

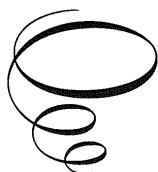
Language and Communication:

From Form to Meaning

Edited by

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CHAPTER TWO

PUNCTUATION REVOLUTION: THE DEMISE OF THE FULL STOP IN MODERN COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

With the rise of portable (mobile, cellular) technology, language took a serious hit with the abbreviations of actual words. Some linguists would argue that the understanding of a text message completely composed of abbreviations as opposed to full words and sentences showed the shrewdness of the younger generations in communication and their agility in understanding, with very little input from the sender of the message. However, it is not just words that have taken a serious hit; punctuation has also suffered this fate. At first, words had to be abbreviated, as mobile phone operators charged per character. As such, punctuating was certainly out of the question. As technology further advanced, it seems that many punctuation marks have made their return, except for the full stop, which seems to be struggling to make its comeback. Gen Zers consider it too serious and, to an extent, passive-aggressive, and seem to avoid using it even in more formal written communication, such as in emails and text messages to their (college) professors, employers and institutions. The present study aims to explore how Gen Zers view the use of the full stop in certain written communication, as well as the reasons behind it. For this aim, a small-scale survey was carried out on a group of university students, which provided us with empirical data to test our hypotheses and discuss the implications on a broader scale.

Keywords: Gen Z, Gen Zers, full stop, LOC, punctuation

Introduction

Setting out from the premise that the primary function of language is communication rather than representation, language can be essentially seen as a social phenomenon (Chen, 2015). As such, we may even say that it is a social construct, meaning that it is invariably influenced and affected by its users. The reasoning behind this idea is the fact that language is created and maintained by a variety of social and cultural norms and forces. As society evolves, so does language; it is fluid and flexible to ultimately meet the speakers' communicative needs.

As technology makes rapid advances and brings about changes in everyday life, so does language, in order to adapt to the newly-created conditions and people's lifestyle. Everything is only a click away, which certainly makes things easier, but, on the other hand, the pace of life is accelerating like never before. We need to hurry to keep up, to be as concise as possible, to be succinct, yet to get all the necessary information across.

What does this mean for language, though? How exactly is this represented in modern communication, this constant race to pack in as much as possible, in as short a time as possible? What brought it all about?

Undoubtedly, the rapid developments in technology have played a significant role in the changes language has undergone, and continues to undergo, from linguistic ones, such as the expansion of vocabulary as a result of newly-introduced and/or newly-coined words, to changes in various linguistic forms and constructions, to changes in the basic mechanics and lower order concerns (LOCs) connected to sentence structure, punctuation and spelling, among others.

This paper will specifically focus on one aspect of these LOCs previously mentioned, namely, that of punctuation, and the all-too-frequent omission of the full stop in (semi-formal and informal) written communication by a specific group of language users - the Gen Z generation.

Generation Z, or Gen Z, is defined by Pew Research Center as anyone born between 1997 and 2012. As such, it is currently the second-youngest generation, preceded by Millennials, or Generation Y, and followed by Generation Alpha. Gen Zers, or zoomers, as they are also informally known, together with Millennials, make up the majority of the workplace. This is, in fact, the motivating factor and impetus behind our aim to explore in greater detail this aspect of Gen Zers' use, or rather, omission of one of the most ordinary of punctuation conventions, the full stop, since they are, in

this way, putting their own stamp on communication in the workplace and elsewhere.

As communication steadily moves online and becomes increasingly text-driven, it is inevitable that certain linguistic conventions concerning the mechanics of language are going to experience potentially 'life-altering' changes, eventually becoming redundant and, as such, obsolete. Though it is not the first time this has happened in language, nor will it be the last, it is, nevertheless, worth exploring the consequences of this phenomenon, and what it may possibly lead to.

Users of mobile technology from its earliest beginnings will undoubtedly remember that mobile phone operators charged by the character, and, as such, users had to be savvy enough to get their message across as concisely as possible. This meant abbreviating words, and most often, omitting punctuation marks. Nowadays, with instant messaging applications such as Viber, WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger, the financial burden of texting has been lifted, yet the habit of abbreviating words and omitting punctuation marks has remained. In fact, this has further been joined by a lack of capitalization. All of these new ways of communicating and changes in writing conventions have invariably found fertile soil for miscommunication and misunderstandings, especially as the use and/or omission of punctuation marks, namely, the full stop, incorporate and convey tone and intention.

Gen Zers have made it more than clear that one of the reasons the full stop has fallen out of favour amongst them is due to the fact that they consider it unfriendly, too serious, rude, abrupt and even, to an extent, passive-aggressive. A recent study by Binghamton University in New York found texts ending with a full stop as being seen as "less sincere" than messages that do not end with it. In this context, then, it becomes clear why they are even struggling to use the full stop in formal written communication, such as in emails and text messages to their college professors or even prospective employers, among others.

