Intergenerational Pragmatic Shifts: A Study of Politeness and Speech Acts Among Generation Z And Generation Alpha in Pakistani Media

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ABSTRACT
The rise of digital media platforms has profoundly reshaped communication among younger individuals. This study explores the shifts in intergenerational pragmatics by examining the speech acts and politeness strategies employed by Generation Z and Generation Alpha in the context of Pakistani digital media discourse. Specifically, it investigates how these two generations navigate communicative functions, including requests, compliments, emotional expressions, and directives in informal settings like YouTube videos and online discussions. Using a qualitative research approach, the study analyses genuine conversational data gathered from six YouTube videos featuring participants from both Generation Z and Generation Alpha. The recorded exchanges were transcribed and subjected to qualitative content analysis. The analytical framework is grounded in Speech Act Theory, as articulated by J. L. Austin and John Searle, and Politeness Theory, as proposed by Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson. Speech acts were classified into categories such as assertive, directives, expressive, commissive, and declaratives, while politeness strategies were assessed through the lens of positive and negative politeness. The findings highlight marked generational distinctions in communication styles. Generation Z participants tend to engage in relatively organized discourse, showcasing a balance of politeness strategies and heightened pragmatic awareness in digital media contexts. Conversely, Generation Alpha individuals display more direct, spontaneous, and expressive communication, a style significantly shaped by their exposure to digital media and informal interaction patterns. The study also indicates that digital settings promote a conversational atmosphere characterized by informality, humour, and straightforwardness, leading to evolving norms of politeness and pragmatic competence. The research enhances our understanding of how different generations communicate in today's Pakistani society, especially focusing on the influence of digital media in forming new ways of interaction. The results provide significant perspectives for sociolinguists, educators, and media researchers who are exploring language evolution, digital communication, and how young people engage with one another.

Keywords: *Pragmatics, Speech Acts, Politeness Strategies, Generation Z, Generation Alpha, Digital Media Communication*

Introduction

Language serves as a crucial medium of human interaction, allowing individuals to share meanings, convey emotions, and build social connections. Effective communication transcends the mere crafting of grammatically correct sentences; it demands the skill to utilize language adeptly within specific social and cultural contexts (Shakeel et al., 2025). This skill is often referred to as pragmatic competence, enabling speakers to engage in meaningful communicative actions like requesting, apologizing, complimenting, or expressing disagreement in a manner that resonates with others (Ilyas et al., 2025). Theories of pragmatics, notably Speech Act Theory introduced by J. L. Austin and expanded by John Searle, illustrate how utterances can function as actions during communication. Likewise, Politeness Theory, proposed by Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson, emphasizes how individuals navigate social relationships and foster interpersonal harmony through various linguistic strategies (Habib et al., 2024). In recent years, the emergence of digital media platforms has dramatically reshaped language use and communication dynamics. Sites like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok have fostered new spaces for interaction, opinion sharing, and identity formation through informal and spontaneous language. These platforms offer researchers valuable insights into genuine communication patterns within natural contexts. In contrast to conventional face-to-face exchanges, digital conversations often promote a more relaxed approach to language, increased expressiveness, and the development of innovative linguistic forms. Younger generations, particularly Generation Z and Generation Alpha, are intricately woven into these digital landscapes, influencing their language choices and communicative styles.

Generation Z, typically defined as those born between 1997 and 2012, witnessed the swift rise of digital technology during their formative years. Consequently, they are often characterized as tech-savvy and socially engaged through online platforms. Generation Alpha, born after 2013, marks the first cohort to grow up entirely within a digitally infused environment. Their early interaction with smartphones, tablets, and online content plays a significant role in shaping their communication methods and interaction habits. These generational experiences lead to differences in how individuals select language, demonstrate politeness, and conduct speech acts in their communications. The landscape of digital media in Pakistan presents a compelling backdrop for exploring the differences between generations. With an increasing number of Pakistani youth engaging on various online platforms, they are not just sharing opinions but also sparking conversations and connecting with different audiences. These interactions reveal changing cultural norms, evolving standards of politeness, and new ways of interpersonal communication. In the realm of digital discourse, there is often a noticeable shift towards more directness, humor, and casual expressions, contrasting with traditional communication styles that stress respect and indirectness. Despite the rising interest in how young people communicate digitally, there is still a significant gap in research regarding the pragmatic differences between Generation Z and Generation Alpha in Pakistan. Most existing studies have honed in on aspects like slang, lexical innovations, or general trends in social media language without delving deeply into how these generations utilize speech acts and politeness strategies in real-world digital exchanges. Gaining insights into these pragmatic variations is crucial for understanding how language shifts over time and the impact of digital platforms on communication methods.

