

Slang language and the formation of British-Jamaican identity in *Blue Story* (2019)

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Article History: Accepted: February 12, 2025; Revised: March 1, 2025; Approved: April 28, 2025

Abstract

This research aims to analyze the type, word formation, function, lexical meaning and contextual meaning of the use British and Jamaican English slangs as identity markers in the film *Blue Story* (2019) by Andrew Onwubolu. The method used in this research is descriptive qualitative method. This research focuses on British and Jamaican English slangs in the dialog of the central character and supporting characters in the film. This research finds out forty data of British and Jamaican English slangs in the movie, but in this discussion the data will be explain ten data of slangs. The type of imitative or word formation dominantly appears in the film. The function of slang language in the movie is mostly used as an identity marker that the speakers are group of Jamaican and British descent. In addition, slang is used as a form of self-expression in negative terms and mocking others because of the conflict between gangs.

Keywords: Slang; Contextual Meaning; Identity Markers.

Introduction

As a communication tool used by humans in interaction, language can be categorized into two types: formal and informal language. Formal language is generally used in official or academic contexts, such as speeches, academic presentations or official communication. In contrast, informal language tends to be used in non-official settings, such as interactions among friends and family. In these situations, informal language is more relaxed and less bound by formal grammatical rules, often incorporating slang to create a sense of closeness in communication.

As time progresses, language evolves due to the influence of increasingly advanced communication technology that is accessible in various context. One of the communication media developed by humans that has grown and is widely enjoyed in the realm of knowledge and technology is film. Film can serve as a subject of study in research because it contains elements that can be examined through linguistic theories. Manovich (2002) argues that film have a unique structure and grammar that allows viewers to understand meaning in the same way as they

understand spoken or written language. One form of language in film that can be analyzed from semantic and pragmatic perspectives is slang.

Slang belongs to the intimate language variety used by speakers and interlocutors because they have a close relationship such as family members or friends who are already intimate (Trudgill, 2000). The film chosen for this study is *Blue Story* (2019) by Andrew Onwubolu. *Blue Story* presents the use of British and Jamaican English slang, which is not widely recognized outside of these cultural communities. The slang used reflects the speech style and cultural identity of the communities represented in the film.

Several previous studies have explored the phenomenon of slang from various research sources, including research by (Rezeki et al., 2019; Fauziah, L., 2021; Yusri et al., 2021; Hendra et al., 2022; Surbakti et al., 2023). One such research, titled *Slang Word Used by the Millennial Generation on Instagram*, revealed how young people use slang on social media by presenting data found in captions written in slang on Instagram accounts. Previous research on contextual meaning conducted by Hendra et al. (2022) examined both lexical and contextual meanings in poetry, highlighting aspects

of strength, confidence, and Black women's identity. In the same vein, Imama & Shofiyuddin (2024) and Aisyah (2024) argue that intercultural linguistic construction correlates with the formation of identity.

In this research, the questions that arise are: what are the types, formation processes, and functions of British and Jamaican English slang, and how do these forms of slang serve as markers of ethnic identity for speakers. Additionally, what are the contextual meanings conveyed through the use of British and Jamaican English slang in *Blue Story*. the scope of this research includes analysis of semantic and pragmatic aspects in the film, focusing on British urban culture and Jamaican culture, which remain relatively unfamiliar to audiences outside these communities.

The aim of this research is to provide a deeper understanding of the types of slang words, their formation processes, their communicative functions, and the contextual meanings of British and Jamaican slang used in *Blue Story* (2019). Through this research, it is expected to reveal how slang reflects meaning as an identity marker in expressing communicative situations.

Methods

This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the observed phenomenon. According to (Cohen et al., 2007) as cited in (Herwianti & Wijayanti, 2023), the descriptive qualitative approach aims to provide a detailed description technique used in this researcher's perceptions and interpretations in a study. The data collection technique used in this research is the observation method, which involves carefully listening to utterances in the film.