In fact, as Gen Zers see it, the very act of sending a message is in itself an indication the sentence has come to an end, and as such, using a full stop has become unnecessary and redundant. When texting via Viber, WhatsApp and FB Messenger, users avoid using the full stop by simply typing out sentences in separate texts and, thus, substituting the primary use of the full stop to indicate the end of a sentence. Chunky, properly punctuated texts are invariably stress- and anxiety-inducing among the Gen Z and, as such, despite the fact that the full stop is one of the most useful and ordinary

punctuation marks and that it makes the majority of our conventions arsenal, its use has evolved in the direction of obsolescence.

It is worth exploring in more detail to see to what extent the full stop is considered to be a rude and aggressive punctuation mark in semi-formal and informal written communication amongst the Gen Z, as well as to find out if there is a way out of exile for the full stop, i.e. whether there is a possibility that this group of users might revise their opinions and attitudes toward this punctuation mark and possibly reintroduce it in their written communication.

The full stop is an inextricable part of standard language norms and should not simply be 'cancelled', even though in cross-generational communication, it certainly seems to be constantly missing. Proper punctuation is invariably and inevitably linked to properly conveying meaning, as well as avoiding miscommunication and misunderstandings, which is extremely likely where written communication is concerned, since we do not have the added elements of various non-verbal gestures and indications that would help us make appropriate inferences.

Literature Review

In spite of the fact that most studies focus on the role of punctuation within a syntactic context, attempts have been made to explain its place in language as a social construct rather than a mathematical/grammatical equation. Even though Gen Z would consider punctuation marks and, more specifically, the full stop as a part of the LOCs in language and communication, there are still not enough reasons to write it off, or 'cancel it', due to the fact that communication would lose a number of social cues, and, as such, lose its value as a social construct.

In their paper on punctuation marks (1990), Adorno & NicholSEN argue that there is nothing more indicative of music in language than punctuation marks. They go on to explain the different values punctuation marks hold in language, such as commas resembling staccato symbols in a phrase, exclamation marks resembling 'a pointed finger raised in warning', etc. However, despite all of these qualities of punctuation in language, the most important point raised is that what was once most popular in punctuation marks is precisely that which nowadays has become outdated in them. In other words, as regarding the full stop, which the authors point to as having the most trouble coming back, it is its definitiveness that makes it so unpopular amongst Gen Z nowadays.

There are numerous works on the proper use of punctuation and revising punctuation rules that guide conversation and communication, with most of the literature being divided on supporting the premise that punctuation must be used in its entirety without having built any attitudes toward the altered communicational value it brings about with the shift of generations. On the other hand, as Celia Klin, Associate Professor of Psychology and Associate Dean at Binghamton University's Harpur College, claims in her study (2016), people are adept at communicating complex and nuanced information and social cues, specifically in written exchanges; they attempt to convey them to the best of their ability using what is available to them. Apart from punctuation marks, emojis and emoticons are also available in the communication process, and it is understandable why Gen Z would substitute the full stop with one of these instead. In Houghton et al. (2018), it is claimed that Gen Z consider written messages and sentences in written communication to be less sincere.

In support of Klin's claims stands the paper by Joseph Brean in the *National Post* (2022) where he notes that the use of the exclamation mark has overtaken the use of the full stop to convey the meaning and communicational value of a more positive context and atmosphere that seem to have been spoiled by the full stop. In a striking and memorable comparison of modern communication to Chekhov's gun (the gun that must be fired if ever shown or evident on stage), such power and attention-grabbing ability is also carried by Chekhov's exclamation mark, which has fully taken over the potential use of the full stop in those situations. The author draws a parallel between Chekhov and his powerful exclamation mark to today's use of punctuation marks and the digital revolution that is happening in modern times. The author also mentions the alternative to using a singular full stop, and that is the use of multiple (usually three) full stops, which convey indecisiveness, inconclusiveness and avoid the finality of one full stop. The paper concludes by claiming that it seems as if the exclamation mark has completely taken over the use of the full stop to change the atmosphere and the communicative value of the written conversation to a more positive one.

Lauren Squires, in her *Enregistering Internet Language* (2010), takes the middle ground between those who support the proper use of punctuation and those who are in favor of letting the use of punctuation be subdued to the atmosphere and the imprint that it leaves with the person receiving the written communication. The author has an extremely objective view of the changes that happen in registering and re-registering the use of language under the influence of internet communication. She excludes herself from

the act of communication and talks about the metalanguage, also known as 'netspeak' or 'chatspeak', which is a shared concept of internet language by users and refers not only to the use of punctuation, but also to abbreviations, acronyms and respellings as its distinctive features.

