

# Navigating the Functions of Emerging Neologisms: A Sociolinguistic Study

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## ABSTRACT

This research explores the functions of neologisms within the context of Generation Z, focusing particularly on Senior High School Students in the Philippines. Employing a sociolinguistic lens and a phenomenological approach, the study conducted a small-scale qualitative investigation at Gregorio T. Crespo Memorial High School in Cabaio, Nueva Ecija. Through convenience sampling and a qualitative survey, data was collected and analysed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis approach. Findings revealed commonly used neologisms such as "char/charot," "sana all," and "dasurv," serving various functions including facilitating easy communication, keeping up with trends, emotional expression, and humor. These functions reflect societal inclinations towards brevity, trend-following, and emotional expression, enriching language's descriptive capabilities and shaping interpersonal dynamics. The study underscores the importance of neologisms in contemporary communication, suggesting further exploration through longitudinal analyses and investigations into cultural and demographic factors, with implications for language learning and education.

**Keywords:** Functions, Generation Z, Neologisms, Sociolinguistics

## INTRODUCTION

Language, as a dynamic and evolving system, constantly adapts to societal changes and technological advancements [16]. One notable aspect of this evolution is the creation and adoption of new words and expressions, known as neologisms. These newly coined terms reflect the ever-changing landscape of human communication and play a crucial role in shaping linguistic interactions within various social contexts. Furthermore, these linguistic innovations have become integral parts of everyday discourse, particularly among Gen Z.

The use of neologisms in the new media shows that new words play several roles including nominative function, attractive function, axiological function, lexical resource saving function, and euphemization function [3]. The nominative function involves creating new terms to name emerging concepts, objects, or phenomena, such as "selfie" for self-taken photos. The attractive function draws attention or appeals through novelty which makes communication more engaging. The axiological function expresses values, attitudes, or judgments, often embedding cultural or social significance. Lexical resource saving function streamlines communication by condensing complex ideas into simpler terms. Finally, the euphemization function softens harsh or taboo concepts, making them more socially acceptable. In sociolinguistic study, examining these functions of neologisms reveals how language evolves in response to cultural and social changes, reflecting and shaping societal norms, attitudes, and technological advancements.

In the Philippine context, empirical studies dealt with the use of neologisms such as the backward speech

among Filipino Millennials [2], evolving Netspeak patterns [14], roles and effects of slangs in academia [19], the morphological structure of Filipino Generation Z slang terminologies [7], intelligibility of internet slang [17] and students' morpho-pragmatic awareness, academic writing, and familiarity with Facebook slang words [11].

Despite their prevalence, the functions and sociolinguistic implications of emerging neologisms in the Philippine context remain relatively fewer attention of the scholars. Understanding how these newly coined terms are utilised within different social groups and contexts is essential for comprehending contemporary linguistic phenomena and societal dynamics. Therefore, this research aims to explore and navigate the functions of emerging neologisms through a sociolinguistic lens.

By employing a phenomenological approach, this study sought to address several key research objectives: identifying the most frequently used neologisms among Gen Z; exploring the social functions served by these emerging neologisms; and providing insights into how these neologisms reflects aspects of the society in which the students are situated.

This research endeavors to contribute to the understanding of linguistic innovation, sociocultural change, and the complex interplay between language and society. By shedding light on the functions and sociolinguistic dynamics of emerging neologisms, this study aims to enrich scholarly discourse on contemporary language use and pave the way for future research in the field of sociolinguistics.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This section includes the research design utilised, the research site and the participants, the research instrument, the data gathering procedure, and the data analysis technique.

### **A. Research Design**

This small-scale study employed a phenomenological technique in a qualitative research design. Qualitative research focuses mostly on the meaning that an individual assigns to situations that they directly encounter. Researcher's aim is to comprehend the subjective experiences of individuals and how they navigate various situations. This approach seeks to understand and describe the experiences revealed through data collection, without making any predetermined assumptions about the data provided by participants [18].