The theories applied in this research include a combination of (Allan & Burridge, 2006) as cited in (Manurung, 2022), which classifies slang into five types and formation processes: fresh and creative, flippant, imitative, acronym, and clipping. In addition, the theory of fifteen slang functions by (Partridge, 2015) is used, which categorizes slang based on its usage context. This research also applies theory of lexical meaning by (Yule, 2023) as cited in (Suparno, 2016), which explains that lexical meaning is similar to denotative meaning or the basic concept

of a word as found in the dictionary and can be understood regardless of communicative context. Conversely, contextual meaning as defined by (Thomas, 2014) refers to meaning derived from the relationship between spoken words and the context in which they are used. The main argument of this research is that in *Blue Story* (2019) by Andrew Onwubolu, the use of slang serves as a markers of Jamaican and British community identity based on the theory of (Partridge, 2015) and (Thomas, 2014).

Findings and discussion

Fresh and Creative Slang

Data 1 *Ten Toes*

(00:13:48) – (00:13:55)

The context of this conversation is Madder expressed his frustration towards Sneak for fleeing when the Peckham gang attacked the Depford gang in their territory. Sneak's action was considered a form of betrayal for leaving Madder and Galis in a dangerous situation. Galis attempted to calm Madder's anger by saying that Sneak's action was just a joke: "It's a joke, T-bone. We're just out here like some doughnuts, bruv. Got man doing ten toes in man's own ends."

The phrase "*ten toes*" belongs to the fresh and creative type of slang, because in standard English and in the *Cambridge dictionary* (n.d). the word is not identified. This phrase is formed by combining two base words, "*ten*" and "*toes*" to create a new meaning. Lexically, the phrase refers to "*ten toes*," but in conversational contexts and according to the *Slang Dictionary* (n.d.), "*ten toes*" refer to someone who is forced to flee within their own territory. The phrase is commonly used in everyday conversations among urban youth to assert group identity and solidarity. Therefore, the use of this phrase serves as a marker of British social identity.

Data 2 *Bubu*

(00:15:28) – (00:15:39)

The context of this conversation is a situation in which Switcher invites his brother, Marco, to order lunch. However, Marco explains that he has already had lunch with a traditional African dish at his friend

Timmy's house: "What, you're aff now, yeah? Eating that bubu food now, yeah?"

The slang word of *bubu* is categorized as fresh and creative type of slang, because in standard English and in the *Cambridge Dictionary* (n.d). the word is not detected and its formation is created from a new word that functions to express ideas, feelings or situations. Lexically, according to the *A-Z of Jamaican Patois* online dictionary, *bubu* means a stupid person with minimal knowledge. In the context of conversation, Switcher uses *bubu* to refer to the jollof rice and chicken eaten by Marco, implying that the food is strange, unappetizing, and associated with a lower social class. Therefore, the use of *bubu* in this context carries a negative meaning that denigrates African food while reinforcing negative stereotypes about food in London, reflecting both class-based cultural perceptions and functioning as a form of negative self-expression (the fourth function of slang) as well as a marker of Jamaican group identity in London (the eighth function).

Data 3 Peng **(00:15:35) – (00:15:45)**

The context of this conversation is a situation in which Switcher invites his brother, Marco, to order lunch. However, Marco explains that he has already had lunch with a traditional African dish at his friend Timmy's house: "No, I'm not even. It's just that Timmy's mum food was peng. I'm telling you. You should try it, bro."

The slang word *peng* is categorized as fresh and creative slang because it is not found in standard English or in the *Cambridge Dictionary* (n.d.). According to the online *A-Z of Jamaican Patois*, the word means "appealing" or "attractive." In conversational context, Marco uses the word *peng* to compliment the taste of the jollof rice and chicken made by Timmy's mother, thus conveying the meaning of extraordinarily delicious food. The use of the word *peng* functions as a form of positive self-expression, corresponding to the fourth function and also serves as a marker of group identity among people of Jamaican descent in London, which corresponds to the eighth function of slang.

Data 4 Duppy **(01:11:59) – (01:12:16)**

The context of this conversation takes place at a location where members of the Ghetto gang are gathered. They appear reluctant to follow Madder's orders and only begin to act after Timmy speaks, indicating a sense of fear and uncertainty in taking action: "Fuck that bruv! You bought him to me! I should have duppied him down then!"

The slang word *duppied* is categorized as fresh and creative slang because it is not found in standard English or in dictionaries. Lexically, according to the online *A-Z of Jamaican Patois*, *duppy* means "ghost" or "spirit," but in conversational context, it is used to describe the act of defeating, destroying, or killing someone. The use of the word *duppy* serves as a marker of social group identity among people of Jamaican descent, thus aligning with the eighth function of slang.