Generally speaking, the authors of this paper do not take a definitive stance in terms of the use or non-use of punctuation, but examine the way in which punctuation is used in written communication, both semi-formal and informal. The long-term aim of our survey, with this paper as a starting point, is to discover the reasons why written online communication is experiencing such changes and enregistrements in terms of punctuation, how susceptible it is to the atmosphere of the conversation and why it is that the full stop is the only punctuation mark struggling to make its comeback. The literature supporting this paper and providing ideas for the empirical survey offers evidence and supports both ends of the spectrum.

Research Methodology

To help us get a more in-depth insight into how Gen Zers view punctuation and, specifically, the use of the full stop in semi-formal and informal written communication, we conducted a small-scale survey, which included us distributing a questionnaire among the students from three schools of two universities (one a state university, and the other a private university), namely the "Blaže Koneski" Faculty of Philology and the Faculty of Economics from the Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje (UKIM), and the School of Foreign Languages from the University American College Skopje (UACS), in the period between December 25 and December 30, 2023.

The respondents were students from all four years of undergraduate studies, from freshmen to seniors and, as such, were in the age group ranging from about 19 to 22 years of age, which means that they all belong to the Gen Z generation (born between 1997 and 2012).

The majority of the respondents are EFL majors, those from the "Blaže Koneski" Faculty of Philology and the School of Foreign Languages, while the others are business majors, those from the Faculty of Economics. We feel that this has no particular bearing on the results, however, as they are all respondents classified under Gen Z. These respondents were chosen to be included in the survey simply because we had access to them - they were students that we had contact with during the Fall term of the Academic year 2023/2024.

The survey was carried out online, via Google forms, which made for easier distribution and dissemination, as well as for the analysis of the results. The survey itself consisted of 20 questions, three closed-ended and 17 open-ended.

After the survey was closed for replies, the results were coded and analysed; the former allowed us to keep the respondents anonymous, while the latter allowed us to obtain a clear picture of the actual results, thus enabling us to deal with our research questions and to check whether our hypotheses were confirmed or not.

Concerning the actual creation of the survey¹, we followed the principles set out by Dörnyei & Taguchi (2010) - that it should take the respondents no longer than 20-25 minutes to complete, that it should not exceed 4-6 pages in length, and that it should include a variety of open-ended and closed-ended questions. The advantage of using open-ended questions is that they offer respondents the opportunity to express themselves, which may lead to shedding light on new perspectives and new ways of looking at the issue. Closed-ended questions, on the other hand, help to standardize the responses.

Our reasoning behind carrying out the questionnaire online was to get as many respondents involved as possible, which proved to be very helpful in our case.

Our article is based around the following research questions and hypotheses.

Research questions:

1. How do Gen Zers feel about punctuation in (semi-formal and informal) written communication (Viber, text messages, social media posts)?
2. How do Gen Zers feel about using the full stop in (semi-formal and informal) written communication (Viber, text messages, social media posts)?
3. What are their reasons justifying this?

Hypotheses:

1. Concerning our first research question - *How do Gen Zers feel about punctuation in (semi-formal and informal) written communication*

¹ The survey that was disseminated is presented in Appendix 1.

- (*Viber, text messages, social media posts*)? - our belief is that they probably do not feel the need to properly punctuate in these cases, as this is informal communication, and they would probably view punctuation as a sign of higher formality and register.
2. As regards our second research question - *How do Gen Zers feel about using the full stop in (semi-formal and informal) written communication (Viber, text messages, social media posts)?* - we feel that the full stop would, in all probability, be seen by them as the most 'aggressive', indicating irritation or even signs of hostility, and would be, thus, avoided.
 3. In terms of our third research question - *What are their reasons justifying this?* - we anticipate that they would probably interpret the use of the full stop in semi-formal and informal written communication in a negative light, associating it with hidden overtones such as anger, annoyance, disappointment, etc., and would thus choose to replace it with something else, either an exclamation mark or an emoticon.

The results of the questionnaire we carried out will help us to see how accurate our hypotheses are, and to what extent we can reach a relevant conclusion, as well as to determine what further steps can be taken to develop and improve our research.

As noted earlier, our findings are based on a small-scale study, which was carried out on a limited number of participants in a limited time frame. There is certainly the potential to expand this and to include a more encompassing approach, such as involving a greater number of respondents by including students from other Faculties and universities throughout the country. Furthermore, as Gen Zers are those born between 1997 and 2012, we may even include high school students, as well as pupils from the upper grades in middle school. As such, our base of respondents will expand, which will ultimately provide us with a greater pool of responses and data that can undergo analysis.

