



An Analysis of Slang Usage in the Film Teenage Girl: A study of informal language in Expressing Adolescents' Emotions and Social Relationships

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the use of slang in the film *Teenage Girl*, examining how informal language represents the emotional expressions and social dynamics of adolescent characters. Slang functions not merely as a means of communication, but also as a marker of identity, a tool for building group solidarity, and a medium for conveying nuanced emotional experiences. Adopting a qualitative descriptive approach within a sociolinguistic framework, this study analyzes selected dialogues from the film to identify the types, features, and communicative roles of slang expressions. The data were collected through documentation techniques and analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model. The findings indicate that slang in the film serves various purposes: articulating emotions such as happiness, frustration, and embarrassment; signaling group membership and solidarity; providing humor; and enabling the characters to navigate their social world. Additionally, the study highlights how adolescent girls creatively and strategically use slang to cope with emotional challenges and social expectations. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of slang as an important socio-emotional and cultural resource in adolescent interaction, both in media and in real-life contexts.

Keywords: slang, informal language, adolescents, emotions, social relationships, film

•Introduction

Language plays a crucial role in human communication, serving not only as a means of conveying information, but also as a tool for expressing emotions, identity, and social belonging. Among adolescents, language often functions beyond its literal meaning, particularly in informal conversations. Teenagers typically use unique linguistic forms—such as slang, idioms, and other informal expressions—not just to express feelings and attitudes, but also to differentiate themselves from other age groups and strengthen peer bonds. Through such language use, they build a sense of identity, define their social roles, and create a feeling of belonging within their community.

Sumarsono (2017, p. 164) explains that slang is commonly used by adolescents and their communities as a form of informal and coded speech. Slang allows individuals to convey thoughts and emotions while also appearing exclusive—those outside the group may not understand the terms being used. Language, therefore, functions as a form of social identity. According to Yule (2014, as cited in Cecilika, 2021), slang reflects social life—especially among youth—and shifts with changing trends.

Slang is generally defined as informal words and expressions that are not considered standard in formal language (Ratna Sari et al., 2021). However, these forms are often widely accepted in casual and social contexts. Yule (2006) further emphasizes that slang is a form of informal English created by specific communities. In the modern era, it has become an essential element of daily communication. While formal language is used in official situations, slang is more prevalent in everyday conversations. Its flexibility allows it to adapt across various informal settings, social backgrounds, and even historical periods, demonstrating its universality and creativity.

Slang has become increasingly popular, particularly among the millennial generation. It often deviates from standard language rules and includes the creation of new words, sometimes borrowed or adapted from other languages. Although it is widely used, slang is frequently perceived as inappropriate or non-standard language, and thus often overlooked in formal linguistic studies. Nevertheless, scholars have increasingly acknowledged slang's importance as a reflection of cultural identity and emotional expression, especially in adolescent communities. Adolescence is a critical stage for emotional development and social identity construction, and analyzing slang expressions used by this age group provides meaningful insights into their behavior, values, and social interactions.

Teenagers not only adopt but also generate slang in their daily conversations. These language choices are often intentional, shaped by emotions and social environments. Slang allows teenagers to strengthen friendships, distinguish themselves from adults, and explore their personal and group identities. It also enables them to express complex emotional states in unique and relatable ways. For adolescents, the use of slang is an important part of their linguistic creativity and cultural participation.

Adolescents are especially known for their rich use and innovation of slang. This developmental stage is marked by significant emotional, psychological, and social transformation, where language serves as a key medium for articulating identity and forming relationships. Through slang, young people assert autonomy, maintain group belonging, and express solidarity or separation. Slang thus reflects the emotional and

- relational dimensions of teenage life, from everyday interactions to broader cultural experiences.

Despite its informality, slang serves essential social functions, particularly within youth communities. It communicates feelings of unity, rebellion, creativity, and emotional authenticity. However, in formal contexts, slang is still frequently dismissed. From a sociolinguistic perspective, slang plays a crucial role in communication and group interaction. Investigating its use in film dialogue can provide insights into how language operates within specific demographics and narrative settings.

This study focuses on analyzing the types and functions of slang expressions used in the film *Teenage Girl*, which portrays teenage life and informal communication. The research aims to examine how the characters use slang to express emotions and navigate social relationships. By analyzing the dialogue and context, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of teenage language use, identity expression, and the broader role of slang in interpersonal communication.