Flippant slang

Data 5 Boogs **(00:21:54) – (00:22:07)**

The context of this conversation occurs in a classroom during the morning, when Hakeem, Dwayne, Leah, and Shyanne talking about shooting incident that happened the previous day between the Ghetto and Peckham gangs near their residential area: "Nah see, your story's boogs, you're the once chatting boogs!"

The slang word *boogs* is categorized as flippant slang because it is created casually and used in non-serious situations in everyday conversation. According to the lexical meaning based on Green's Dictionary of Slang, the word boogs means a black person, a fake or a nuisance, but in the context of the conversation between Hakeem and Dwayne, this word is more accurately used to express a lie. The use of the word boogs reflects London's urban culture that often uses non-standard terms in informal debates, especially to show disbelief in the other person's story. Thus, the use of boogs reflects the sixth function of slang, namely as a form of avoidance of the use of standard language.

Imitative slang

Data 6 Bare **(00:08:07) – (00:08:20)**

The context of this conversation takes place in a shopping mall when Timmy, Marco, Hakeem and Dwayne are looking at Adidas Yeezy shoes sold in the store: “They’re sick, man. One fifty’s too much man. You can buy two Air Forces with that. I got bare Air Forces, man.”

The slang word *bare* is categorized as imitative slang, because it imitates the form or sound of existing standard English. Lexically, according to the online *Cambridge Dictionary* (n.d.), the word *bare* means “unclothed” or “not covered,” but in conversational context, it is used to mean “a lot” to describe the number of Air Force shoes owned by Marco, as explained in the *Slang Dictionary* (n.d.). The use of *bare* functions as a marker of social identity within the British urban community, thus aligning with the eighth function of slang.

Data 7 Mandem

(00:07:22) – (00:07:58)

The context of this conversation occurred when a group of 18 to 21-year-olds, such as Madder, Striker, and Galis, were chatting in front of an empty building where they were hanging out, before a group of youths from Peckham arrived and launched a gun attack that caused most of them to flee, leaving only Madder and Galis: “All right. Fuck these games, man pussios. Come, let’s cut. Oi Mandem! Come, come.”

The slang word *mandem* is categorized as imitative slang, because it imitates existing forms or sounds in standard English. The word *mandem* is formed from the combination of *man* (male) in English and *dem* (them) in Jamaican. Lexically, based on the A-Z of Jamaican Patois online dictionary, *mandem* is defined as guys or friends and in the context of the conversation it is used by Peckham gang members to call close friends when attacking the Deptford guns gang to build solidarity. The use of the word *mandem* functions as a marker of group identity of Jamaican descent in the London urban environment.

Data 8 Ends

(00:10:06) – (00:10:32)

The context of this conversation takes place when Marco and Timmy are harassed by two unknown individuals, Daps and Skitz, who are unaware that Marco is the younger brother of

Switcher, a respected figure in the Peckham gang: “How are you friends with a ghetto you? Does your brother know? We just ducked them fools out their own ends. If you live un them ends, you’re one of them.”

The slang word *ends* is a type of imitative slang because it comes from standard English which has undergone meaning adjustment. Lexically, according to the online *Cambridge Dictionary* (n.d.), the word *ends* mean “end” or “the furthest part from the center,” but in conversational context, the word means “neighborhood” or “area of residence,” reflecting British urban culture. The use of *ends* serves as a marker of local identity in urban communities, particularly in large cities such as London, and thus falls under the eighth function of slang usage as theorized by (Partridge, 2015).

Data 9 Blood

(00:11:44) – (00:11:53)

The context of this conversation occurs when Timmy is waiting for Marco who is buying something. A group of men came up to Timmy and one of them, Killy, was Timmy's childhood friend when he lived in Lewisham: “Blood man, I hasn’t seen you for 175 years, cuz!”

The slang word *blood* belongs to the imitative slang type because it imitates the standard English word meaning blood according to the *Cambridge Dictionary* but has an expanded meaning to fellow black people or friends according to *Green's Dictionary of Slang*. In conversational context, Killy uses *blood* to greet Timmy, representing emotional closeness and solidarity among people of Jamaican descent in London. Therefore, the use of the word *blood* functions as a marker of racial and cultural identity.