This study, therefore, intends to explore how Generation Z and Generation Alpha use speech acts and politeness strategies within Pakistani digital media interactions. By examining authentic

conversational data drawn from YouTube, the research aims to uncover patterns of pragmatic behaviour while investigating how these younger generations construct meaning, express their identities, and navigate interpersonal dynamics in digital environments.

Statement of the Problem

The rise of digital media has significantly altered how younger generations communicate. Platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram foster informal and interactive exchanges, enabling young users to share opinions and experiences across diverse cultural contexts. However, there is a gap in research regarding the pragmatic elements of language, such as speech acts and politeness strategies, in online interactions among youth, particularly in Pakistan. While existing studies often focus on lexical creativity or slang, they overlook how young people negotiate intentions and relationships online. Additionally, little has been done to compare communication styles between Generation Z and Generation Alpha, despite their differing experiences with technology Generation Z grew up during the social media boom, while Generation Alpha has known it from an early age. Thus, understanding the pragmatic features of digital communication in these contexts is critical. This study aims to analyse authentic interactions from YouTube videos to uncover generational differences in communication practices among Pakistani youth, contributing to a deeper comprehension of evolving language use in the digital landscape.

Research Questions

1. What types of speech acts and politeness strategies are employed by Generation Z and Generation Alpha speakers in Pakistani media?
2. How do these pragmatic patterns reveal about intergenerational shifts in communication in Pakistan?

Research Objectives

1. To classify the types of speech acts and politeness strategies used by Generation Z and Generation Alpha in selected Pakistani media.
2. To reveal intergenerational shifts in communication practices in Pakistan.

Significance of the Study

The current study offers important academic and social insights into how digital discourse shapes youth communication. With digital media becoming a vital interaction platform for younger generations, understanding their language use in online spaces reveals evolving linguistic norms and communication styles. By examining real digital interactions, this research enhances our grasp of pragmatics in technology-driven communication. From a sociolinguistic viewpoint, the study explores language change and generational differences, specifically between Generation Z and Generation Alpha, shedding light on how exposure to technology impacts communication strategies. In contexts like Pakistan, where traditional politeness norms persist, it illustrates how younger individuals navigate these cultural expectations in informal digital settings. The findings can aid educators, researchers, and media professionals in connecting with younger audiences, enhancing their understanding of communication styles, and tailoring their approaches accordingly. Ultimately, this research deepens our awareness of digital technology's influence on language and social interaction among emerging generations in contemporary Pakistani society.

Literature review

Language serves not just as a means of communication, but also as a vehicle for expressing one's social identity, fostering relationships, and carrying out significant actions. The field of pragmatics investigates how meanings are conveyed in context, extending beyond mere literal interpretations of words (Austin 1962; Searle 1969). Central to this examination are speech acts such as requests, apologies, compliments, refusals, and other communicative functions which

shed light on how speakers accomplish their intentions within interactions. Additionally, politeness strategies, as articulated by Brown and Levinson (1987), play a crucial role in aiding speakers to uphold social harmony, manage face, and navigate power dynamics. These strategies are influenced by various social factors, including age, gender, cultural norms, and the situational context (Holmes 2013). In Pakistan, grasping the nuances of pragmatics is especially vital, as communication often reveals intricate social hierarchies, traditional customs, and the impact of modern digital media.

Generation Z (those born between 1997 and 2012) and Generation Alpha (born from 2013 onwards) are true digital natives who predominantly rely on social media and online platforms for interaction (Prensky 2001; Twenge 2017; Wood 2021). While earlier research has explored aspects such as lexical creativity, netspeak, and slang among the youth in Pakistan (Ali et al. 2024; Baig et al. 2024; Jabeen and Nawaz 2024), the pragmatic functions of language including the applications of speech acts and politeness strategies have not received adequate attention. Although Bukhari et al. (2025) investigated intergenerational perceptions of language use in Pakistan, their inquiry primarily revolved around vocabulary rather than the practical deployment of speech acts or politeness management by Generations Z and Alpha in authentic digital contexts. This study seeks to fill that gap by examining genuine media discourse to illustrate how these two generations engage in communication through YouTube videos, podcasts, and various social media platforms.

Speech Act Theory serves as a valuable framework for classifying communication into categories such as assertive, directives, expressive, commissive, and declaratives (Qadus et al., 2025). This approach facilitates a structured analysis of generational differences in functional communication (Austin 1962; Searle 1969). Assertive provide information or factual statements, directives aim to affect behaviour, expressive disclose emotional states, commissive engage the speaker for future actions, and declaratives enact changes in the social realm (Searle 1969). When this framework is applied to media content in Pakistan, the current research uncovers distinctions in how Generation Z tends to Favor casual and humorous directives, while Generation Alpha opts for concise and formulaic assertive. These emerging patterns reflect the evolving communicative priorities between the generations and underscore the significant influence of digital platforms on the realization of speech acts (Ali et al. 2024).