In addition, as previously stated, our survey was conducted in the period of five days, from December 25 to December 30, 2023, which is right around the Christmas and New Year's holidays. Though we had a respectable number of respondents, 83, we might possibly have had even more, had the survey been conducted at a more opportune, less hectic time, for example during the middle of the term, either Fall or Spring, and had we kept it open for longer, perhaps 10-14 days.

Furthermore, we may also decide to include follow-up interviews, which would allow us to clarify anything that might not be clearly stated and explained in the replies, though in this case we would be losing the anonymity factor, which is definitely very important.

Once we have obtained a large pool of responses, we may then go one step further and carry out an actual analysis of social media posts, Viber exchanges, and emails and compare them with the results - to see if they match, and to what extent.

These are all possible steps that may be taken to further develop our research and get more in-depth results, which may be worth thinking about and carrying out as additional steps to expand on our preliminary findings.

Analysis/Discussion

This section will focus in greater detail on the results received from the 83 respondents that participated in the survey by filling out the questionnaire, which was discussed in greater detail in the Research Methodology section above.

'Demographically' speaking, students from three Faculties of two universities were involved, that is, 68 respondents from the Ss Cyril and Methodius University (UKIM), out of whom 41 (49.4%) were from the "Blaže Koneski" Faculty of Philology and 27 (32.5%) from the Faculty of Economics, while the remaining 15 respondents (18.1%) were from the School of Foreign Languages within the American College Skopje (UACS). In addition, out of those that responded, the majority, 48, were first-year students (57.8%), with a relatively even distribution among the remaining years - 14 second-year students (16.9%), 12 third-year students (14.5%), and nine fourth-year students (10.8%). Gender-wise, there was a clear majority of female respondents, 56 students (67.5%), while 26 were males (31.3%), with one respondent opting to declare themselves in the category of Others.

Question 4 was a more general question that led into our main research focus, asking the respondents whether they spelled out words fully when texting/posting on social media, and allowing them the opportunity to explain their answer, especially those that answered No. Predictably, the majority, 45 respondents or 54.2%, answered in the negative, that they did not spell out words fully when texting/posting on social media, with the remaining 38 respondents (45.8%) claiming that they did not abbreviate in social media posts and exchanges. There are some interesting explanations

provided by those that answered that they do abbreviate, some expected, such as that it is easier, faster, more practical, more fun, it has become second nature, due to being lazy and/or not really wanting to reply, and others not so expected, such as that short forms look cooler and are considered more 'aesthetic' (*inspo* instead of *inspiration*). Others went on to explain that they use short forms in certain contexts and depending on the situation - *If I'm texting someone that is close to me (my friends or family) then sometimes I shorten them, but if I'm texting someone that is not close to me or I'm making a post, then I spell out the words fully; when texting usually I don't, but I do when I post something on my story or as a post, unless it's referencing something such as a meme and it needs to be shortened; when posting I use full forms, but when texting my closest friends I tend to shorten words; while posting yes, while texting no; I try to use full words but sometimes when i [sic] write with friends i cant [sic] be bothered; I usually do spell them out fully, but there are words that have known abbreviations and it's easier to use them, among others.*

Question 5 asked respondents whether they punctuate when texting/posting on social media, and had them elaborate, especially if they answer in the negative. Surprisingly, as we can see from the pie chart below (Fig. 1), a clear majority claim that they do punctuate when texting/posting on social media, which certainly does not correspond to our expectations. It also does not fully correspond to the manner in which the respondents elaborate, where they do, in fact, omit all sorts of punctuation marks, such as apostrophes (*its* for *it's*; *im* for *I'm*, among others), but this may be left for future research and analysis.

Do you punctuate when texting/posting on social media?

83 responses

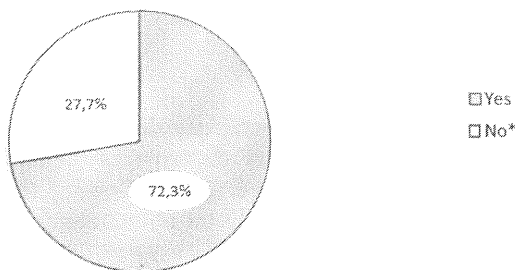


Fig. 1. Q5 in questionnaire: Do you punctuate when texting/posting on social media?

The answers in connection to this question, where the respondents are asked to elaborate in more detail, provide an interesting array of explanations, and selected ones are provided in the chart below (Fig. 2), as written by the respondents themselves.

