

Communication Accommodation Strategy Among Members of the OMORI Online Community: A Case Study on the Use of Semantic Shifted Slang by Generation Z

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Abstract

Communication accommodation is a process that is undergone by all new members of a community. The rapid growth of online communities among Generation Z has fostered the emergence of unique linguistic practices, including semantic-shifted slang, which can present challenges for new members to adapt and integrate. This study examines how communication accommodation strategies are employed by members of the OMORI virtual community on Discord, focusing on the use of semantic-shifted slang as a tool for group adaptation. The OMORI community serves as a platform for the players to meet and discuss with other OMORI players. This study attempts to research the OMORI virtual community in Discord, where the group members also often have other smaller groups which help them in their communication accommodation process. Employing a case study qualitative approach through semi-structured interviews, findings reveal that convergence—through observation, imitation, and gradual adoption of slang—is the dominant strategy, with small groups serving as safe spaces for experimentation and learning. Divergence also occurs when slang conflicts with personal identity or self-image. This research contributes to the field of communication studies by deepening the understanding of Communication Accommodation Theory in virtual, interest-based communities, highlighting how slang functions as both a symbolic and practical tool for fostering cohesion, negotiating identity, and strengthening group membership in online spaces.

Keywords: communication accommodation; OMORI virtual community; semantic-shifted slang; group communication; group membership.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Communication is an integral part of human culture, enabling humans to interact with each other (be it through verbal or non-verbal means), adapt to their surroundings, as well as conveying messages effectively, through the selection of words and symbols adjusted to the context, relationship, and/or social norms (Greene, 1997). Behind every message, there exists a goal which serves as a motivation for every one of us to communicate. The current digital era has changed the way we humans communicate. With it comes the rising trend of computer mediated communication (CMC), which is communication that is done through the medium of electronic devices (Arianto, 2020); facilitating communication without the need to meet face-to-face and/or in real-time. The effects are especially evident amongst Generation Z (Gen-Z), who grew up in the internet age, and where technology and the internet played an integral part in their daily lives (Tarihoran et al, 2022). Commonly referred to as digital natives, they are the ones most active in using new media to communicate. CMC is one of the most used modes of communication, leveraging various social media platforms to interact and communicate with one another. Digital technology, including social media, influences Gen Z's communication patterns and also plays a significant role in shaping their identity (Chen, 2023). As such, Gen Z prefers written communication as well as online interactions and/or communities (Musfirah, 2024). CMC itself is also part of youth culture, serving as a platform for them to express humor, rebellion, and youthfulness (Shaw, 2008), and is often used as a tool to mark one's social identity (Wood et al, 2013). As such, CMC is inherently linked to slang (language), which can commonly be seen in the burgeoning trend of virtual

communities. Virtual communities can be defined as communities which exist online in the cyberspace, and is characterized by its interaction being non-face-to-face, and often conducted anonymously; members of virtual communities share common interests and shared values, usually pursuing similar goals with similar norms as well (Agostini & Mechant, 2019).

Slang is a form of language that is specific to a particular group and/or community, with meaning that cannot be understood by everyone and is used in non-formal settings (Hutabarat et al, 2020). Usually tied to youthfulness, its development and rising trend can be traced to the rapid spread as well as ease of access to information through the net. Usually formed through informal conversation amongst friends, it is a form of expression which utilizes alternative meanings for words and is often used exclusively by certain social groups as a marker/form of their self-identity (Mutonga & Mukaro, 2021). High engagement in online activities helps in the spread of slang through rampant usage in the cyberspace. As such, it also plays a role as a social marker of one's identity in a group communication setting. Slang is often used by a group of specific people to communicate with one another (Putrawan et al, 2020). Not only that, in the context of today's day and age, Gen Z also tend to use slang as a tool to express sarcasm and irony, forming their identities in the process; the use of slang allows them to discuss social issues, convey nuanced messages, and also subtly highlight socio-political events within their groups/communities (Olaniyan & Oluremi, 2024).