Existing research in Pakistan has predominantly concentrated on vocabulary, netspeak, and informal lexical selections among youth, resulting in a notable absence of insight into pragmatic behaviours. This study seeks to fill that void by analysing speech acts and politeness strategies utilized by Generation Z and Generation Alpha within Pakistani media. It aims to enhance our comprehension of intergenerational changes in communication styles. By employing Speech Act Theory and Politeness Theory alongside genuine media data, this research not only identifies the language being used but also elucidates its social function, emphasizing the convergence of culture, age, and technology in modern Pakistani discourse (Bukhari et al., 2025; Ali et al., 2024; Baig et al., 2024).

Research Methodology

This investigation employs a qualitative research design to delve into the pragmatic patterns observed in the communication styles of Generation Z and Generation Alpha within the context of Pakistani digital media. Utilizing qualitative methods is fitting for exploring pragmatic research as they enable an in-depth look at language use in natural settings and offer valuable insights into the meanings that speakers express during their interactions.

Research Design

The study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach to scrutinize how speakers from these two generations execute speech acts and implement politeness strategies during spontaneous media discussions. The focus of the analysis is on identifying pragmatic patterns in conversational exchanges and exploring how language mirrors social relationships and highlights generational contrasts.

The primary analytical framework for classifying communicative acts is grounded in Speech Act Theory as proposed by Austin (1962) and further enhanced by Searle (1969). Furthermore, the analysis incorporates Politeness Theory, developed by Brown and Levinson (1987), to investigate how speakers navigate face-saving and manage interpersonal connections through various politeness strategies.

Data Source

The data for this study has been gathered from a selection of Pakistani digital media content, specifically including YouTube videos and podcasts that showcase conversations among individuals from Generation Z and Generation Alpha. Digital media platforms serve as authentic venues for spontaneous communication, allowing researchers to witness genuine language interactions.

These platforms were specifically chosen for their reflection of modern youth communication, providing a wealth of linguistic material where speakers engage casually, sharing opinions, humour, disagreements, and emotional responses.

Sampling

For this study, a purposive sampling method was employed to identify media content that aligns with our research goals. The chosen videos showcase discussions featuring speakers who distinctly represent the Generation Z and Generation Alpha demographics.

The selection criteria included:
- The content is comprised of spontaneous dialogues instead of scripted interactions.
- The speakers are part of either Generation Z or Generation Alpha.
- The conversations exhibit interactive exchanges where speech acts and strategies of politeness can be observed.

This methodology guarantees that the data gathered is directly relevant for exploring the pragmatic differences across generations.

Data Collection Procedure

The chosen videos were systematically analysed, and pertinent conversational segments were transcribed. During transcription, we focused on identifying utterances that fulfil specific speech acts, including requests, compliments, apologies, and refusals.

Each utterance was assessed within its conversational setting to discern its pragmatic purpose. Special emphasis was placed on the communication tone, the relationship dynamics between speakers, and the use of politeness strategies.

Analytical Framework

The analysis of the gathered data is informed by two theoretical frameworks.

Speech Act Theory

Speech Act Theory elucidates how utterances function as actions rather than simple messages. As noted by Searle (1969), speech acts can be categorized in several ways:
- Assertive – statements that relay information or express beliefs
- Directives– efforts by the speaker to persuade the listener to take action
- Commissive – pledges to undertake future actions
- Expressive – declarations of feelings or attitudes
- Declaratives – statements that instigate a change in the social context

These categories serve as a foundation for classifying the communicative acts observed in the selected digital media discussions.

Politeness Theory

Politeness Theory, introduced by Brown and Levinson (1987), provides insight into how individuals maintain their own dignity and that of others during conversations. This theory delineates a range of politeness strategies, including:

- Positive politeness strategies, which focus on fostering warmth and community.
- Negative politeness strategies, which respect individual boundaries and independence.
- Indirect strategies, utilized to lessen direct pressure on others.

Through this lens, the research explores how younger generations navigate relationships in their interactions.

Data Analysis and Findings

An analysis of selected digital media exchanges uncovers distinct patterns in the communicative behaviour of Generation Z and Generation Alpha individuals. The results underscore variations in the types of speech acts and politeness strategies employed, mirroring broader shifts in the communication habits of younger people in Pakistan.

Speech Acts in Generation Z Communication

Generation Z individuals frequently utilize expressive and directive speech acts during their conversations. Expressive acts are often used to share feelings, humour, and personal views. For instance, speakers readily express emotions like excitement, surprise, or admiration when discussing various topics. Directive speech acts are also common, often taking the form of suggestions or casual guidance. Instead of relying on formal request formats, Generation Z tends to use straightforward and conversational language, reflecting a sense of familiarity and informality. Another notable aspect of Generation Z communication is the use of humour. Participants frequently incorporate playful comments, sarcasm, or hyperbolic expressions to foster a laid-back conversational environment.