Theres no point of punctuations because its understandable as it is.
I use commas and question marks, but not full stops.
I typically don't because the device usually does it automatically.
Nobody pays attention anymore...
I text faster without using punctuation. I only use it when what I've written is very long or when I have to so that my message is clear.
It really depends who I'm texting. If it's a friend, I feel free around them and don't punctuate, but if I post something I do.
Sometimes, it depends on who I'm talking with and if I should be using formal language.
I use punctuation in more formal contexts, or sometimes if I feel like it. But, most of the time i write like this and dont use apostrophes or full stops
Unless I'm asking a question.
It depends who I'm texting or what I'm posting.
When texting I mostly use commas so the sentences don't get confusing, when posting it depends on what the caption is.
I do punctuate when texting, although sometimes I leave out some punctuations when texting with close friends or family.
no body does that
Not really, but it really depends of the length of the message, of it's purpose and where it needs to be sent.
It depends on who I'm texting really. If its a more professional setting i will be careful of that but if I'm texting a friend I don't use anything and hope for the best :). On the topic of posting, I rarely do, but usually it's not formatted as a text so that I'd have to use proper punctuation and it's more of a thought or a comment.
not fully

It depends mostly on the person that i'm texting, however, in most cases I just chat with my friends and people close to me so it allows me to be a bit more casual
If it's a statement, I don't put a full stop (.) at the end of the sentence, but I do usually punctuate questions and exclamations
Except the dots at the end of the sentences, I always use punctuation marks.
I don't punctuate when I text my friends
Most people I text don't and it's rarely necessary to convey the intended meaning

Fig. 2. Q5 in questionnaire: If you answered NO, please explain.

Interestingly enough, as can be seen from the replies above, there are certain situations in which the respondents note that they do use punctuation marks, such as commas and question marks. Full stops, however, tend to not make the cut, and are omitted. This leads us to the next three questions, namely, questions 6, 7 and 8, where in question 6 respondents need to reply as to whether they use proper punctuation in modern communication (texts, Viber, social media posts), and elaborate; question 7 ties in specifically to those that answered the previous question in the negative by having them further elaborate in terms of which punctuation marks they tend to omit by choosing from the provided options or adding their own answer, and question 8 allows the respondents to explain their reasons why they omit the punctuation marks they noted previously.

As such, question 6 - *Do you use proper punctuation in modern communication (texts, Viber, social media posts)*, we, interestingly, see that the majority, 49 respondents or 59%, answer in the affirmative, elaborating as shown in Fig. 3 below:

I would like the communication to be coherent.
I use it so people understand me.
Because it's important.
It's important to use punctuation so people can know in what tone I am speaking, texting
I think with using punctuation we can express ourselves better.

Even if I cut down [abbreviate] words, punctuation helps with showing my point and emotions while the recipient read the message;
I do punctuate when texting, although sometimes I leave out some punctuations when texting with close friends or family.
I use proper punctuation because it annoys me when people do not use it as it can lead to a lot of misunderstandings;
I hate it when longer texts on social media don't have any punctuation; it makes it 10 times harder to read;
I love using proper language and I don't want to sound illiterate;
Because i don't want to sound uneducated. It's important to use punctuation so people can know in what tone i am speaking, texting.
Most of the time I do, as its easier to understand the tone of the message I'm trying to convey to the person. I find that when I use proper punctuation, I am better understood.
I try my best to use proper punctuation when writing anything really
i use it so people understand the point im getting to.
Because without punctuation it feels wrong to me.
It is cultural [polite] and shows how much smarter we are.
Because it makes it easier for the other side to understand the tone of your message. Its difficult to grasp the meaning of a text if it is just written without any punctuations to signify whether its a question or a simple statement.

Fig. 3. Q6 in questionnaire: *Do you use proper punctuation in modern communication (texts, Viber, social media posts)?* (Affirmative replies elaborated, selected, as written by the respondents themselves)

Out of the 83 respondents, 26 (31%) answer in the negative, elaborating as shown below, in Fig. 4:

I feel like people would understand me even if I omit punctuation in places where it's obvious that there should be one.
No, unless I think it's necessary for the sentence to make sense.
No one bother to use punctuation anymore.
I don't think it's necessary.

I'm used to texting without proper punctuation.

...my generation is very used to not using punctuation in modern texting.

I dont punctuate my texting because i usually write very fast

i dont use it its faster without it

Fig. 4. Q6 in questionnaire: Do you use proper punctuation in modern communication (texts, Viber, social media posts)? (Negative replies elaborated, selected, as written by the respondents themselves)

The remaining eight respondents (10%) are somewhat ambivalent, as can be seen from their replies in Fig. 5, below:

No if I am writing to friends or family, but when I write more formal messages then yes.

