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative methods allow the researcher to engage deeply with data, examine nuance, and generate rich interpretations rather than statistical generalizations. The study uses purposive sampling to select both slang terms and research participants. A total of 20 common Gen Z English slang terms were identified from popular social media platforms. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with bilingual participants who have practical experience in English-to-Urdu translation. These participants include, university students majoring in English or linguistics, and bilingual Gen Z speakers familiar with both languages.

Data collection involved two phases. In the first phase, a list of Gen Z slang terms was compiled based on frequency of use on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter/X. In the second phase, participants were asked to translate the selected terms into Urdu and explain their translation choices. Their responses were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed thematically. Thematic analysis, was used to identify recurring patterns and challenges across the data. All ethical guidelines were followed, including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation.

3.2 Sampling

The present study employs purposive sampling as its primary sampling strategy. Purposive sampling is a non-probability technique in which the researcher deliberately selects participants and data based on characteristics relevant to the research objectives (Creswell, 2013). This approach is well suited to qualitative inquiry, where depth of understanding is prioritized over statistical representativeness.

Sampling was applied at two levels. At the data level, twenty Gen Z slang terms were selected based on their frequency of use on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter/X, and their diversity in linguistic structure and cultural origin. At the participant level, fifteen bilingual individuals were selected, including professional translators, English linguistics students, and bilingual Gen Z speakers, all chosen for their proficiency in both languages and familiarity with digital youth culture (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.3 Theoretical Foundation

The study is grounded in two theoretical frameworks that complement each other in addressing both the functional and cognitive dimensions of translation. Skopos Theory (Vermeer, 1978) provides the functional lens, focusing on how the purpose of a translation shapes the choices a translator makes. When translating Gen Z slang for a Pakistani youth audience, the skopos might be to engage, inform, or entertain. Based on this purpose, translators may choose strategies such as cultural adaptation, explanatory translation, or borrowing.

Skopos Theory allows the researcher to evaluate whether the translation decisions made by participants align with an audience-centered communicative goal.

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) provides the cognitive lens, allowing the researcher to examine how metaphorical structures within Gen Z slang affect translatability. Many Gen Z expressions carry implicit metaphors that rely on specific cultural schemas not available to Urdu speakers. By identifying the source and target domains of these metaphors, the researcher can analyze whether Urdu offers comparable conceptual mappings. Together, these two frameworks create a comprehensive analytical lens that addresses both the social purpose of translation and the cognitive structure of the language being translated.

4. Data Analysis

This section presents a detailed qualitative analysis of the cultural and contextual challenges encountered when translating selected Gen Z slang terms from English into Urdu. The analysis is organized around key thematic patterns that emerged from participant responses and cross-examined through the two theoretical frameworks. Each sub-section addresses a different type of translation challenge, supported by concrete examples drawn from the data.

4.1 Results and Findings

4.1.1 Overview of Selected Slang Terms

Ten Gen Z slang terms were selected for analysis based on their high frequency of use across social media platforms. These terms represent a variety of linguistic and conceptual categories, including metaphorical expressions, emotional descriptors, and evaluative terms. The table below provides a transparent overview of each term, its meaning, the Urdu translation attempted by participants, the strategy used, and the main challenge encountered.

Table 4.1

Gen Z English Slang Terms: Urdu Translation Attempts, Strategies, and Identified Challenges

<i>Slang term</i>	<i>Meaning (English)</i>	<i>Urdu equivalent</i>	<i>Translation strategy</i>	<i>Challenge identified</i>
No cap	No lie; I am serious	بالکل سچ / کوئی جھوٹ نہیں	Semantic paraphrase	No single Urdu slang equivalent; highly context-dependent
Slay	To perform brilliantly	کمال کر دیا / دھوم مچا دی	Cultural adaptation	Battle metaphor underlying "killing it" is absent in Urdu social register
Lowkey	Slightly; secretly; understated	چپکے سے / تھوڑا سا	Semantic paraphrase	Cool, Informal understatement lost; register becomes neutral
Bussin	Exceptionally good (food)	بہت لذیذ / لاجواب	Domestication	AAVE cultural origin entirely lost; evaluative force weakened