### **B. Research Site and Participants**

This study was conducted in Gregorio T. Crespo Memorial High School, where the researcher works. The school is located at Lopez Jaena Street, Entabulado, Cabiao, Nueva Ecija. It was established during the School Year 2016-2017 through the initiative of the Entablado Parents Association, DepEd-Cabiao and Cabiao Local Government Unit of Cabiao. The school began its first year of Senior High School implementation in 2019, offering Humanities and Social Science strand. The students, particularly the senior high school students, provide valuable insights on how language is changing and being used today, as they mirror the linguistic patterns and trends that they and their peers use. For this reason, the researcher focused on them. Since the students were not forced to answer the research instrument, the researcher utilised the convenience sampling technique. This type of sampling was used by the researcher because it provides a rapid and cost-effective means to obtain data from those who were readily available.

### **C. Research Instrument**

The primary tool the researcher used in gathering the data required to answer the research questions was through a qualitative survey. The researcher chose the qualitative survey as the principal instrument because

it can be easily prepared and administered, and by far, it is the most extensive way of gathering data.

The qualitative survey includes open-ended questions that explore the point of view of the senior high school students. The qualitative survey focused on questions about the most used neologisms and the reasons why these neologisms are commonly used, the reasons why the participants use neologisms in conversations and some additional neologisms and how these neologisms are used. Furthermore, the questions included were also translated to Tagalog for the participants who cannot comprehend and answer well using the English language.

The researcher devised the qualitative survey through reading related literature and studies regarding the Gen Z's usage of neologisms. After the formulation of questionnaire, the researcher presented the qualitative survey to the subject professor to verify it. A language professor verified the questionnaire and found some portions which are needed to be modified. The given corrections were incorporated before proceeding to the data collection.

#### **D. Data Gathering Procedure**

Prior to the collection of data, the researcher secured a letter signed by his subject professor to the school head of the research site to ask for permission to conduct the study. After the school head approved the request, the researcher proceeded to discuss the study with the participants. The participants were informed through Messenger about the research and its purpose. It was made sure that the participants fully understood the process and the conditions of their participation. The researcher answered their queries and concerns adequately. The researcher also informed the participants that they may choose not to participate in this survey, and that their participation or non-participation would not affect their academic standing. They were also aware that they may withdraw their participation at any time without the need to explain why. Finally, the researcher ensured that the participants' personal details were kept confidential. Therefore, the researcher utilised coding to protect the respondents' identities.

After the orientation, the researcher sent the participants the link to access the qualitative survey in a Google Form. For the study's data collection, the researcher reviewed literary sources such as online journals and articles related to this study. The knowledge gained from these resources aided the researcher in constructing qualitative survey. The qualitative survey focused on questions about the most used neologisms and the reasons why these neologisms are commonly used, the reasons why the participants use neologisms in conversations and some additional neologisms and how these neologisms are used.

Initially, the researcher aimed to gather all the students to answer the qualitative survey. However, for some reasons, the researcher only utilised 25 participants.

#### **E. Data Analysis Technique**

The study utilised Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis approach which comprises several stages, including familiarization, coding, theme generation, theme review, theme definition, labeling, and writing up. This method incorporates a range of viewpoints from several research participants, bringing attention to both similarities and contrasts and frequently producing surprising results. Thematic analysis is utilised to identify trends both inside and among the data pertaining to the participant experiences.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This section presents the findings collected in the qualitative survey. The results are presented thematically by the researcher. Moreover, the results were checked by the researcher's professor who is conversant and a native Filipino speaker. The results and conclusion from several related literature and studies are presented

to support the results. Based on the outcomes of the data collection, the researcher assessed the commonly used neologisms, their functions, and what these say about the society today. Furthermore, the researcher utilised the code “Pa” to represent the participants (e.g. Pa1 means Participant 1).