It depends who I'm communicating with.

...with the exception of the end of the message. If my text consists of 3 sentences, I always use commas and end the first two sentences with a full stop, but I never end the last sentence with a full stop.)

When texting friends and family not always, but when posting something publicly I always use proper punctuation.

Most of the time I don't, but it depends because if the message is long, I use comma (,) and full stop(.) or sometimes even quotation marks.

Yes and no.

Depends honestly, but i do use some short abbreviations sometimes.

Not all the time.

Fig. 5. Q6 in questionnaire: Do you use proper punctuation in modern communication (texts, Viber, social media posts)? (Ambivalent replies elaborated, selected, as written by the respondents themselves)

Concerning question 7 as regards which punctuation marks the respondents tend to omit in modern communication (texts, Viber, social media posts), we see that the full stop is omitted the most frequently, by 38 respondents or 45.8%, followed by both the comma and the exclamation mark, by 23 respondents in both cases, or 27.7%, closely followed by the question mark, by 14 respondents, or 16.9%. In the option Others, which 30 respondents chose, or 36.1%, the following punctuation marks are mentioned: quotation marks, semicolons and colons, and capitalization.

In terms of question 8, where the respondents elaborate as to why they omit the said punctuation marks, the replies tend to correspond to current trends where punctuation, especially the full stop, is concerned, and thus, Fig. 6 below contains selected replies, as provided by the respondents, in the context of their omission of the full stop:

I usually split my sentences in a different message, so I don't feel like using a full stop is necessary.

When I text my friends, writing a full stop seems too formal for me so that's why I omit it.

I don't use full stops to signify the end of a sentence - I just send the text.

I mostly don't use question marks because there's either a question word in the sentence already or you can tell from the context/what's being discussed.

I don't use exclamation marks because the context renders it unnecessary. This is what I do in texting; if I posted something, I would use correct punctuation.

I often find it unnecessary to use periods when I'm talking with friends

i can faster write and send the message

We're probably too lazy to use any of them.

Because it's easier to just not use them and try to find them on the keyboard.

Using it makes the message look way too formal and I don't like feeling like I have to be formal with friends/family.

I like to omit the full stop because it introduces an abrupt feeling at the end of the sentence (as it should), which can feel very formal and unnatural for a casual setting. Next, I also leave out the hyphen, often because, to be honest, I'm not really sure in which places it belongs and where it doesn't, but I do try to use the dash appropriately and as much as possible.

It's too formal

I send separate texts instead of a paragraph so I usually forget the full stop.

They are not so important in informal communication.

Perhaps out of convenience, and because I often send every sentence separately which implies the end of the sentence.

The end of a text bubble implies the end of a sentence, so no need for a full stop. I do sometimes use commas, but full sentences aren't really necessary for texting, so neither are commas. Reading commas and full stops in a text

message implies there should be a pause there, thus making it come across as a little sarcastic.

I honestly just hit the send button and forget to do it

With hitting send I end a sentence. That's why I tend to omit the full stop. However, i don't really think about it I do it mechanically.

Fig. 6. Q8 in the questionnaire, respondents elaborating on why they omit the use of punctuation marks, in this case with an emphasis on the omission of the full stop

The responses to question 9 - *Do you feel that using a full stop (.) in modern communication has any other meaning than the usual ending of an affirmative sentence?* - are more or less evenly split, with 42 of the respondents, 50.6%, answering in the affirmative and 41 of the respondents, 49.4%, in the negative. As to what additional meanings may be carried by the full stop in modern communication, again there is a correspondence of the replies by our respondents to current trends among Gen Zers, with a wide range of negative emotions evoked by the use of the full stop, such as *being passive aggressive, serious, upset, angry, speechless (in a negative connotation), sad, irritated, odd, displeased, insincere, cold, too formal, rude, abrupt; it shows disapproval, a desire to end the conversation, a need to emphasise something*, among others.

Bearing the above in mind, the responses to questions 10, 11 and 12 - *If you are replying via text/Viber message in the affirmative, how would you indicate the end of your reply?; Do you feel that proper punctuation is important in (informal) social exchanges (social media, texting, Viber, Twitter, etc.)?; and In which situations do you feel it is appropriate to avoid the use of the full stop?*, respectively, are unsurprising and in tune with the overall Gen Z views on punctuation in general, and the use of the full stop specifically. Thus, over half, 42 of the respondents or 50.6%, would not mark the end of a message by any punctuation mark, with only one-fifth, 17 out of 83 respondents, or 20.5% opting for a full stop, and the remaining ones going for an emoticon or an exclamation mark. The results to question 10 are interesting, especially when we compare them with the responses received to question 11, where almost half of the respondents feel that punctuation is important (despite the fact that 50.6% previously noted that they do not punctuate the end of their messages). However, there is an overall correspondence as regards the replies to question 12, where respondents say that it is acceptable to omit the full stop in Viber texts and emails to friends, family and colleagues.