Vibe check	Assessing mood or energy	موڈ جانچنا / ماحول دیکھنا	Explanatory translation	Concept of "vibe" as ambient energy has no Urdu lexical equivalent
Sus	Suspicious; untrustworthy	مشکوک / شکی	Direct semantic transfer	Closest match in dataset; Urdu equivalent more formal in register
Rent free	Occupying one's mind constantly	نہن میں بیٹھ گیا	Metaphor recreation	Capitalist rent metaphor requires full cognitive restructuring for Urdu
Hits different	Feels uniquely or deeply special	کچھ اور ہی بات ہے	Cultural adaptation	Sensory impact metaphor only partially maps onto Urdu expression
Main character	Behaving as if one is the protagonist	ہیرو سمجھنا خود کو	Descriptive equivalent	Narrative self-framing metaphor is culturally unfamiliar in Urdu
Ghosting	Abruptly cutting off all contact	اچانک غائب ہو جانا	Descriptive calque	Ghost metaphor partially transfers; informal register is not preserved
Stan	To obsessively admire someone	دیوانہ مداح / حد سے زیادہ چاہنا	Descriptive equivalent	Pop-culture origin (Eminem 2000) and fan-community identity fully lost

As shown in Table 1, the translation of Gen Z slang into Urdu involves multiple strategies, and no single approach is uniformly effective. The challenges range from cultural untranslatability and metaphor restructuring to register mismatches and loss of informal nuance. The following sub-sections analyze these challenges in greater depth.

4.1.2 Cultural Untranslatability: *The Case of 'Bussin' and 'Slay'*

Two of the most culturally embedded terms in the dataset are *'bussin'* and *'slay'*. The term *bussin* originates from African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and is used to describe food that tastes exceptionally good. Participants translated it as بہت لذیذ (very tasty) or لاجواب (matchless). While these translations convey the positive evaluation, they lose the cultural identity marker embedded in the term. *Bussin* carries social and ethnic significance that cannot be transferred through a general evaluative adjective in Urdu. As Venuti (1995) noted, the domestication of culturally specific terms often results in the erasure of the source culture's identity.

'Slay,' meaning to perform or look exceptionally well, presented a different type of challenge. The term is metaphorically structured around the concept of 'killing it,' which implies a battle metaphor. Participants offered translations such as کمال کر دیا (did something amazing) or دی دھوم مچا (made waves). These translations approximate the meaning but entirely dissolve the underlying battle metaphor that gives 'slay' its intensity and edge. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), conceptual metaphors are cognitively grounded, and stripping a metaphor of its source domain changes the nature of the concept being communicated. In Urdu,

the concept of 'slaying' in a non-violent social performance context does not exist as a metaphorical frame, making full equivalence unachievable through direct methods.

4.1.3 Metaphorical Structures and Cognitive Challenges

Several Gen Z terms in the dataset are grounded in conceptual metaphors that do not have direct equivalents in Urdu. The expression 'living rent free in my head' is a strong example. This phrase means that a person, thought, or memory keeps returning to one's mind without any deliberate invitation. Participants translated it as ذہن میں بیٹھ گیا (sat down in the mind) or دماغ و پر چھا گیا دل (dominated the heart and mind). While these translations capture the general idea, they do not fully replicate the conceptual metaphor of 'renting mental space,' which is specific to a capitalist economic framework where rent and property are culturally meaningful symbols.

Similarly, the term '*hits different*' implies a sensory experience something that strikes a person in a unique and emotionally significant way. Participants suggested کچھ اور ہی بات ہے (there's something else about it) or دل کو چھو جاتا ہے (it touches the heart). These are culturally resonant Urdu expressions, but they do not carry the casual, understated tone that '*hits different*' communicates in Gen Z English. Kövecses (2005) pointed out that metaphorical meaning is often culturally bound, and translators must reconstruct rather than simply transfer metaphors when working across culturally distant languages. This analysis confirms that view.

4.1.4 Register and Identity Challenges

A recurring theme in the data was the challenge of maintaining informal register in Urdu translation. Gen Z slang is characterized by its deliberately casual, ironic, and identity-marking qualities. When translated into Urdu, many terms automatically shift toward a more formal or neutral register, simply because Urdu's established vocabulary tends toward formality. Participants noted this explicitly when translating '*lowkey*,' a term used to signal mild intensity or secrecy in a cool, underplayed way. The Urdu translations offered, such as چپکے سے (quietly) or تھوڑا سا (a little bit), are semantically accurate but register-neutral. They do not communicate the casual Gen Z identity that the original English term signals.