Nowadays, a new trend of using slang has occurred amongst Gen Zs in online/virtual communities, where the slang used has undergone a semantic shift on their meaning. An example of this is words that usually carry negative connotations being used with a new, positive meaning, or vice versa. The formation process of semantic-shifted slang causes words to have brand new meanings, even ones that are the complete opposite of their meaning traditionally (antiphrasis) which tend to occur in multicultural groups (Widawski, 2013). This causes confusion for people who are not part of the group, or even new members of the group. Widawski categorizes semanticshifted slang in four categories, which are generalization – the expansion of a word's meaning, specialization – the shrinking of a word's meaning, melioration – a positive shift in a word's

meaning, and pejoration – a negative shift in a word's meaning. This process is dynamic, as it is influenced by culture and social surroundings, and may lead to cross-group and/or cross generation ambiguity. This is because the culture of slang usage differs from one generation to another. Communication accommodation theory (CAT) allows the facilitating of this intercultural communication, as well as serving as a tool to manage interpersonal and intergroup communication (Hoffman et al, 2022). As communicators, we accommodate each other's communication styles, in this case, through the use of slang. Communication amongst group members using slang can help contribute to group cohesion, especially in multilingual and/or diaspora communities (Radke, 2021). Effective communication is essential in a world where we are prompted to collaborate and be part of a group membership. As such, the use of slang can serve as a reference point; by providing a way to measure the social distance between group members through communication.

This is also shown through a pre-interview that the researcher conducted with a member of the OMORI virtual community, who agrees that communication accommodation helps the acceptance of new members into the community, through a sense of familiarity. Slang usage then plays a crucial role in group cohesion and group relations. It helps serve as a means to build and strengthen the social identity within a group; acting as a marker of identity to signify attachment to a social group and enhance the members' sense of closeness with the group (Alawiyah et al, 2021). Effective group communication is crucial in building an efficient collaboration, and slang usage serves as one of many tools at Gen Z's disposal to help them adapt to a new group. The researcher wants to explore the phenomenon and/or trend of semantic-shifted slang usage by Gen Z in the cyberspace, with a focus on communication accommodation. Through it, the researcher aims to find out the role that semantic-shifted slang plays in this specific generation's attempts to adapt and fit into a particular group through communication. The research will be conducted on the OMORI community in Discord. The reason is the uniqueness of the group's demographics which is almost exclusively Gen Z. The novelty of the community itself, which was only formed in Q4 of 2020, also contributed to this choice. Since the study focuses on slang trends used among Gen Z, a community dominated by Gen Z serves as the optimal place to conduct this research. In addition, based on the results of the pre-interview done by the researcher, the OMORI virtual community has a fairly high barrier to entry in the form of several particular slang used to communicate which are exclusive only to the OMORI community, with some having their roots based on the OMORI game. In addition to that, the combination of Japanese elements in the OMORI game itself causes some slang to originate from that language too, with differing meanings.

Academically, this research can contribute to the development of communication science studies, in communication accommodation theory particularly, through the use of slang among Generation Z in online communities. Through this research, it is hoped that the process of communication adjustment which takes

place in virtual groups can be better understood. How slang can be used as a tool to achieve communication accommodation will also be studied. This research will provide a particularly deeper understanding of the dynamics of Gen Z communication and their culture in the net, through how they choose to interact and their language usage patterns in virtual communities. In addition, this research can also help understand how the acceptance and use of slang is one strategy to build closeness and be accepted in online groups; as well as to provide insight into the important role of slang in creating cohesiveness and a sense of togetherness in group communication existing on online platforms. Some of the research used as references include Grandez's *Forda Ferson: The Morphological Structure of Generation Slang in Social Media* which discusses slang usage in Filipino social media, as well as Alawiyah's *Slang Usage as Representatives of Social Cultural Identity in Film Step Up 2 The Streets* which analyzes communication accommodation through slang in a film. Ayoko's *Resolving The Puzzle Of Productive And Destructive Conflict In Culturally Heterogeneous Workgroups: A Communication Accommodation Theory Approach* which researches the role of CAT in enhancing understanding and serving as a conflict mitigation tool in workplace settings. This research provides a different nuance from those prior researches, as unlike those three, this research focuses more on Gen Z slang language, specifically semantic-shifted slang, in a virtual group setting.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Communication Accommodation in Virtual Communities

Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) posits that individuals will always adjust their communication style to better adapt to their social surroundings, and this adjusting can come in the form of making their communication more similar or more distinct from their interlocutor(s) (Giles & Ogay, 2007), which in this research happens to be members of a virtual community. CAT views communication from both interpersonal and intergroup perspectives, explaining differences in individuals' communication styles. In CAT, accommodation involves not only cognitive aspects but also relational and behavioral elements of communication. It is usually done to improve group cohesion, as well as to build explicit boundaries and/or social norms in a group/community. As such, the act of communication accommodation in a group/community can create a more positive image amongst group members and strengthen group cohesion and/or solidarity. Accommodation actions toward the ingroup can create a more positive image of group members and enhance group solidarity and cohesion. Such communicative adjustments are made in response to, or in anticipation of, potential misunderstandings. These adaptations help navigate social categorizations and boundaries at the collective group level. According to Giles & Ogay, the two main strategies in communication accommodation are convergence and divergence. Convergence refers to adjusting one's speech and communication style to be more similar to others, often to improve understanding, strengthen relationships, or gain social approval. It is commonly used within in-groups to foster cohesion and solidarity. While it can enhance communication effectiveness, forced convergence may limit self-expression and potentially hinder group relations (Soliz & Giles, 2012). On the other hand, divergence occurs when an individual deliberately maintains or emphasizes different communication styles to assert individuality or preserve group identity. This is typically seen in outgroup interactions, and/or to highlight distinctions and protect one's or the group's uniqueness. One such group is virtual communities. Communities can be defined as a group of people who interact and have shared experiences with one another, and who hold relatively similar values, beliefs, as well as interests (Syafudin & Hamidah, 2009). Communities can also form in virtual spaces, where members gather based on shared interests and have the freedom to choose when and where to communicate. A virtual community tends to develop its own distinctive language style during interactions; Gen Z, as part of such communities, also adjusts their speech style to fit their surroundings, either through convergence (aligning with others) or divergence (deliberately maintaining differences).

2.2 Group Communication and Membership

Group communication shapes the social dynamics and relationships among members, as well as influences decision-making within a group; both verbal and non-verbal communication can affect group cohesion and collaboration (Frey, 1999). Through group communication, group members can develop and/or strengthen existing relationships with other group members which directly impacts the group dynamics. These interactions also contribute to how group members interact and collaborate. As such, through those interactions, group members can establish their social positions within the group. Group membership serves

to strengthen members' social identity; individuals do not possess a single, unique "personal self," but rather multiple, integrated selves connected to their overlapping group memberships (Turner et al., 1987). This affiliation shapes the thought process, behaviour and communication style of group members, leading individuals to adjust their speech and opinions based on group norms, strengthening group solidarity. The more one associates oneself with a group, the stronger the group's influence on one's identity formation becomes. This affects the way one thinks, behaves, and sometimes even how they should feel about certain things. In different social environments, an individual may change not only their style of speech, but also their opinions to align with the 'expectations' of the group they identify with at the time. Sometimes, they also unconsciously adopt the same language patterns as other group members. If there is a subgroup that wants to assert its unique identity, it may deliberately maintain or exaggerate different communication styles, thus causing group polarisation. Status and hierarchy among group members also affect how much people can be accommodated and/or are willing to accommodate in group interactions (e.g., lower-status members accommodate higher-status speakers more).

3. METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative-descriptive method. Qualitative research is designed to understand a phenomenon based on the experiences of its subjects such as behaviors, perceptions, motivations, amongst many others, expressed in words and language within a specific context (Moleong, 2021). The descriptive method is a technique used to provide an accurate portrayal of the characteristics of an individual, group, or specific situation; with the aim of presenting an overview of the situation without drawing broader conclusions (Kothari, 2004). Through this study, the researcher will conduct a case study to explore how Gen Z new members in the OMORI virtual community adapts to a group through communication, specifically by using slang, with the new trend of assigning new meanings to certain words. The research will employ a case study method focusing on the OMORI virtual community on the Discord platform. A case study is a research design that examines an individual, group, or community in a comprehensive, detailed, and in-depth manner regarding contemporary phenomena or cases, grounded in the understanding of human behavior and experience (Herdiansyah, 2015). The researcher seeks to explore how the process of communication accommodation occurs through the adaptation of new members in the OMORI online community to semantic shifted slang. Interviews will also be conducted with members of the OMORI online community to gain deeper insights into the accommodation strategies used through semantic shifted slang. The slang examined in this study will be limited to those that fall under the semantic shifted category.

