'LIKE' AND THE CROSS-GENERATIONAL COLLOQUIAL CONUNDRUM: THE RISE OF HIEROGLYPHS IN COLLOQUIAL LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT: Language barriers are found between generational groups more often than not, even when each group speaks the same language. Each generation adapts their language to suit their needs, which are influenced with a variety of factors including the technological landscape and social norms. Colloquialisms are a characteristic in English which connote a general idea between individuals. They play a key role in understanding the tone and mood of a conversation. However, in the last thirty years colloquial phrases used by Millennials, such as "like", have brought about a resurgence of hieroglyphs, the antiquated concept of a picture standing in for a mood, tone, or a series of phrases. By reshaping language to suit new communication needs Millennials and Generation Z have created a new type of language barrier between themselves and Generation X. Tracing new uses of the word "like" in social situations, writing, and spoken communication can determine where Generation X and the two newest groups are crossing wires, and help us gage community ties and communication strength within youth culture.

Introduction

Communication in society is essential for strong and effective social relations, especially between older and younger generations. As younger generations learn how to use language, communication between generations can become difficult. Examining different styles of communication and the different features of the two newest generations can help determine how language shifts are affecting communication in interpersonal relationships across generations.

New generations learn to use language differently and it affects work and personal relationships in the private and business world. I argue that the Net Gen has come to rely on social media and tech to learn new colloquial phrases, and consequently leaves a linguistic void between themselves and the previous generation. Whereas Millennials learned linguistic features primarily from their parents, the Net Gen did not, solidifying their position as the first internet-tech fluent generation. Further, because the Net Gen relies on social media to learn new words, they are fully fluent in verbal and non-verbal communication which has led to a rise in hieroglyphs beginning with the term "like". To look at how this operation has come to pass, we first need to examine the two types of communication at the focal point of human relationships: verbal and non-verbal. After that, I will examine the specific case of the word "like" to demonstrate how colloquialisms are being created by new generations. Next, I will examine how the word "like" has led to a rise in hieroglyphic terminology. Finally, I will analyze how this creates a communication void between Baby Boomers and the Net Gen.

Communication is a daily activity everyone participates in both consciously and unconsciously. Reliance on a common language is the cornerstone of social relationships. The short definition of communication is to "exchange…thought by oral, written, or

nonverbal means" (Waltman 85). People communicate easily everyday even though it is a complicated process that relies on several different factors. The purpose of all forms of communication is to translate an idea from a sender to a receiver. To exchange an intangible object of analysis the sender, the creator of the thought, must create a physical way to transmit an idea (Waltman 85). This takes several different forms. Verbal and non-verbal communication is the fastest way to transmit an idea because it is immediate. Written communication can come in different forms such as an office-memo or a college research paper. Texting and email also fall under this category. Non-verbal communication is different from written and oral communication because it lacks linguistic features (Waltman 85). It relies on facial expressions and body language. In his article "A generational approach to using emoticons as nonverbal communication," Franklin Krohn explains that non-verbal indicators are heavily relied upon in social situations because they are "commonly assumed to be unintentional" (321). This means they are easy for a receiver to interpret. People communicate most effectively when the receiver correctly interprets the sender's message. Once the sender has translated the thought, the receiver's job is to interpret those thoughts and give feedback (Waltman 85). According to Waltman, effective communication is characterized by how well the receiver perceives the message being sent. Being able to communicate effectively is important in social situations because it allows overt and covert messages to be translated to , especially in face-to-face interactions and more recently technology-based ones.

There are several ways people communicate quickly and effectively today. Direct ways to communicate in an internet-saturated culture are through verbal expression and technology. Outside the dome of technology, one of the most prominent ways humans communicate is through "non-verbal" indicators such as tone, facial expressions and gestures (Krohn 321).

Social networking websites using non-verbal communication have become more prominent as technology improves. In today's culture of expanding technology, texting and social media are some of the fastest ways to spread information. This type of communication is found on sites such as Twitter and Facebook. Instead of tone and gestures, text and emoticons replace these non-verbal indicators found in a face-to-face interaction (Krohn 321). Emoticons are used to improvise facial expressions through modern technological means of communicating. They are a non-verbal indicator expressing a feeling the same way a facial expression or physical gesture would. They are a useful tool for the internet-fluent generations because they "are more believable" than written or verbal cues (Krohn 321). This is important because it is a relatively new way to express a thought or idea. A "pictograph" imitating a human face is easily translatable to the brain (Krohn 321).