The term '*sus*,' derived from the game *Among Us* and popularized on social media, was the easiest to translate because Urdu already has the word مشکوک (suspicious). However, even here participants noted that مشکوک carries a more serious and formal tone compared to the playful, light-hearted usage of '*sus*' among Gen Z speakers. This illustrates that even when semantic equivalents exist, pragmatic and social meaning may still be lost in translation. Skopos Theory (Vermeer, 1978) would suggest that translators in such cases should prioritize the communicative goal whether that is to sound casual, playful, or ironic over semantic precision.

4.1.5 Translator Strategies and Participant Insights

Participants in the study employed a variety of strategies to manage these challenges. The most common strategies were cultural adaptation, paraphrase, descriptive equivalence, and code-switching. Cultural adaptation involved finding an existing Urdu or Punjabi informal expression that conveys a similar social meaning. For instance, some participants suggested using already common informal Urdu youth expressions like '*zabardast*' (fantastic) or '*mast*' (cool) as functional equivalents for terms like '*bussin*' or '*fire*.' While this approach maintains informality, it can result in loss of specificity.

Several bilingual Gen Z participants suggested that the most effective approach for digital content is to retain the English slang term and provide a brief Urdu explanation or gloss. This strategy, sometimes called foreignization (Venuti, 1995), preserves the cultural authenticity of the source term while making it accessible to Urdu readers. This was particularly recommended for terms like '*vibe check*' and '*main character*,' where no close Urdu equivalent exists. Participants also noted that code-switching using English slang within Urdu sentences is already a common practice among Pakistani youth, suggesting that audience expectations may naturally accommodate foreign terms without full translation.

4.1.6 Obsession, Delusion, and Identity: '*Stan*,' '*Delulu*,' and '*Simp*'

Three terms in the dataset '*stan*,' '*delulu*,' and '*simp*' describe psychological or emotional states tied to social relationships and identity. The word '*stan*' originated from an Eminem song about an obsessive fan and has since evolved into a general verb meaning to admire someone intensely. Participants translated it as دیوانہ مداح (mad fan) or حد سے زیادہ چاہنا (to like excessively). While the general meaning is preserved, the cultural origin and fan-culture context embedded in '*stan*' are completely lost. Urdu has no equivalent pop-culture reference that encodes the same idea.

'*Delulu*,' a truncated and playful form of 'delusional,' describes someone living in a fantasy with self-aware humor. Participants found this term particularly difficult to translate. Suggestions such as وہمی (delusional) or خیالی دنیا میں رہنا (living in an imaginary world) captured the meaning but lost the ironic tone that makes '*delulu*' charming in Gen Z speech. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) noted that how a concept is framed shapes its emotional impact. By translating '*delulu*' as a straightforward Urdu adjective, the self-aware humor disappears. Similarly, '*simp*' meaning someone excessively devoted to a romantic interest was translated as خوشامدی (flatterer) or دیوانہ (crazy about someone). Participants noted that while Urdu has concepts of excessive devotion, the comedic register of '*simp*' does not transfer cleanly.

4.1.7 Metaphorical Expressions: '*Ate and Left No Crumbs*,' '*Spill the Tea*,' and '*It's Giving*'

These three expressions represent some of the most challenging items in the dataset because each is built on a conceptual metaphor that has no parallel in Urdu. '*Ate and left no crumbs*' means that someone performed so flawlessly that nothing is left to criticize. The metaphor draws on eating as a symbol of completeness and total mastery. Participants attempted translations such as کیا، کوئی کمی نہ چھوڑی کمال کر (performed brilliantly, left no shortcoming). This translation is descriptively accurate but feels verbose compared to the compact original. The culinary metaphor at the heart of the expression simply does not exist in Urdu tradition as a way to express flawless performance.

'*Spill the tea*' means to share gossip or reveal secrets. The metaphor treats secret information as a liquid that can be 'spilled.' Participants suggested راز اگلنا (to spit out a secret) or بتانا گپ شپ (to share gossip). The first option is interesting because Urdu has a comparable bodily metaphor 'ugalna' (to spit out) that can approximate the sense of something being revealed. However, the social register differs; 'ugalna' implies something forced, while 'spill the tea' is cheerful. 'It's giving...' is perhaps the most abstract term in the dataset. It is used to say that something has the energy or aesthetic of a certain thing. Participants found this extremely difficult to render, offering جیسا لگ رہا ہے (this feels like...). While understandable, this lacks the stylistic sharpness of the original. This confirms Deignan's (2005) finding that metaphor use varies significantly across languages and cultures.