### A. Commonly Used Neologisms

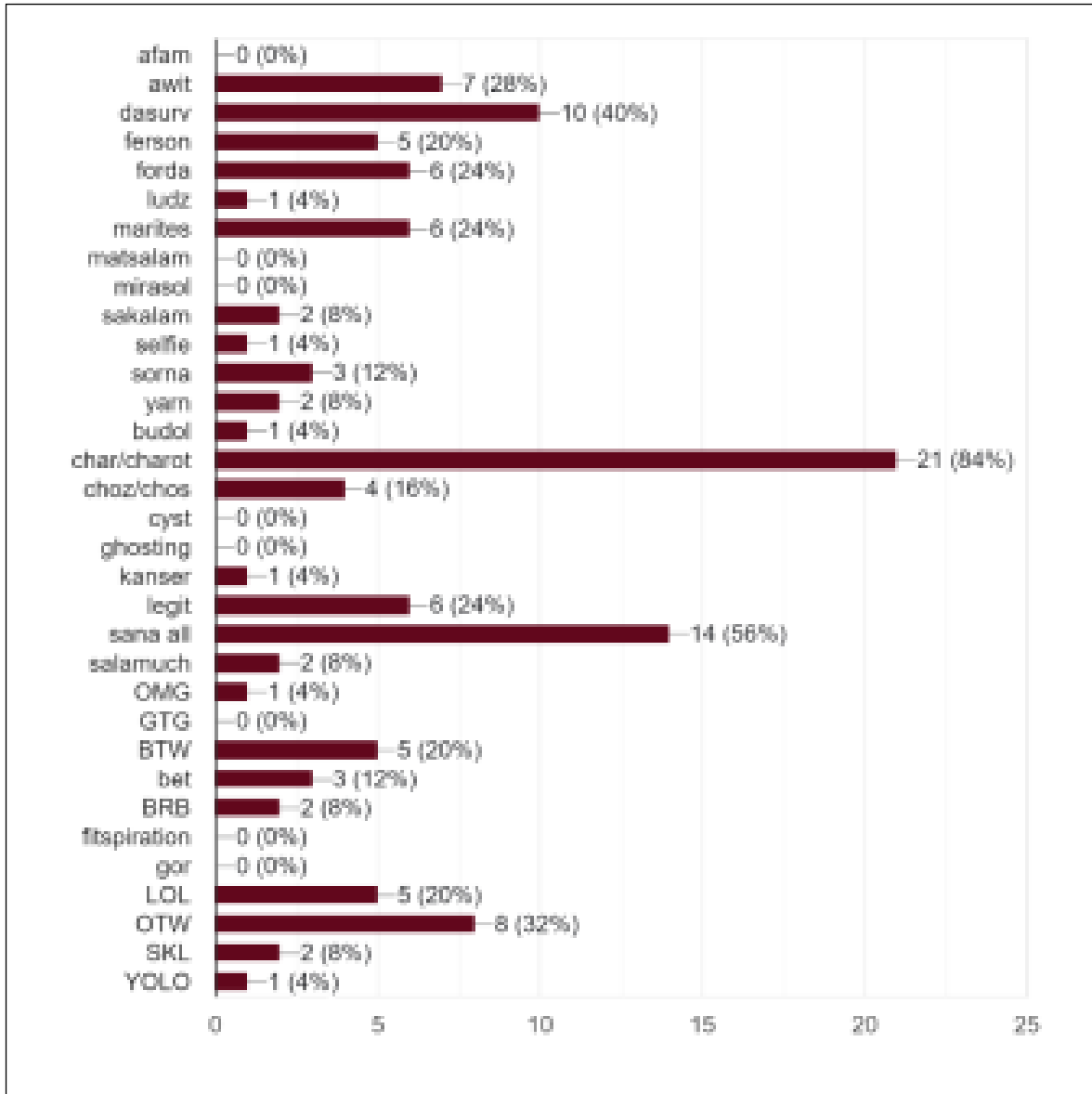


Fig. 1 Percentage of the Commonly Used Neologisms

The figure above indicates the commonly used neologisms by Gen Z based on the study of by Vacalares et al. (2023). The results show that the five commonly used neologisms participants are “char/charot” (84%), “sana all” (56%), “dasurv” (40%), “OTW” (32%), and “awit” (28%). Aside from the indicated neologisms above, the participants also enumerated neologisms including “sana all”, “nvrmd”, “chiki”, “eme”, “char”, “kimmy”, “bff”, “bhie”, “sa true”, “sus”, “skl”, “wis”, and “delulu”. These neologisms are used for communicating easily keeping up with the trends. Furthermore, these neologisms are commonly used on the internet and social media. This implies a lighthearted communication style that reflects the school community’s humor, friendship, and social connectedness. In the research conducted by [17], it was found that Gen Z commonly incorporates these internet neologisms into their everyday discussions and posts on social media platforms.

## B. Functions of Neologisms

TABLE I Easy Communication as a Function of Emerging Neologisms

Function	Statements	
Easy Communication	P1	<i>"In my generation it is easier for us to use these kinds of words in order to communicate."</i>
	P2	<i>"Most likely because it's fun, sometimes it's much easier to use for daily conversation, to shorten words, and to connect with people around you in different kind of level that is more impactful."</i>
	P8	<i>"To make the conversation easier in a modern way."</i>
	P10	<i>"para mas madali nilang maintindihan ang gusto kong sabihin"</i>
	P13	<i>"para mas mapadali ang sasabihin"</i>
	P15	<i>"Para mas madaling maunawaan ng katulad Kong kabataan Ang nais Kong sabihin"</i>
	P18	<i>"To make communication with the other person easier and faster."</i>
	P19	<i>"Para mapadali o mas malinaw ang pag uusap dahil ito ang napapanahon ngayon."</i>
	P21	<i>"dahil sa mga friends ko mas lalo kaming nagkakaintindihan"</i>