Speech Acts in Generation Alpha Communication

Speakers from Generation Alpha exhibit a distinct pattern in their use of speech acts. Their communication style tends to be more succinct and direct. Assertive speech acts are commonly employed when expressing opinions or recounting experiences. While expressive speech acts can still be observed, they often take on simpler forms. In comparison to Generation Z, individuals from Generation Alpha generally provide shorter responses and prefer direct statements over detailed explanations. This trend may indicate the growing impact of brief digital interactions, where conciseness and immediacy are prevalent characteristics.

Politeness Strategies in Digital Media Interactions

The politeness strategies evident in these discussions reveal changing norms of interpersonal communication among Pakistani youth. Generation Z participants often utilize positive politeness strategies such as compliments, humour, and inclusive language to foster amicable exchanges. These approaches promote a sense of togetherness and help mitigate potential conflicts during conversations. Conversely, Generation Alpha tends to Favor a more straightforward style of communication, utilizing fewer explicit markers of politeness. Although they still adhere to politeness, it tends to manifest more through tone or contextual cues rather than formal linguistic indicators.

Intergenerational Differences in Communication Style

A comparison between the two generations brings to light significant changes in pragmatic behaviour. Communication among Generation Z reflects a transitional phase where traditional politeness customs coexist with the onset of modern digital communication styles. In contrast,

Generation Alpha's communication seems to progress towards an even greater degree of informality and efficiency. The influence of digital platforms promotes brevity in speech, swift exchanges, and casual expressions, setting them apart from the conventional politeness standards seen in previous generations.

Discussion

The results of this study uncover significant generational differences in how Pakistani youth engage in pragmatic communication. The analysis illustrates that digital media has profoundly impacted the manner in which younger generations execute speech acts and navigate politeness within conversations. Speakers from Generation Z strike a balance between traditional and contemporary communication methods. While they uphold certain politeness strategies, they also embrace informal phrases and humour that are characteristic of the digital communication landscape. In contrast, Generation Alpha speakers seem to be even more heavily influenced by their digital communication environments. Their speech patterns exhibit a notable trend towards directness and conciseness, indicating that online platforms, which prioritize swift interactions, have shaped their pragmatic tendencies. This research reinforces the notion that language adapts alongside technological and societal transformations. As digital platforms continue to redefine communication practices, younger generations cultivate new standards for politeness, relationship management, and meaning-making.

Recommendations from the Study

Drawing from the insights of this research, several recommendations emerge. Future investigations should broaden their scope by exploring a wider array of digital platforms and incorporating more comprehensive datasets. This approach will enrich our understanding of intergenerational communication trends. Additionally, comparing various age groups could shed light on notable shifts in pragmatic behaviours over time.

Moreover, it would be valuable for researchers to delve into the influences of cultural nuances, multilingualism, and code-switching on speech acts and politeness strategies within the context of Pakistani digital media. Such inquiries would enhance our comprehension of how ongoing technological and social transformations shape language practices in our modern world.

Implications of the Study

The results of this research shed light on the evolving communication trends among younger generations in Pakistan. By analysing the speech acts and politeness strategies adopted by Generation Z and Generation Alpha in digital spaces, the study illustrates how technological contexts shape pragmatic behaviour. These findings contribute significantly to the fields of pragmatics and sociolinguistics, showcasing the way language adapts to contemporary digital communication. Moreover, the research offers practical insights for educators, parents, and media creators. By grasping the communication nuances of younger generations, educators can craft teaching methods that resonate with current language practices, while parents and media producers can enhance their engagement with youth by acknowledging their changing communication styles.

Conclusion

This study has explored the pragmatic communication styles of Generation Z and Generation Alpha within the realm of Pakistani digital media, employing Speech Act Theory and Politeness Theory as analytical lenses. The findings reveal that while both generations utilize a diverse range of speech acts and politeness strategies, distinct differences characterize their communication styles. Generation Z speakers often resort to expressive language, humour, and positive politeness techniques to foster amicable interactions. Conversely, Generation Alpha speakers demonstrate a preference for more direct and succinct communication, reflecting the impact of

digital media environments on their interactions. The comparison between these two generations underscores the ongoing evolution of communication norms within Pakistani society. Digital platforms are fundamentally shaping the ways younger generations engage, form identities, and maintain social relationships. In summary, this study enhances our understanding of intergenerational pragmatics in Pakistan and emphasizes the significance of analysing language use in digital contexts. Future research could build upon these findings by examining larger datasets, investigating additional digital platforms, or comparing pragmatic patterns across various cultural frameworks.

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