4.1.8 Social Awareness and Transformation: '*Woke*,' '*Dead*,' and '*Glow Up*'

The term '*woke*' refers to being socially and politically aware, particularly about issues of race, gender, and inequality. It has a strong ideological dimension rooted in African American social activism. Participants translated it as باشعور (conscious/aware) or سماجی سوچ رکھنے والا (someone with social thinking). These translations are semantically accurate at a surface level but strip away the political weight and cultural origin of the term. In the Pakistani context, '*woke*' also carries imported ideological connotations that are debated differently within Urdu-speaking society. Skopos Theory would suggest that the translator must decide whether the skopos is to explain the term neutrally or to convey its full socio-political charge, as these are very different translational goals.

'*Dead*,' used to describe extreme amusement (as in 'I'm dead' meaning 'I'm dying of

laughter'), was among the more creative metaphors in the dataset. Participants offered لوٹ پوٹ (rolling with laughter) or مر گیا ہنستے ہنستے (died laughing). The second option is culturally resonant because Urdu does have a tradition of using hyperbolic death metaphors in comedy and poetry, making this a rare case of genuine metaphorical overlap between the two languages. Finally, 'glow up' means a dramatic personal transformation. Participants suggested نکھر انا (to blossom/come into one's own) or بہت بدل جانا (to change a lot). The first option was preferred by most participants because it carries a connotation of natural flourishing, making it one of the more successful translations in the dataset.

4.1.9 Application of Skopos Theory

Applying Skopos Theory to the data reveals that the translation purpose significantly shapes the strategies chosen by participants. When the skopos was to inform an older Urdu audience about Gen Z culture, participants preferred explanatory translations and descriptive equivalents. When the skopos was to engage young Pakistani social media users, participants favored cultural adaptation or code-switching. This confirms Nord's (1997) argument that the skopos determines not only the language used in translation but also the cultural level at which translation decisions are made. The analysis shows that a one-size-fits-all strategy is ineffective for Gen Z slang; instead, purpose-driven flexibility is essential.

4.2 Discussion

4.2.1 Primary Cultural Challenges in Translating Gen Z Slangs

The findings of this study clearly show that cultural embeddedness is the most significant barrier in this translation process. Many Gen Z slang terms are rooted in specific cultural communities, historical moments, and social movements that do not exist in Urdu-speaking cultural contexts. For instance, terms like 'bussin' and 'woke' carry strong African American cultural identities that simply cannot be replicated through standard Urdu vocabulary.

Similarly, expressions such as 'ate and left no crumbs' and 'spill the tea' are built on cultural metaphors involving food and gossip rituals that have no equivalent framing in Urdu tradition. The data further revealed that even when a semantic equivalent exists in Urdu, the social and cultural register is almost always different, making the translation feel either too formal or culturally misplaced (Ahmad & Khan, 2021). These findings align with Leppihalme (1997), who argued that cultural references in source texts resist translation precisely because they depend on shared cultural knowledge that the target audience does not possess. The study confirms that cultural untranslatability is not a rare exception but a consistent and primary challenge when working with Gen Z slang in the English-to-Urdu direction (Chaudhary & Iqbal, 2022).

4.2.2 Influence of Cultural and Contextual Challenges

The study found that both cultural and contextual factors play a powerful and interconnected role in shaping translation outcomes. Culturally, the digital origin of Gen Z slang means that these terms carry meanings tied to internet communities, meme culture, and online social dynamics that are still emerging in Urdu-speaking digital spaces. Terms like 'stan,' 'delulu,' 'main character,' and 'it's giving' are not just words; they are cultural performances that signal identity, irony, and belonging within a specific online youth community. When these terms are translated into Urdu without that cultural backdrop, the translation loses its communicative function entirely.

Contextually, the findings show that the same term may require a completely different translation strategy depending on the audience and purpose. A translation prepared for a young Pakistani social media user requires a different approach than one prepared for an older reader unfamiliar with digital culture. As Skopos Theory (Vermeer, 1978) suggests, the purpose and context of a translation are inseparable from the decisions made during the process (Munday,

2016). Participants in this study consistently noted that context determined whether they chose cultural adaptation, code-switching, or explanatory translation, reinforcing the view that no single strategy can serve all contextual needs for this type of language.