	P22	<i>"Para mas maintindihan ung sinasabi"</i>
P24	<i>"Para madaling maintindihan kasi uso"</i>	

The statements of the participants, which are presented above, indicate that neologisms are used to communicate easily. It can be attributed to the fact that some of them such as OTW, tyt, skl, and LOL are just short versions of on the way, take your time, share ko lang, and laugh out loud. Also, these neologisms are used in social media where the Gen Z is exposed. Blommaert, as cited in Reference [15] suggests that advancements in technology have simplified communication which leads to a decline in traditional letter writing and the use of social media platforms comes in for it has emerged as convenient alternatives for communication [15]. The findings indicate that they find it easier to communicate when they employ neologisms which underscore the thought-provoking power of these recently created terms or expressions.

TABLE II Keep Up with the Trends as a Function of Emerging Neologisms

Function	Statements	
Keep Up with the Trends	P3	<i>"upang makasabay sa usong slang"</i>
	P4	<i>"to keep up with the trend happening"</i>
	P5	<i>"to keep up with the trends of my generation"</i>
	P9	<i>"Dahil ito ay uso"</i>
	P12	<i>"Nakikisabay sa uso"</i>
	P16	<i>"maganda pakinggan dahil ito ay uso"</i>
	P20	<i>"kasi uso"</i>
	P23	<i>"para makisabay sa uso and para mapaikli yung ibang mga salita."</i>

The statements of the participants above indicate that neologisms are also used to keep up with the trend. It cannot be denied the Gen Z's mentality is that they have to be "in". This mentality highlights a general tendency among members of Generation Z, indicating a strong desire to keep up with the times and conform

to the newest fashions or societal norms. The results align with the paper of [10] which inferred that neologisms enhance the vocabulary of a language, thereby validating the fluidity of language evolution and therefore people need to keep up with language trends.