An important feature of language and modern communication is the use of colloquialisms. A colloquialism is considered an informal part of speech reserved for everyday use (Fitzmaurice 54). But this term is not just reserved for certain phrases or words. Colloquial, as explained by Susan Fitzmaurice in her article from American Speech, can be applied to any form of conversation that is "traditionally reserved for informal interpersonal communication" (54). This means that colloquial is a casual form of verbal expression that is its own dialect. Anyone can use colloquialisms. Colloquial language has traditionally been used in casual, informal settings, but makes its way into formal settings frequently. Fitzmaurice found that across urban and rural demographics the use of the colloquial dialect levels people who are supposed to be speaking in a formal setting with those in informal conversations; it's a linguistic leveling tool (54). Colloquial language has found its way into formal settings such as television news reports (Fitzmaurice 54). This is important because the colloquial register is derived from its spoken, grammatical construction.

The spoken colloquial form of expression is acceptable in formal and informal conversation, but lines between formality and informality become blurry when an expression is transferred to a written form. Different generations, such as millennials and Generation Z, use different parts of speech to express their feelings to their peers. This is where generational differences in written communication begin to emerge.

How people communicate information impacts interpersonal relationships outside the scope of technology. Different forms of communication, verbal and non-verbal, affect face-to-face interactions. It can also affect the perception of information that is presented. According to Joann Montepare, non-verbal communication on Facebook and within "the digital social environment" can create issues in the perception of information (409). Montepare points out that when information is presented on social media such as Facebook, it is "manipulated" and manicured without the actual elements of an interpersonal interaction (409). The manicured messages that appear on Facebook do not allow for a transferal based on stream of consciousness. The removal of the base, human interaction of passing on information detracts the value of the transferal. Without non-verbal indicators the information that is passed along lacks substance because it does not have a human element to it. As mentioned before, Krohn observed that non-verbal indicators are "more believable," especially in uncomfortable social situations (321). Verbal and non-verbal communications rely on feedback from the receiver, or whoever the information is sent to. By taking away non-verbal indicators used to transmit new information social media distorts the receiver's perception of the information because they cannot see the non-verbal cues, or body language, of the sender (Waltman 85). In other words, effective communication relies on the combined efforts of verbal and non-verbal cues. This is where linguistic markers such as "like" and hieroglyphs become an important part of the colloquial dialect that is still shaping

the Net Gen.

Every new generation has defining features that contribute to how they interact with other generations in society. Members in different generations often distinguish themselves by their time period. The most recent generation gap that exists is between millennials and members of Generation Z. This generation gap actually overlaps with these two generations which often causes misconceptions about which age groups are part of which generation. Millennials are the group born between 1977 and 1994 and are characterized by being primarily middle-class ("The Generations" 5). In 2012 millennials "spanned the ages of 18 and 35" ("The Generations" 5). Millennials make up one of the largest age demographics in the United States and are second only to their predecessors, the Baby Boomers, although in recent years this statistic has changed ("The Generations" 5). Generation Z, also called the Net Generation, is the name given to the group of children "born from 1993 and 2005" (Turner 103). Z-Generation is the first generation to be born into a culture of complete globalization due to the emergence of the internet and new social communication (Ilin 500). Unlike millennials, Gen-Z is characterized by its reliance on networking and connectivity to form bonds; millennials are still characterized by living in a social hierarchy ("The Generations" 5).

Millennials are the generation on the cusp of the digital age. They make up the group of people born between 1977 and 1994 ("The Generations" 5). They are the generation after the Baby Boomers but before Generation Z (Turner 103). Millennials cover a larger time frame compared to Z-Generation. This means there are more millennials and they are getting older. Most millennials have finished college and are starting their working lives at this point in time (Turner 103). Unlike Generation Z, millennials were not born into new technology. Adapting quickly to technology is what sets them apart from their predecessors and successors. A

study by Eddy Ng at the Journal of Business and Psychology shows that technological affluence is not the defining feature of this generation (281). Even though this generation is considered internet-fluent, work-lives and interpersonal relationships shaped by work are what set this generation apart (Ng, Schweitzer, and Lyons 281). According to Ng, Schweitzer and Lyons, millennials make their work life a priority (281). Satisfactory occupations influence the quality of their social lives and interpersonal relationships (Ng, Schweitzer, and Lyons 281). Communicating well at work and on an interpersonal level is important to millennials because their communication skills are excellent indicators of their adaption to internet-culture. Millennials are older so they have had more time to play with the English language than Gen-Z has. "The totes amazesh way millennials are changing the English language" by John Guo describes how millennials are verbally expressing themselves to each other. Communication on twitter and other social media sites has given older millennials the opportunity to create a virtually new style of spoken and written English, which have since wormed their way into dictionaries and mommy-blogs. Millennials can readily claim the beginning of the digital language shift as their own. But it is Generation Z who is carrying on the tradition thanks to their technological fluency.   Millennials bridged the divide allowing Gen-Z children to add another method of communication to social interactions: hieroglyphs.