The OMORI Community is an online gathering of players and fans of the game OMORI, a psychological horror turn-based RPG that features Japanese cultural elements and multiple endings. Due to its single-player nature, players seek a discussion space to exchange and share information about various gameplay routes and hidden secrets. The main forum for this community is the OMORI Discord server, which has been active since the game was released back in December 2020. As of 2025, the server hosts over 210,000 members worldwide. Quoting from the Keyword Studios article, Discord remains a top platform for building communities thanks to its multi-channel structure, which allows various conversations to take place within a single server functioning as a central hub. It also offers gamified features such as interactive activities and custom stickers. The OMORI Discord server provides multiple channels based on topics of discussion, such as sharing fanart, discussing story theories, exchanging game tips, and casual chatting. This channel allows members to engage in topic-specific discussions easily. Moreover, the flexibility of access via both computer and mobile devices makes Discord a popular medium for virtual communities like the OMORI community.

The subjects and objects of the research are attributes, characteristics, or values of individuals, objects, or activities used as a source of information about the situation and conditions of the research context, with specific variables set for study and conclusion drawing (Sugiyono, 2013). In this study, the subject consists of Gen Z members of the OMORI virtual community, with an age range of 18-27 years old. Subjects are picked based on their differing backgrounds (new members and old members) who are also using semantic-shifted slang. The subjects were determined purposely by the researcher with several criteria outlined, with an emphasis to obtain data from a diverse set of informants to get a more varied perspective as

well. Informants will be split into couples (although still interviewed individually), which will then be divided further into old member-new member and new member-new member. New member as communicator and accommodation actor, and old members as communicators and those who assist in and/or accept the accommodation process.

The unit of analysis in this study is individual informants selected based on specific criteria. After determining the focus of the study, data collection is conducted within the informants' activities; what

influences them, how they behave, and other similar aspects (Moleong, 2021). The researcher also conducted interviews with individually selected participants to obtain data related to specific subjects; these interview participants are referred to as informants, meaning individuals who possess expertise or a deep understanding of the subject matter (Silalahi, 2012). There are three types of interviews: structured interviews, semi structured interviews, and unstructured or in-depth interviews (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2016). In this study, the researcher used semi-structured interviews conducted online to allow for deeper exploration based on the informants’ responses, aiming to gain a more comprehensive understanding. To ensure data validity, the researcher will employ data triangulation by comparing the results of interviews with the researcher’s own observations. Triangulation is a technique for checking the validity of data by using something outside the data itself for verification or comparison (Moleong, 2021). In this study, data triangulation will be applied through comparison and re-evaluation of information obtained through different informants who are also members of the same group as the initial informants, and at different times.

Table 1. Informant criteria

	Criteria	Description of Variations	Reasoning
Informant Group 1	2–3 New Members* with >2 Old Members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Gender <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Male ○ Female ● Background <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Education ○ Primary Language ● Age Range <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ School/University Age ○ Working Age <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Type of work ● Ethnicity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Asian ○ Caucasian ○ Mixed ○ etc. 	To explore how the accommodation process occurs in group communication settings from both the communicator and the communicatee perspectives.
Informant Group 2	2-3 New Members*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Gender <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Male ○ Female ● Background <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Education ○ Primary Language ● Age Range <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ School/University Age ○ Working Age <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Type of work ● Ethnicity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Asian ○ Caucasian ○ Mixed ○ etc. 	To explore the strategies and the process of accommodation from the communicator's perspective in group communication settings.

*members who joined the virtual community within the last three months
 Source: Researcher’s Output (2025)

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

On February 4th, 2025, the researcher initiated the process to find informants in the virtual community of OMORI on a Discord platform. When the researcher monitored the dynamics in the server’s main channels, the researcher saw that there were a few micro-groups (small groups) within the larger whole. Subsets of these subcultures have also grown, specialties, slang and culture are cut off from the others of the community. The

researcher reached out to two subgroups, Walnut Club and Black Space Denizens, to see if any members were willing to be interviewed. Participants were prescreened to ensure they actively use semantic-shifted slang in routine social interactions, and especially to ensure their usage reflects communication accommodation to the wider OMORI community. Results of the interviews also indicate that group formation in the server is based largely on how close and comfortable members feel toward one another. The researchers invited informants in both subgroups of the OMORI virtual community. The four informants and triangulators in the research are profiled below:

Table 2. Informant table

No.	Initial	Status	Background
1.	AG	Informant #1, Old Member, Walnut Club	United States, Designer
2.	EJ	Informant #2, New Member, Walnut Club	Malaysia, Finance Fresh Graduate
3.	EN	Triangulator #1, Walnut Club	-
4.	PM	Informant #3, New Member, Black Space Denizens	Canada, Highschooler
5.	FF	Informant #4, New Member, Black Space Denizens	China, Food Science Freshman
6.	MT	Triangulator #2, Black Space Denizens	-

