

Mixed tongue, a comfort zone

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Calcutta: A group of children from different schools in the city were talking on the sidelines of a dance event, held during their recent term break. Their language was a mix of English, Bengali and Hindi. Terms like “Yolo” (short for: you only live once), “chill koro” and “for real” floated from the conversation.

“We use these terms while speaking with our friends,” said Sinjini Sengupta, a Class IX student of Garden High School. Educators, however, begged to differ. According to them, students are increasingly blurring the line between formal and colloquial language, be it English or their mother tongues.

“They are so used to talk-

ing in abbreviations and a mixed jargon that they sometimes use it before their teachers and also while writing,” said Nupur Ghosh, vice-principal of Mahadevi Birla World Academy.

“Spoken English has lost its purity. While speaking in English, students sometimes slip in vernacular words such as *matlab* or *mane*,” she said. Similarly, vernacular languages are being spoken with a smattering of English. Some also slip into the WhatsApp lingo while writing. “I have come across U (short for you), R (short for are), IDK (I don’t know) and the likes. It is the job of the educators to correct them,” Ghosh said.

Slips happen because students are constantly switching between phone lingo and



Students chat in a mixed language

formal language. “I have unconsciously written abbreviations in classwork and then struck them out,” confessed Navoneer Bhattacharya, a Class IX student of Birla High School.

Abbreviations and new terms make up the student-tongue, forcing adults to scurry for meanings mid-sentence. “I speak in Bengali with my friends as I am comfortable

in it, but GenZ lingo does creep in,” said Sinjini. Students have made their own rules while speaking. Colloquial language is fused with influences from Bollywood, Japanese anime and Korean series, and the concoction gets reflected in their writing.

According to Piyas Mukherjee, English teacher at M.P. Birla Foundation Higher Secondary School, mixing languages is at play even inside classrooms, especially when students discuss topics for a group project among themselves. “They start in English and then switch to a mix of Hindi, Bengali and even borrow terms from Bollywood and the OTT series. Students of Classes VI to VIII don’t even know what the formal way of speaking or writing is. They

message us with a thumbs up (instead of okay) or write btw (by the way) instead of their full forms,” she said, adding how the mixed tongue is more apparent since the pandemic, when screen time increased.

For Class III student Sreyan Mondal of Delhi Public School, Ruby Park, everyone’s a bro. “I enjoy speaking ‘Benglish’ or ‘Hinglish’ with my friends or even at home. That is my comfort zone,” he said. Comfort and clarity are priorities for most students.

Consultant psychiatrist Dr Sanjay Garg agreed. “Children know which language to switch to, to make a greater impact. It makes communication easier and effective for them. We need to learn the new rules if we want to understand this generation,” he said.