Questions 13-20 have to do with four cases where the full stop is used in different contexts of (semi-formal and informal) written communication, where the respondents need to interpret them as friendly, unfriendly or neutral, and elaborate their answers, especially if they interpreted the exchanges as unfriendly. The results in all the cases presented are similar, and interesting to compare, as the majority of the respondents in all the cases interpret the tone as either neutral or friendly, despite the use of the full stop, bearing in mind that in the previous questions the overwhelming majority declared that they see the use of the full stop in informal written communication in a negative light, as was noted previously and especially in the analysis of the replies to question 9.

The first exchange, question 13, is a Viber exchange with a friend, in which the reply by B is marked with a full stop. The responses reveal an almost even split between those that see the exchange as neutral, 37 respondents out of 83, or 44.6%, and friendly, 34 respondents out of 83, or 41%. Only nine respondents, 10.8%, interpret the exchange as unfriendly, and out of those most would either not punctuate it at all, or use an emoticon.

The next exchange, question 15, is a text exchange with an acquaintance, in which, again, the reply by B is marked with a full stop. The results here are similar to the previous exchange, in that only eight respondents, 9.6%, interpret the exchange as unfriendly, whereas the split between those that see it as neutral and those that see it as friendly is bigger, that is, 54 respondents out of 83, or 65.1%, as opposed to 19 respondents, or 22.9%, respectively. Those that felt it was unfriendly would opt either not to punctuate at all, use an emoticon, an exclamation mark or even an ellipsis, to suggest an incomplete thought.

The third case, question 17, illustrates a closing greeting in an email from a coworker, where only five respondents, 6%, see it as unfriendly, whereas 77 respondents see it as friendly or neutral - 50 respondents, or 60.2%, and 27 respondents, or 32.5%, respectively. Again, instead of the full stop, those who deemed it unfriendly would either not punctuate it at all, or use either an emoticon or an exclamation mark.

Finally, the last exchange, question 19, represents a comment from a teacher, as feedback on a written assignment, and the number of respondents that interpret it as unfriendly is identical to the previous case, five in total, or 6%, 57 respondents, or 68.7%, see it as neutral, and 19 respondents, or 22.9%, see it as friendly. Like the previous cases above, those that see it as

unfriendly would either not punctuate it at all, or use either an emoticon or an exclamation mark.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that Gen Zers have their own unique take on communication, and, as such, punctuation. There is no guarantee that these changes will not undergo further modifications and adjustments, but that is only to be expected, as language adapts to current trends in society.

As far as our research is concerned, we carried out a survey to answer three research questions, and to see whether our hypotheses concerning the said questions would be confirmed, and if so, to what extent.

In that context, as regards our first research question - *How do Gen Zers feel about punctuation in (semi-formal and informal) written communication (Viber, text messages, social media posts)?* - our hypothesis that *they probably do not feel the need to properly punctuate in these cases, as this is informal communication, and they would probably view punctuation as a sign of higher formality and register* was fully confirmed, as the results we received supported this belief.

Concerning our second research question - *How do Gen Zers feel about using the full stop in (semi-formal and informal) written communication (Viber, text messages, social media posts)?* - our hypothesis that *the full stop would, in all probability, be seen by them as the most 'aggressive', indicating irritation or even signs of hostility, and would be, thus, avoided* - is confirmed in one section of the survey, while we received contradictory answers in another section, which might be resolved if we expand our research and perhaps incorporate interviews, as well as involve a greater number of respondents and possibly carry out additional research and analysis of semi-formal and informal written communication amongst Gen Z, such as social media posts and Viber exchanges.

In terms of our third research question - *What are their reasons justifying this?* - our hypothesis that *they would probably interpret the use of the full stop in semi-formal and informal written communication in a negative light, associating it with hidden overtones such as anger, annoyance, disappointment, etc., and would thus choose to replace it with something else, either an exclamation mark or an emoticon* - is fully confirmed, bearing in mind the replies we received as regards the negative perceptions evoked by the use

of the full stop, as well as the substitutes they would use instead, such as the exclamation mark or an emoticon.

In addition, we may see from the respondents' actual replies, as presented in Figures 2-6, in practical terms how they punctuate, which, once again, illustrates their casual approach.

Language embraces the changes taking place in society and its users, and these linguistic changes, at any point in history, are simply a reflection of this. As such, they are significant in that they are testament to the evolutionary nature of language and of society, keeping up with all the novelties and advancements taking place. As linguists, we, too, embrace these changes, since they provide us with unlimited phenomena to research and study in greater detail, compare and contrast, and even make predictions on how they might further develop.