Source: Researcher’s Output (2025)

4.1 Data Analysis

Community members share interests, uphold values and norms, and pursue similar goals (Agostini, et al., 2019). Based on interview findings, members of the OMORI virtual community alter their communication style to better adapt and fit in with the group. Identity in virtual communities is dynamic, shaped by social interaction, knowledge sharing, and the interplay between real and virtual selves. The construction and expression of identity depend on community type, social structures, and individual motivations, with implications for social capital, group cohesion, and personal development. In a virtual community, communication adaptation is often described as instinctive and natural. Adjustment is also influenced by the digital context, where online communities like OMORI provide a more flexible linguistic space than offline social environments. This adaptation process is achieved through observation and is also driven by a personal desire to belong to the community. Although the process occurs naturally and without a concrete strategic plan, adaptation to a virtual community still requires time and effort, especially from new members. However, despite its “natural” connotation, accommodation through the use of semantic-shifted slang involves effort, particularly for newcomers who must adapt to these shifted meanings.

The most common form of communication accommodation in the OMORI community is convergence, where members naturally adjust their speech styles, slang usage, and expressions to "align" with the group. For the younger digital natives, this mesh is something that comes naturally; driven by a desire to fit in online rather than conscious planning. The use of slang and informal expressions grows over time, and convergence reflects an identification strategy and a desire to experience a sense of belonging. This often stems from habits of directly observing and imitating the group’s speech style. However, for some members, the accommodation process also involves internal reflection, especially when adapting their speech style could impact their self-image. Adapting one’s communicative behaviour is known to affect one’s constructed identity as an individual communicator. While certain members act proactively to converge (ie. looking up slang meanings in Google or asking more senior members) it is clear that proficiency in semantic-shifted slang is considered an important tool for full group membership. Slang usage signals not only understanding but also emotional attunement with the group’s values, humor and inside jokes. As the group becomes more familiar and comfortable to members, they report greater ease in use and frequency of such terms, reinforcing an experiential sense of membership in the category. Adaptation was described as instinctive and unconscious, reflecting unconscious convergence as an effort to become part of the community. Interviews also revealed that some members converged strategically by adopting community slang and emojis as signals of closeness; demonstrating high awareness of language use as a social integration tool and adjusting as comfort within the group increased. In the OMORI virtual community, divergence typically occurs among members who do not wish to be associated

with certain labels. For example, in the OMORI community, dissonance may be found when slang is perceived to be too deeply rooted in niche subcultures such as “weeb” slang or anime-related terms which some members would like to dissociate from. This is partly because OMORI itself contains many Japanese cultural elements, leading to slang that may be associated with that culture. Such resistance suggests that acceptance or rejection of a semantic-shifted slang item is not simply a linguistic choice, but rather a strategic identity negotiation between a personal position of authenticity and the pressure to conform. Divergence also happens when certain slang feels uncomfortable for some members to use. Interviews revealed that divergence can initially occur when new members feel unsure about the meanings of slang terms, to avoid mistakes. Another motivation for divergence is the desire to maintain one’s personal identity despite membership in the OMORI community.

Through this research, it can be inferred that the most common reason for accommodation in this group communication is the need for emotional connection and social approval. Additionally, the enjoyment of using slang also contributes to members’ motivation to accommodate. Although not mandatory, the use of semantic-shifted slang in OMORI is far from purely whimsical jargon, it is also a symbolic tool that fosters a feeling of shared identity within the group members through its exclusivity and in-group humor value. This phenomenon highlights the importance of affective convergence in CAT; emotional alignment achieved through affective resonance language use. Group members often mirror each other’s emotions and assess situations collectively, creating a shared emotional state. This process occurs through slang and inside jokes as forms of emotional and symbolic alignment, where adopting slang becomes not just a communication tool, but also a dynamic calibration and reciprocal attention mechanism that strengthens togetherness and group identity during interactions (Wolf, et al, 2023). However, the decision to accommodate can also be strategic and identity-based. Interviews revealed that accommodation can be selectively used to align with certain group identities while resisting others; slang itself holds flexibility as both a unifying and separating tool in group interactions. It signals group membership through the members’ knowledge and usage of certain slang words.