TABLE III Emotional Expression as a Function of Emerging Neologisms

Function	Neologisms	Statements	
Emotional Expression	<i>sana all</i>	P1	<i>“usually use if we happen to like something that happened to others.”</i>
	<i>sus</i>	P10	<i>“kapag medyo hindi naniniwala sa sinasabi ng kausap (para sa’kin)”</i>

The table above shows the use of neologisms to express emotions. Examples like “*sana all*” and “*sus*” illustrate emotional expression in conversations. “*Sana all*” conveys envy and expresses a desire for experiences others have had.

The word “*sus*”, on the other hand, signals doubt towards another’s words or actions. Building upon this finding, Reference [9] defined a subset of neologisms known as authorial neologisms. These terms frequently originate from an author’s desire to give an emotional color to his expression.

TABLE IV Description as a Function of Emerging Neologisms

Function	Neologisms	Statements	
Description	<i>chiki</i>	P3	<i>“ginagamit ko ang salitang ito kapag ako ay nakakakita ng mga panget”</i>
	<i>delulu</i>	P15	<i>“pag masyado na silang nag iimagine ng malayo sa reality “</i>

Neologisms also serve the purpose of describing concepts or behaviors. Two examples, “*chiki*” and “*delulu*,” highlight this descriptive function within conversations. “*Chiki*” is used to denote unattractive or displeasing aspects. Conversely, “*delulu*” characterises individuals indulging in unrealistic imagining that aids in describing those disconnected from reality. Reference [1] noted that innovative words are coined particularly to explain or describe things and ideas especially when no available word is there to accurately express thoughts.

TABLE V Response as a Function of Emerging Neologisms

Function	Neologisms	Statements	
Response	<i>sa true</i>	P8	<i>“that means “sa totoo lang” i use this kind of slang/neologisms when I’m talking to someone like my friends to make the sentence shorter. “</i>
	<i>wis</i>	P15	<i>“ginagamit ko ang wis pag di ako agree”</i>

Neologisms facilitate efficient communication by offering abbreviated or alternative responses in conversations. Two examples, “*sa true*” and “*wis*,” serve distinct purposes within this context. “*Sa true*” acts as a condensed form of “*sa totoo lang*,” which expresses agreement or acknowledgment of truthfulness in informal settings, as explained by Participant 8. Conversely, “*wis*” is employed to express disagreement or dissent without explicitly stating it. Thus, this provides a shorthand way to convey opposition, as Participant 15 indicates. These neologisms serve as tools for quick and efficient way to agree and disagree which contributes to fluid communication. The use of neologisms, therefore, is highly significant for the user to express concepts in the most concise manner [4].

TABLE VI Addressing a Friend as a Function of Emerging Neologisms

Function	Neologisms	Statements
Addressing a Friend	<i>bff</i>	P16 “ <i>pag kaibigan ang kausap</i> ”
	<i>bhie</i>	P4 “ <i>to call a close friend in a joking manner</i> ”

The table above shows that neologisms like “*bff*” and “*bhie*” function as terms of endearment, each with distinct connotations. “*Bff*,” derived from “*best friends forever*,” denotes close friendship which facilitates quick and informal communication while conveying a sense of closeness. Conversely, “*bhie*” is used playfully to address close friends which adds an affectionate and lighthearted tone to interactions. Reference [17], on the other hand, “*cyst*,” similar to “*sis*,” is used as a word of endearment for females. The adoption of these neologisms highlights the significance of friendship and intimacy in contemporary discourse.