Researchers have not completely identified what sets Generation Z apart from millennials for the simple reason that they are too new. But there are a few obvious characteristics that set Generation Z apart. Most of these are caused by environmental factors. The first is their time period. The second is the connectivity of the world they were born into. Gen-Z is the first generation to be born into a globalized, internet culture (Ilin and Shestova 500). This means they are the first group to grow up with the internet and easy access to instant communication services. Anthony Turner refers to members of Gen-Z as "internet natives" (Turner 103). Turner points out that while the preceding generation might look at Gen-Z's use of technology excessive they are simply doing what comes naturally. This generation was born acclimated to a wired globe. Millennials sometimes consider the use of unlimited technology a privilege, but Turner finds that access to the internet or a smartphone is a constant across most environments (103). In other words, Gen-Z does not consider unlimited access a privilege. Knowledge rests at their fingertips, and that's how it ought to be. Reliance on immediate access to a smartphone can cause anxiety in unpleasant social situations since members of Gen-Z know how to escape rather than face a social challenge (Turner 103). This is one of the known psychological features that sets Z-Gen apart from millennials. Presumably, one new change researchers should find soon is the development and reliance on visual culture as a method of communicating not only full ideas, but feelings associated with them. Since social media is a medium of non-verbal communication, Gen-Z figured out how to emote independent of emoticons provided by Myspace, Instagram, and Facebook. It seems obvious in retrospect, but the simple emoticons don't connote the full range of feelings a person may go through when sending or receiving information. Millennials attempted to bridge this gap with the word "like," as a grammatical indicator of metaphor. But Gen-Z mastered it-- by disposing of it.

As stated before, colloquial phrases are their own dialects of verbal expression. They are an important feature of spoken language because they transfer a common idea in a traditionally casual way. Several colloquial expressions are commonly attributed to millennials and z-generation even though they had no hand in coining any of them (Hitchens). Neither generation has invented entirely new expressions but their prominent use of colloquialisms in verbal and written communication puts them at

the forefront of recent language shifts. Standing out significantly is the word "'like'…the idiom of the youth," as put by Christopher Hitchens in Vanity Fair. It has been a casually used expression since the sixties, but if you go and talk to a teenager between the years 2000 and 2010, and you will hear it being uttered anew (Hitchens). "Like" is considered a filler word that takes up space in long sentences that could be much shorter. The word is very important word in Millennial and Gen-Z vernacular. "Like" has a few functions in today's speech that are often cast off as bad grammar. It is a filler-phrase, a pause and a verbal "colon" (Hitchens). As a filler-phrase it can be followed by any "number of expressive sounds" (Hitchens). This is important because it allows for verbal and non-verbal modes of communication to follow it, making it versatile. As a pause it indicates that the speaker needs to take a moment to solidify their next sentence. As a verbal colon it can connect two seemingly unrelated phrases. Paired by "like," they can become a hyperbolic statement: "the trip was like, life changing," if you'll pardon my example (Hitchens). The most important function of like is that it is a slang word and a pause; it impresses upon the receiver of the verbal signal how the sender perceived another verbal signal (Guo). This is significant because it is complicated, but it is a possible way to communicate between three people. "Like" allows someone to express how they felt about another person's signal to receiver different from the original sender. The sender acts as a medium, connecting three trains of thought, and inviting the new receiver to participate in the verbal and non-verbal parts of the conversation.

As a colloquial signifier, "like" serves several positive functions in everyday English. Since the meanings of words and signifiers are recoded continuously, "like" can serve multiple purposes verbally and non-verbally. As stated before, "like" is a word that can be followed by "any number of expressive sounds" or phrases (Hitchens). Non-verbal cues following "like" are easily translatable. Messages being sent to the receiver prefaced by "like" have a built-in signifier that already exists in the receiver's lexicon. Important messages can be easily perceived and interpreted (Waltman 85). In English, signifiers are a feature of communication that signal to the receiver that an idea should be associated with a similar idea in order to evoke a feeling about the object being described. Metaphors and similes are created using "like." Messages sent with "like" as a signifier achieve this goal because they have a built-in metaphorical signifier. Fluency in non-verbal communication allows millennials and Z-Gen to instinctively not take messages sent with "like" literally. As Jeff Guo explains, it is a "systematic" way "to effect a certain tone." Communicating this way distinguishes Z-Gen and millennials from Baby Boomers and beyond. In his article in Language and Communication, Daniel Suslak explains how "youth and maturity" are directly linked to "linguistic variants" (199). "Like" is important in everyday language because it is used by the youth "as markers of age identities" (Suslak 199). Communicating through colloquialisms, especially "like," is how millennials and generation-z identify each other. It does not mean the English language is decaying; simply that new speakers are using it to carve a linguistic identity.