For members of the OMORI community, slang functions as a marker of group identity; a symbolic boundary separating members of the in-group from those of the out-group. Slang usage enhances social closeness among group members and fosters a sense of belonging, while also creating a symbolic boundary through exclusive and shared language meanings (Manurung, et al., 2023). Some slang has different meanings for the OMORI community because it became very common for that group and its meaning has since been warped just for that group. Slang use is optional, but is an indicator of how much a member of the community associates with it. Consequently, slang functions as an identity expression. The closer and more involved someone is with OMORI, the more slang they tend to use. For new members, corrections to slang misuse are collaboratively accommodated by older members who provide guidance, and by new members’ willingness to accept corrections. Group membership in the OMORI community is less a matter of official membership, and more a performative sort of inclusion. Interview findings indicate that while interest and active participation are key, slang use also functions as a “signal” of belonging. However, for new members, participation and comfort alone may suffice. One respondent noted:

*“Even if you don’t use slang, as long as you vibe with the group,
you’re in”
(EJ)*

This statement reflects a membership concept where shared emotional experience is prioritized over strict linguistic conformity. Consistent with interview results, accommodation requires time. Learning this slang is frequently handed down to new members from older members and is represented as a bonding mechanism for the group; initially, participation may be sufficient, but over time, slang use becomes a sharper indicator of membership. Learning this slang is frequently handed down to new members from older members and is represented as a bonding mechanism for the group. Persistent refusal to use slang could result in being perceived as a “poser” or fake member by the community.

Interviews with both groups indicate that communication accommodation processes are formed through a combination of social instinct, active observation, and the need for emotional connection in virtual spaces. Interview findings reveal that the use of slang constitutes an essential issue and a strategic practice when new members try to converge with a peer group. Despite that, all four informants described the process as “natural”; it happens as long as newcomers have the desire to belong. However, “natural” here does not mean without control. In practice, many respondents still engage in internal reflection and proactive efforts to understand slang meanings before adopting certain communication styles; as seen in FF’s case, where awareness of potential identity risks created tension between blending in and maintaining personal image. While not strictly

required for acceptance, slang plays a key role as a social lubricant in group communication; its use can elevate one's "social value", strengthening emotional bonds and group solidarity (Parkinson, 2020). Group members often mirror each other's emotions and assess situations together, boosting the accommodation process. The accommodation process typically begins with passive observation, developing into imitation of speech style, emoji use, and eventual adoption of slang reflecting group norms. This aligns with convergence theory in CAT, where adaptation often emerges as an unconscious response to relational and social acceptance needs. Accommodation initially triggered by external pressure can evolve into naturalized convergence through positive feedback and sustained group interaction (Pratiwi, et al., 2021). Eventually, the use of semantic-shifted slang becomes internalised in the member's individual linguistic system, as an unconscious behaviour integrated into their interlanguage. But this learning is still flexible; speakers have a choice whether to express or repress different types of social identity, and react by concealing or exposing themselves to others in various ways as part of the communication accommodation process.

Within the OMORI virtual community, where nonverbal language does not exist and emotional distance is amplified, slang and inside jokes serve as the equivalents to physical social cues, providing a form of relational glue and an indicator of emotive involvement. From the interview, it can also be noted that small groups serve as an incubator in the accommodation process. The informants stated that group conversations frequently diverge from OMORI's central themes and reach a point where they mention uniquely shared interests encompassed only by the subgroup. It fosters a new inside joke inside of these places and leads to intimacy and closer relationships, which in turn helps to pass around, to understand, to accommodate the slang used in the wider OMORI community. These small groups offer a safer, more open social backdrop for experimenting with accommodation outside of the normative demands of a mainstream forum. In these private circles, members can safely test out new slang, honing their semantic awareness of shifts before introducing them to more open spaces. This is where OMORI slang and community act as not just communication media but as social negotiation tools too, strengthening cohesion while leaving room to maintain personal identity boundaries.

One of the informants, FF, reported that she engaged in convergence by actively observing the group speech style and their communication symbols. Further probing confirmed that there was interior/personal reflection process, particularly in cases where changes in mode of speech or the use of slang could affect her self-presentation. Accommodation appears inextricably bound up with identity and authenticity. PM also showed a pattern of selective assimilation. She used some communication styles but she refused to dumb herself down by using slang she felt uncomfortable using. PM also stressed that she doesn't want to be perceived in the wrong way (using the wrong type of slang) or in a way that didn't reflect the image she wanted. However, PM was willing to integrate some slang into her lexicon. For example, the use of semantic