TABLE VII Joking as a Function of Emerging Neologisms

Function	Neologisms	Statements
Joking	<i>eme</i>	P4 “ <i>for joking</i> ”
	<i>char at eme</i>	P15 “ <i>pag nagbibiro</i> ”
	<i>eme and kimmy</i>	P18 “ <i>I use these to tell the person I’m talking to that I am just kidding.</i> ”
	<i>eme</i>	P17 “ <i>ginagamit ko ang eme minsan kahit totoo ang sinasabi ko</i> ”

Neologisms play a key role in facilitating joking within conversations which offers individuals linguistic tools for humor and playful expression. Terms like “*eme*,” “*char*,” and “*kimmy*” serve as markers of fun. Participants employ these neologisms explicitly for joking which signals humorous intent to their audience. Notably, some participants use “*eme*” even when telling the truth. This reveals the nuanced usage of neologisms for ironic or sarcastic effect. This finding aligns with the paper of [12] which indicated that, even in Romanian context, neologisms are employed to generate humor and irony.

TABLE VIII Sharing Something as a Function of Emerging Neologisms

Function	Neologism	Statement
Sharing Something	<i>skl</i>	P12 “ <i>para maiwasang barahin ng kausap</i> ”

The table above indicates that neologisms emerge to aid in sharing information or experiences in conversations. “*SKL*,” meaning “*share ko lang*” in Filipino, functions as a marker for sharing, as explained by Participant 12. It allows speakers to share without making others feel targeted. “*SKL*” initiates sharing. Its usage reflects evolving communication norms. Studying neologisms like “*skl*” illuminates language’s role in facilitating sharing and enhancing interpersonal communication efficiency for these words have emerged as convenient alternatives for communication [15].

### C. What Does This Say About the Society?

The results underscore the profound impact of emerging neologisms on society’s communication landscape. Neologisms, deployed particularly on digital platforms like social media, offer a streamlined means of communication which allows individuals to convey complex ideas and emotions efficiently. This reflects the evolving dynamics of communication in contemporary society, where brevity and immediacy are highly valued. Moreover, the widespread adoption of neologisms, especially among Generation Z, highlights a societal inclination towards trend-following and novelty-seeking. By embracing emerging linguistic norms, individuals demonstrate a cultural mindset of staying “in” and keeping abreast of the latest trends in

language usage.

Furthermore, neologisms serve a crucial descriptive function which enriches language's descriptive capabilities and reflecting evolving social dynamics. These linguistic innovations fill gaps in linguistic terms, allowing for the expression of concepts or behaviors. Additionally, neologisms offer efficient responses in conversations, emphasizing the importance of streamlined communication in modern discourse. They not only contribute to the fluidity of language evolution but also shape interpersonal dynamics, fostering camaraderie, expressing closeness, and promoting openness in communication interactions. Finally, the use and adoption of neologisms in society highlight language's adaptability to meet users' expressive needs while reflecting broader cultural attitudes and communication preferences.

## CONCLUSIONS

This research delves into commonly used neologisms and their multifaceted roles. Neologisms emerge as crucial facilitators of easy communication, especially prevalent among Gen Z, who employ them adeptly to convey complex ideas and emotions concisely, particularly on digital platforms like social media. The prevalence of neologisms reflects a broader societal trend towards rapid, streamlined communication, indicative of a culture that values staying current and embracing linguistic innovation. Moreover, neologisms serve descriptive functions which enriches language by articulating concepts that lack existing terms, while also streamlining responses in conversations. The study underscores language's adaptability to meet evolving expressive needs and its pivotal role in shaping cultural norms and communication dynamics in contemporary society.

Based on the findings of this research, it is recommended to further explore the evolving landscape of neologisms and their impact on communication practices and societal trends. Specifically, future studies could focus on conducting longitudinal analyses to track the emergence and evolution of neologisms over time, particularly within the context of digital communication platforms. Additionally, investigating the cultural and demographic factors influencing the adoption and usage of neologisms among different age groups and communities would provide valuable insights into language dynamics and sociolinguistic trends. Furthermore, exploring the implications of neologisms on language learning and education could inform curriculum development and pedagogical approaches tailored to meet the needs of contemporary learners. Finally, the continued research in this area has the potential to deepen our understanding of language evolution and its significance in shaping contemporary communication dynamics and cultural norms.

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