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Appendix

QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire has been created to help us get a more in-depth insight into some current trends in modern (written) communication amongst the younger population.

Your participation is of invaluable significance for our research, and your responses will be anonymous.

The purpose of the questionnaire is to help us collect data, which will be used in our writing a paper to be internationally published. The results will be used solely for that purpose.

The questionnaire consists of 20 questions and will take you no more than 10 to 15 minutes to complete.

Please read the questions carefully and answer them as honestly as possible. Where possible, please provide additional explanations.

Thank you for your participation.

* * * * *

Answer the following questions by marking the option that best applies to you.

1. Which Faculty are you enrolled in?
 - a) "Blaze Koneski" Faculty of Philology, UKIM
 - b) Faculty of Economics, UKIM
 - c) American College - Skopje
2. What year of studies are you in?
 - a) I
 - b) II
 - c) III
 - d) IV
3. What is your gender?
 - a) Male
 - b) Female
 - c) Other

4. Do you spell out words fully when texting/posting on social media?

- a) Yes
- b) No*

* If you answered No - please explain.

5. Do you punctuate when texting/posting on social media?

- a) Yes
- b) No*

* If you answered No - please explain.

6. Do you use proper punctuation in modern communication (texts, Viber, social media posts)?

- a) Yes - please explain.
-

b) No* - please explain.

7. * If you answered No to the question above, please choose which of the following punctuation marks you tend to omit in modern communication (texts, Viber, social media posts) - mark as many as applicable.

- a) Comma (,)
 - b) Full stop (.)
 - c) Exclamation mark (!)
 - d) Question mark (?)
 - e) Other(s)
-

8. Please explain your answer(s) above - why do you omit those?

9. Do you feel that using a full stop (.) in modern communication has any other meaning than the usual ending of an affirmative sentence?

- a) Yes*
- b) No

* If you answered Yes - please explain.

10. If you are replying via text/Viber message in the affirmative, how would you indicate the end of your reply?

- a) Full stop
 - b) Nothing
 - c) Emoticon
 - d) Exclamation mark
 - e) Other(s)
-

11. Do you feel that proper punctuation is important in (informal) social exchanges (social media, texting, Viber, Twitter, etc.)?

- a) Yes - please explain.
-

- b) No - please explain.
-

12. In which situations do you feel it is appropriate to avoid the use of the full stop? Mark as many as applicable:

- a) Text message/SMS to a colleague/acquaintance
 - b) Viber message to a colleague/acquaintance
 - c) Email to coworker
 - d) Email/text message/Viber message to an unknown prospective co-worker
 - e) Other(s) - please specify
-

13. How would you interpret the following Viber exchange with a friend, focusing on the use of the full stop in B?

A: You coming to the party tonight?

B: Yup, definitely.

- a) Friendly
 - b) Unfriendly*
 - c) Neutral - neither friendly nor unfriendly
 - d) Other (please specify)
-

14. * If you answered Unfriendly - how would you punctuate it?

- a) Nothing
 - b) Emoticon
 - c) Exclamation mark
 - d) Other(s)
-

15. How would you interpret the following text exchange with an acquaintance, focusing on the use of the full stop in B?

A: I need to talk to you, please; when are you available?

B: Tomorrow morning's good for me.

- a) Friendly
 - b) Unfriendly*
 - c) Neutral - neither friendly nor unfriendly
 - d) Other (please specify)
-

16. * If you answered Unfriendly - how would you punctuate it?

- a) Nothing
 - b) Emoticon
 - c) Exclamation mark
 - d) Other(s)
-

17. How would you interpret the following closing greeting in an email from a coworker, focusing on the use of the full stop?

Thanks for your help and have a great day.

- a) Friendly
 - b) Unfriendly*
 - c) Neutral - neither friendly nor unfriendly
 - d) Other (please specify)
-

18. * If you answered Unfriendly - how would you punctuate it?

- a) Nothing
 - b) Emoticon
 - c) Exclamation mark
 - d) Other(s)
-

19. How would you interpret the following comment from a teacher, as feedback on a written assignment, focusing on the use of the full stop?

Your arguments are logical and well supported; in terms of the grammar - please see me after class for further clarifications.

- a) Friendly
 - b) Unfriendly*
 - c) Neutral - neither friendly nor unfriendly
 - d) Other (please specify)
-

20. * If you answered Unfriendly - how would you punctuate it?

- a) Nothing
 - b) Emoticon
 - c) Exclamation mark
 - d) Other(s)
-