shifted slang like the 🤪 emoji to convey humor. As such, it can be noted that divergence can occur when the existing slangs do not align with the new members' self-identity. The divergence described here serves as a strategy to preserve their identity with the group as well as a tactic to preserve their sense of independence. It simply serves as a reminder that not all adjustments are good adjustments, especially when they could change or contradict one's true self. The fact of maintaining a boundary is, itself, a way for members of a group to differentiate themselves from others, defining themselves as a distinct group, always through symbolic means, including language (slang) use (Bhatt et al., 2022). This is consistent with CAT's positioning, that accommodation is not always towards majority norms, and may also be an act of resistance against the shore of certain linguistic features to maintain one's self-integrity and duality through divergence. In terms of accommodation strategies, informants reported that it wasn't until they had a solid grasp of the language that they started to imitate the use of the emojis and slang.

4.2 Data Interpretation

Slang usage varies cross culturally and generationally, and communication accommodation theory is useful in bridging cross-cultural communication as well as in the context of interpersonal and intergroup relationships through communicative interaction (Hoffman et al, 2022). In communication, individuals mutually adjust their language and speaking styles, including the use of slang as a form of communication accommodation within a group setting. Slang usage among group members can strengthen a sense of togetherness or cohesion, particularly in multilingual and/or diaspora communities (Radke, 2021). Membership in a group provides a frame of reference and self-orientation that helps individuals build relationships and understand the level of social closeness with others, one of which is through the use of slang. Drawing on findings from interview data, the following themes emerged as patterns of communication accommodation

practices in online group settings, and particularly in interest-based communities, such as that of the OMORI community. The informants reported that communicative adaptation takes place "spontaneously", in particular when they want to be part of the group. This is indicative of the fact that the need to belong, be valued and emotionally connected seems at the heart of the accommodation. In this vein, accommodation is not only cognitive or strategic, but is a response to the group's perceived "vibe". When people feel at ease and pick up the "vibe" of the group, adjusting communication style and slang is an organic element of the human experience. Adjustment to use of groupspecific slang in group communication indicates a wish to be embraced by members of the group as well as a readiness to engage in group-oriented practices. The use of slang as a means of emotional and symbolic alignment is not only helpful in communicating with others, it also contributes to solidarity and group identification through interactional negotiation and understanding (Wolf et al, 2023).

Newcomers do not, generally, jump right in, but rather observe language style, relative frequency and context of slang use, and dynamics of member-member communication, initially. The process of accommodation usually starts with the new members monitoring slang use in the community. In doing so, they can get an initial sense of the degree of relaxedness in the conversation, and even observe the manner of communication that seems dominant in the OMORI community, without having to use said slang, or contribute to the conversation. This approach suggests that the act of accommodation is not immediate but consists of a process of presentation and context-sensitive analysis. In this respect, context-sensitive readings become important, because too immediate or hasty form of convergence may seem insincere or even contribute to accentuating social distance. New members often adjust themselves to community by the way of using community-specific slang, unique emojis, or even copies of particular writing style. Trial of slang usage, or 'testing the waters' as FF mentioned, comes next. New members will try to communicate by replicating, or at least mirroring the communication style they have seen, to see how others will respond being subjected to that adopted communication style. Informants report that this usually happens in their own micro-groups, where they can ask questions and work on learning and using language in more a relaxed manner and/or freely with other members of these micro-groups. For Gen Z new members at an early stage of the network life cycle who don't know many people in a new community, the existence of these micro-groups is very important in the process of their communication accommodation. These little groups are a cautious environment for the public to ask and look into what slang means before being able to wield it out among the general OMORI community.

"It would not be funny if I just use the slang without knowing what it means because it can be used wrongly. I would also often find myself testing the use of certain slangs with people I'm comfortable with before using them in the community at large."
(PM)

The use of semantic-shifted slang in a virtual community doesn't just serve as a means of communication, but also a more symbolic one, as a signal that signifies group membership as well as closeness amongst group members. As such, it is no wonder that the use of such slang plays an integral role in Gen Z's attempts at communication accommodation. After all, having a common ground and shared experience does help speed up the social integration process. By using a "shared" language, as EJ put it, members demonstrate their understanding of the group's internal cultural context and their readiness to become part of the community. The importance of adapting slang within both groups is not only related to its communicative function but also carries significant social value. Table 3 are some of the semantic-shifted slang recorded to be used in the OMORI community.