The biggest change "like" has undergone in the last decade is its disappearance. Spoken and written communication still use the term as an indication that there is more to come, but Generation-Z has slowly been disposing of it without replacing it. "Like" is very useful, and it helped an entire generation figure out how to create a tri-way communication loop that included emotional feedback. Generation-Z realized something only the most reflective writers realized: you don't need a metaphorical indicator (Pathak and Bansal 2019). Colloquial phrases that make our mothers gasp don't have the same effect on the youth, because there is an intuitive sense of hyperbole and metaphor. For example, I may be relaying to my mom that I was worried about Tyna who was so tired

she fell asleep walking to the next bar. I know that's a metaphor for how tired Tyna is, but my poor mom thinks I left Tyna asleep in a bar somewhere. The visual picture I have painted for my mother is lost on her, but my Friend B understands immediately, because I have created a pictograph for her, a verbal summation of the facts, and the emotional experience: a hieroglyph. Hieroglyphics are "a system of writing that uses pictures instead of words" (Pathak and Bansal 2019). The hieroglyph is a pictorial, a dictation, of what someone is trying to express verbally and emotionally all at once (Pathak and Bansal 2019). "Like" is a grammatical pause, an indicator that there is more to come. But you don't need it. A picture can express the emotional range that we may feel but our language does not accommodate for. Even though "like" is an important phenomenon, it is the harbinger of a return to an ancient form of communication the Egyptians and Mayans used (Pathak and Bansal 2019). It should be noted that although there is fear about pictures and slang replacing language, I have it on good authority that Millennials and Gen-Z love language and don't intend to replace dictionaries with picture books.

Ultimately what this tells us is "like" was a verbal bridge to a creative, visual culture that relied on everyone being in the know. My mother doesn't understand why I like sending her gifs of Kermit the Frog, but my friend Tyna sees them, interprets them, and can respond to the expressed emotion. It's important to remember Pathak and Bansal's comment that "communication is too vast a topic to be covered under one definition" (2019). Language changes and adapts to the user's needs. If we refer back to the psychological differences between Millennials and Gen-Z, we should be able to surmise that pronounced anxiety requires further outlets of expressions. For millennials it was creating a feedback loop; for Gen-Z it is highly specialized colloquial knowledge that establishes context, players, and mood, all liberated of grammatical shackles.

Communicating with colloquial expressions can have a negative impact on relationships between older and younger generations. The frequent use of colloquial expressions reveals a deeper social issue that explains the emergence of this new language shift. In "The Sociolinguistic problems of generations" Daniel Suslak explains that linguistic features are passed down from generation to generation (199). Suslak also notes that every succeeding generation has fewer features to pass on (199). The issue is that millennials and Generation-Z are not being fed enough verbal features to communicate effectively with their predecessors. Finding an identity in non-verbal cues is second nature to younger generations (Suslak 119; Turner 103). Social backlash comes from older generations who take "purist stances toward linguistics" (Suslak 199). Suslak explores how communication styles are affected by age differences (199). Most social backlash about language shifts originates from the linguistic features of "youth culture" being regarded as "hybrid" forms of communication (Suslak 199). Using "like" colloquially is an indicator of "youth culture" (Suslak 199). This instantly establishes a communication barrier between older and younger generations (Suslak 199). The communication barrier does not originate from a lack of understanding; it comes from disapproval from linguistic "purism" (Suslak 199). This is understandable and can be troubling for English teachers and parents who still don't know that an ellipse is not a replacement for a full stop, but language shifts cannot be avoided.

Communication is a complicated system that relies on factors outside conscious control. By looking at the newest generations and how they communicate, it is easy to see how communication between generations can become foggy. It also reveals the positive impact of a generation creating an identity for itself out of something as ageless as language. By examining how technology and generational differences influences communication it is easy

to see how people carve identities out of their linguistic features. The end result is having a positive outlook on how the newer generations are going to continue changing language to suit their future needs.

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