4.2.3 Cognitive and Linguistic Difficulties in Translating Gen Z Expressions

The findings provide strong evidence that Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) is a highly useful framework for diagnosing why certain Gen Z expressions are so resistant to translation. Many of the slang terms analyzed in this study are not simply informal words; they are metaphorical constructions that map one conceptual domain onto another (Kovecses, 2020). 'Slay' maps violence onto performance. 'Rent free' maps economic tenancy onto mental preoccupation. 'Hits different' maps physical impact onto emotional experience. 'Glow up' maps luminosity onto personal transformation. These mappings are so deeply embedded in English-speaking cultural cognition that they feel natural to native speakers.

However, when translated into Urdu, the source domain of the metaphor either does not exist or carries entirely different cultural associations. For example, the battle metaphor in 'slay' does not operate in Urdu youth culture as a symbol of social excellence, and the rent metaphor in 'living rent free' requires an economic and spatial conceptual framework that is not readily activated in Urdu.

Kovecses (2005) found that conceptual metaphors, while sometimes universal in their basic structure, are heavily shaped by cultural experience, and this study confirms that finding in the specific context of Gen Z digital slang. The rare case of 'dead' showed that when a conceptual metaphor does have a cultural parallel in Urdu, as with the tradition of hyperbolic death metaphors in Urdu comedy and poetry, translation becomes significantly more natural and effective.

Taken together, the findings of this study offer a comprehensive picture of the challenges involved in translating Gen Z slang from English into Urdu. The three research questions addressed above point to a common underlying conclusion: successful translation in this domain requires far more than linguistic competence. It demands cultural literacy, contextual sensitivity, and an awareness of how metaphorical thinking shapes meaning.

The study demonstrates that Gen Z slang is a linguistically rich and culturally specific variety of language that exposes the limits of conventional translation approaches when applied across culturally distant language pairs. Translators working between English and Urdu must be prepared to move beyond equivalence-seeking and instead adopt creative, adaptive, and audience-centered strategies. The combination of Skopos Theory and Conceptual Metaphor Theory has proven to be a productive analytical pairing for this purpose, offering both a functional and a cognitive lens through which translation challenges can be identified, understood, and addressed.

5. Conclusion

This study has explored the cultural and contextual challenges involved in translating Gen Z slang from English into Urdu. Through the analytical lenses of Skopos Theory and Conceptual Metaphor Theory, the research has demonstrated that Gen Z slang is a highly culture-specific and cognitively complex form of language that resists conventional translation approaches. The analysis of ten selected slang terms revealed that challenges arise from cultural untranslatability, metaphorical incompatibility, register mismatch, and the absence of conceptual equivalents in Urdu.

The findings confirm that no single translation strategy is sufficient for handling all types of Gen Z slang. Instead, translators must adopt a flexible, purpose-driven approach informed by an awareness of the target audience, the communicative function of the text, and the cultural context in which the translation will be received. Skopos Theory provides a practical

framework for making these purpose-driven decisions, while Conceptual Metaphor Theory offers cognitive insights into why certain slang terms are harder to translate than others.

This research contributes to translation studies by addressing a relatively unexplored area: the translation of digital youth language in a South Asian language context. It also has practical implications for translators, educators, and content creators working between English and Urdu. As the digital landscape continues to bring Gen Z language to global audiences, the need for culturally informed and linguistically creative translation will only grow. It is hoped that this study serves as a foundation for future research that further explores the fascinating intersection of language, culture, technology, and translation.

6. Future Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are offered for future research and professional practice. First, future studies should expand the dataset to include a larger number of Gen Z slang terms across different social categories, including emotional expression, humor, identity, and social critique. A broader dataset would allow for more generalizable conclusions about translation patterns and strategies. Longitudinal research could also track how Gen Z slang evolves and how translation practices adapt over time.

Second, researchers should explore the role of digital platforms in shaping translation norms for Gen Z language. As Pakistani youth increasingly consume English content on TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram, the informal translation or caption culture that develops on these platforms deserves scholarly attention. Corpus-based studies that analyze how Gen Z terms are actually translated in subtitles, captions, and social media posts could provide valuable empirical data.

Third, translation educators and curriculum designers should incorporate discussions of digital youth language into translation training programs. Students of translation need to develop sensitivity to register, cultural embedding, and the rapidly changing nature of slang. Practical exercises involving real Gen Z content can prepare future translators for these challenges. Finally, lexicographers and linguists should consider developing resources such as bilingual slang glossaries or digital dictionaries that document Gen Z English terms alongside their best Urdu equivalents, with notes on cultural context and appropriate usage. Such resources would be invaluable for professional translators, content creators, and educators working across these two languages.

7. References

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