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ONLINE LANGUAGE AND GENERATIONAL IDENTITY: NEOLOGISMS IN THE DIGITAL ERA

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Language evolution closely mirrors technological progress and cultural shifts, with the digital era accelerating the creation of new lexicons. New terms transcend simple additions to vocabulary, encapsulating generational divides in communication, digital literacy, and workplace norms. They reflect the intersection of technological environments and generational identities, shedding light on how different age groups construct online personas, respond to surveillance technologies, remote work, etc.

This paper explores the role of Internet neologisms in shaping and reinforcing generational identities and digital literacy. By examining terms rooted in online behaviors and work culture, the study highlights how language in the digital age functions as a tool for interaction and a marker of generational boundaries.

Generational theory suggests that shared historical experiences shape the social identities and behaviors of people born in similar time periods [5]. Digital fluency diverges along generational lines — millennials (1981-1996) are digital immigrants adapting to technology, while Generation Z (1997-2012) are digital natives [6]. According to researchers, “Gen Z tends to be more pragmatic, risk-averse, and inclined to favor security over idealism compared to Millennials” [7, p. 93].

Sociolinguistics highlights language’s role in identity construction [4]. Neologisms, emerging rapidly in digital spaces, signify in-group belonging and reflect socio-political realities [3]. Words like “bossware” (workplace surveillance) and “cyber ambassador” (digital safety advocates) convey collective anxieties and responses to evolving digital environments, further delineating generational attitudes toward privacy and empowerment.

Digital literacy — skills to browse and engage with online content — varies across generations [1]. Language thus serves as a cultural marker of digital competency and generational distinction. For example, the term “millennial pause” typifies millennials’ cautious approach to online content, contrasting with Gen Z’s spontaneous digital creation. Millennials’ digital personas stem from early exposure to platforms emphasizing permanence, while Gen Z prioritizes authenticity through ephemeral content: *If you have ever watched a video or an interview and noticed the*



person take a pause and a deep breath before they start speaking, that has been dubbed the **millennial pause** because it is synonymous with that generation. (Newsweek, 11 October, 2024)

The term “bossware” symbolizes growing surveillance in remote work, unsettling millennials who value autonomy. Gen Z, while critical, often adopts pragmatic roles like “cyber ambassadors,” reflecting proactive engagement with workplace digital policies, distinguishing them from millennials’ reliance on institutional frameworks. This shift underscores Gen Z’s grassroots approach to shaping digital environments.

Neologism “digital removalist” highlights millennials’ preoccupation with refining their online footprints, driven by career advancement concerns. Gen Z, in contrast, employs temporary content and privacy settings to mitigate digital risks in real time, reflecting differing attitudes toward online permanence.

Digital literacy extends beyond technical skills to reflect generational attitudes toward technology. Gen Z’s fluency stems from immersive digital experiences, while millennials acquired skills through adaptation [1]. Neologisms like “algospeak” illustrate Gen Z’s intuitive platform navigation using appropriate lexicon, contrasting with millennials’ more awkward digital engagement.

Platform preferences mirror generational divides: millennials favor structured spaces (Facebook, LinkedIn), while Gen Z thrives in fast-paced, ephemeral environments (TikTok, Snapchat). This reflects broader differences in content curation and authenticity, with Gen Z embracing brevity and participatory culture. Terms like “fexting” (text-based conflict) show Gen Z’s comfort with asynchronous communication, in contrast to millennials’ preference for face-to-face interaction: *You probably didn’t pick up the phone and think to yourself, “Who can I get in a text fight with today?” Fighting over text, or **fexting**, happens because texting happens (like, ya know, all the time).* (Women’s Health, 30 October 2024)

Digital lexicons shape identity and community. Gen Z’s embrace of roles like “finfluencer” (financial influencer) reflects the blurring of personal and professional personas, while millennials maintain clearer boundaries between work and social spheres. This divergence underscores generational approaches to digital identity construction. The rise of “zoom towns” highlights shifting professional geographies driven by remote work. Millennials view relocation as pragmatic, while Gen Z considers it a symbol of workplace decentralization and flexibility. This reflects contrasting perceptions of work-life integration.

Terms like “vampire meetings” and “virtual commute” reveal generational negotiations of remote work culture. Gen Z advocates for efficiency and asynchronous collaboration, while millennials critique the inefficiencies of prolonged video conferencing: *If there’s one thing remote workers probably don’t miss about going into the office, it’s the commute. Microsoft, however, disagrees. The company announced that it is working on a new feature for its Teams platform that will allow remote workers to schedule **virtual commutes**.* (Govtech.com, 29 September 2020)

Finally, the term “password child” (a humorous way of referring to a parent’s favourite child, supposedly because the parent will often use the name of that child as a computer password) half-jokingly reflects generational differences in digital attachment. Older generations, such as Gen X or Baby Boomers, intertwine

memorable dates and emotional connections with digital security, while the Millennials and Gen Z adopt utilitarian approaches like password managers and two-factor authentication [2].

Digital neologisms like “millennial pause”, “bossware”, etc. encapsulate generational divides in digital literacy, workplace norms, and identity formation. Older generations prioritize curation and privacy, while Gen Z values authenticity and empowerment. These linguistic trends offer insight into evolving generational experiences and highlight language’s role in navigating the online landscape. As technology advances, future neologisms will continue to shape and reflect generational identities, further emphasizing the interplay between language and digital culture.

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ОНЛАЙН-МОВА ТА ІДЕНТИЧНІСТЬ ПОКОЛІНЬ: НЕОЛОГІЗМИ В ЦИФРОВУ ЕПОХУ

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