However, fundamentally, the most important thing in this entire process is one's desire to be part of the group. The interview shows that all four informants agree that communication accommodation will go smoother and feel more natural when coupled with an internal desire to belong with and be involved in a group. In other words, strategies such as observation, imitation and use of semantic-shifted slang, as well as active inquiry helps in the accommodation process. One's personal willingness and openness towards the social process are the main factors determining the success of accommodation. Another thing of note is the behavioral difference exhibited by different age groups of the OMORI virtual community's Gen Z new members. New members of the OMORI community who are above and below the age of 20 exhibit different levels of cognitive complexity when engaging in communication accommodation. For those above 20, it is apparent that they pay less attention to the impact of slang use on their self-image, focusing instead on efforts to be accepted within the group. According to the informants interviewed, the older informants make a difference between the aspect

of slang as only an identity marker and/or linguistic feature characteristic of a particular community. Accordingly, they think its influence is only limited within that community. On the other hand, younger members (ages 20 or less) are more careful about their self-image and about which slang to adopt.

Table 3. Semantic-shifted slang in the OMORI community

Slang/Word	Real Meaning	Semantic-shifted Slang
<i>Oyasumi</i>	Sleep	Die
Stab	Thrust a sharp object to wound someone	To end a conversation
Cap	A type of laughter	To lie
Queen	Member of royalty	Used as words of encouragement and/or praise
Savage	Fierce, violent	Something good
💀 / 😵 / 🥲	Dead/Confused/Crying	Laughter
Weeb	Someone obsessed with Japanese culture	<i>Anime</i> fans
Stairs (moment)	A set of steps leading from one floor to another	Used to indicate something triggering
Sick	Ill	Something amazing
Im dead	Deceased	Burst out laughing
Clam	A type of animal	Money

Source: Researcher’s Output (2025)

*“I would start normal and start exploring the range of tolerance and then find an intersection of, okay, I’m comfortable with speaking in this tone.”
(FF)*

Younger members reported that even though slang is characteristic of a particular community, its usage can unintentionally spill over into their everyday vocabulary, potentially influencing their personal identity beyond the scope of community interactions. This suggests that unlike the older segment of Gen-Z (those above 20 years old), the younger Gen-Z members place greater importance on how they are perceived by others and on maintaining their self-image, even within virtual settings. Comfort in a slang’s usage reflects accommodation through convergence where members adopt and use the slang. While discomfort in a slang’s usage leads to divergence, seen in the conscious rejection and/or avoidance of said slang’s usage during interactions with the group.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on research conducted within the OMORI virtual community, communication accommodation within a group is a process that cannot be standardized or reduced to merely one or two strategies, as emotional factors also play a significant role in the accommodation process within a group. The use of semantic-shifted slang within the OMORI virtual community serves as one of the entry points that requires accommodation efforts. Nevertheless, several common strategies can be highlighted.

The first is the use of slang as a symbolic element that identifies closeness and/or understanding of the community’s culture. Through the use of slang, new Gen Z members of the OMORI community are able to engage in communication accommodation at their own comfort level, which is positively received by older or more established members. When there is a genuine desire to belong, the process of adaptation feels natural and does not require conscious or deliberate effort. The process of discovering the meaning and usage of slang, as well as the act of imitating or experimenting with its use, was observed among members of both the Walnut Club and Black Space Denizens. Communication accommodation in virtual communities is strongly influenced

by the reciprocal relationship between linguistic adaptation, emotional motivation, and identity negotiation. Slang is not merely a collection of words, but a symbol of familiarity, a tool for social validation, and a medium for expressing identity. Effective accommodation is not simply about imitation, but about understanding, feeling, and becoming part of the rhythm of the group.

In addition to the utilization of semantic-shifted slang by new Gen Z members, the use of small groups outside the larger OMORI community also serves as a comfort zone for newcomers, allowing them to experiment with slang usage and learn about these linguistic features alongside people they already feel close and comfortable with. Although the comprehension and use of slang may be seen as an additional or supplementary outcome of the accommodation process into a group, the understanding and proper use of slang are also closely related to how group members perceive each other's group membership status. Therefore, slang usage remains an essential element of communication within the group. Convergence emerges as the dominant strategy that strengthens social relationships and community membership. However, divergence also appears as a means of controlling identity and resisting conformity within the group. Slang serves not only as a communication tool but also as an affiliative and exclusive instrument, strategically used by individuals to either integrate into or distance themselves from certain social groups. In virtual communities like OMORI, the ability to speak in alignment with the community's linguistic norms becomes a key indicator of membership, closeness, and social influence.

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