Data 10 Waghwarn

(00:58:11) – (00:59:05)

The context of this conversation occurred after a conflict with his best friend, Marco, which sparked a feud between the Peckham and Ghetto gangs. Timmy ran to attack Marco for killing his partner and tried to stab the Switcher from behind: “Tell Galis, I said waghwarn.”

The slang word *waghwarn* belongs to the imitative slang type because it comes from the phrase

what is going on, which has changed its form and sound adjustment in the Jamaican dialect. Lexically, according to the online *A–Z of Jamaican Patois*, the word of *waghwarn* carries the same meaning as the original English phrase to ask how someone is doing. In conversational context, Switcher says “tell Galis, I said waghwarn” just before he shoots Madder, as a message to Galis whom he had previously killed, implying that Madder would convey the greeting in the afterlife. Therefore, the use of this slang word serves as a marker of group identity among people of Jamaican descent living in London through their distinctive dialect.

Acronym slang

Data 11 GB

(00:14:05) – (00:14:22)

The context of this conversation takes place when Madder feels angry and anxious due to Sneak’s earlier action of abandoning him and Galis when their group was nearly attacked by the Peckham gang. Shortly thereafter, Galis discovers that the incident was recorded and uploaded to the internet by members of the gang: “What? Lemme see. GB men are moist. Ghetto boy bitches.”

The slang word GB is categorized as a type of slang acronym because the process of its formation from taking the initial letter of the word “Great Britain,” although technically it is more appropriate to be called an abbreviation; however, according to Allan & Burrige (2006) in Manurung (2020), the word is a type of slang acronym. In the context of conversation, *GB* refers to *Ghetto Boys*, the name of the Deptford gang that is mocked by the Peckham gang as “GB men are moist” for being perceived as weak when fleeing from an attack. The use of such abbreviations functions as a marker of gang affiliation, aligning with the eighth function of slang as a marker of group identity, as abbreviations are often used to reinforce exclusivity within gang culture.

Clipping slang

Data 12 Feds

(00:58:11) – (00:59:05)

The context of this conversation occurred after a conflict with his best friend, Marco, which sparked a feud between the Peckham and Ghetto gangs. Timmy ran to attack Marco for killing his partner and tried to stab the Switcher from behind. However, when the incident took place, it was not long before the police arrived: “Hey, wait, wait! There are feds there!”

The slang word *feds* belongs to the clipping slang type because it is formed through shortening the word *federal* in standard English. Lexically, according to the *Cambridge dictionary* (n.d.), *federal* refers to matters related to the central government; however, in UK slang, *feds* refers to the police or law enforcement officers authorized to make arrests. In the conversation, Timmy, who is attacking Marco and stabbing Switcher, is stopped by Killy due to the presence of patrolling police officers, indicating that the use of the term *feds* serves as a linguistic marker of British society, specifically in the context of UK slang referring to law enforcement authorities.

Conclusion

Based on the research data, it is evident the types Slang used in the film *Blue Story* (2019) are highly varied, with imitative slang being the most dominant. This type involves the formation of words by mimicking existing expressions and adapting their meanings. The primary function of slang in this research is to serve as a marker of social group identity, indicating that the speakers belong to British and Jamaican-descended social communities. This highlights the role of slang as a symbol of identity and social strength within specific communities.

The meaning of slang depends on the context of the conversation, particularly shaped by the surrounding urban culture and social situations. Often, the meaning of slang differs significantly from its literal or standard language. Jamaican slang, known as Jamaican Patois has a significant influence on the development of slang in the UK, particularly within Afro-Caribbean communities in South London. Jamaican Patois is a form of Creole language that emerged from a blend of English with African, Spanish, and Portuguese elements, brought by immigrants after World War II.

In *Blue Story* (2019), slang is not only used as a tool for communication but also reflects social life,

conflict, and solidarity. This study provides insight into how slang mirrors the culture and social identity of a community. Moreover, it affirms the importance of slang in sociolinguistic studies as a means to understand the relationship between language, culture, and society. The research also opens up opportunities to further explore the role of slang in other media that reflect social and cultural changes in the modern era.

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