Methods

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive method to explore the use of slang in the film *Teenage Girl*. A qualitative approach is considered suitable for analyzing language phenomena in their natural social and cultural contexts, especially when aiming to understand how language reflects emotions and social relationships. By focusing on real dialogues from the film, the research seeks to uncover how teenage characters use informal expressions to express themselves and navigate their interpersonal dynamics. This approach enables the researcher to describe and interpret the types and functions of slang without relying on statistical data, allowing for a more nuanced and context-sensitive analysis.

The data for this research are derived from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data come from the dialogues in *Teenage Girl*, a film directed and written by Aaron Lee Lopez and released in 2020 by Mutt Productions. The story follows two teenage girls and their journey of self-discovery, friendship, and emotional growth. The film contains rich examples of informal language, particularly slang, which are analyzed to understand their communicative roles. The secondary sources consist of relevant books, scholarly articles, and theories from experts in sociolinguistics and language studies, such as Allan & Burridge (2006), Tagliamonte (2016), Holmes (2013), and others who provide frameworks for analyzing informal and youth language.

To collect the data, the researcher employed documentation techniques. The film was viewed multiple times to identify and transcribe scenes where slang was used in informal or emotionally expressive situations. These transcriptions formed the basis for identifying slang expressions, which were then examined in terms of their meaning, context, and communicative function. The analysis focused on how the slang terms reflected the emotional states of the speakers and how they functioned within the social dynamics of teenage interaction.

The process of data analysis followed the model proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994), which involves three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction phase, only relevant slang expressions were selected based on their emotional or social significance. These were then organized systematically to highlight speaker, situation, emotional tone, and function. Finally, conclusions were drawn and verified by interpreting the patterns through

sociolinguistic theory. Through this method, the study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how slang serves as a linguistic and emotional tool among adolescents as depicted in the film.

Findings and Discussion

Based on the analysis of dialogues in the film *Teenage Girl*, it was found that the teenage characters employed a wide range of slang expressions throughout their interactions.

Varieties of Slang

These expressions varied not only in linguistic form but also in their sociocultural origins and communicative purposes. To systematically analyze the data, the slang terms were categorized into several distinct varieties. The classification was guided by theories from Allan and Burridge (2006) and Partridge (2006), who emphasized the importance of social function and usage context in distinguishing types of slang. Each variety reflects a different dimension of teenage social life, emotional expression, and cultural engagement. The table below outlines the slang varieties identified in the film and provides a brief description of each type:

Table 1. Varieties of Slang Expressions in the Film *Teenage Girl*

No	Variety of Slang	Description
1	Internet/Pop Slang	Slang influenced by social media and online platforms, commonly used to express humor, mood, and identity among adolescents.
2	Society Slang	Slang related to social status, trends, appearance, and popularity, reflecting how teenagers view and navigate social hierarchy.
3	Vulgar Slang	Informal expressions used to convey strong emotions such as anger, frustration, or surprise, often in high-stress moments.
4	Gendered Slang	Slang predominantly used among female characters to express support, empowerment, or emotional connection.
5	Creative/Formed Slang	Slang formed through abbreviation, blending, or acronyms, often serving humorous or exaggerated functions in speech.

Based on the findings presented in Table 1, it can be observed that the slang expressions used by the characters in the film *Teenage Girl* fall into five major categories: Internet/Pop Slang, Society Slang, Vulgar Slang, Gendered Slang, and Creative/Formed Slang. These classifications reflect the linguistic diversity within teenage conversations and indicate how various forms of slang function as tools for emotional expression, cultural reference, and social identity among adolescents.

The most dominant category is Internet/Pop Slang, which reflects the influence of digital culture on youth language. Phrases like “*cringe*”, “*lit*”, “*shook*”, and “*no cap*” demonstrate how slang derived from social media platforms has been integrated into everyday speech. These expressions help teenagers communicate specific emotions

- and reactions in a way that resonates with their digital experiences, enhancing group belonging and signaling cultural awareness.

Meanwhile, Society Slang refers to expressions connected to social image, lifestyle, and peer perception. Terms such as “*flex*”, “*clout*”, “*bougie*”, and “*glow up*” are used to comment on appearances, social standing, or perceived popularity. In teenage interactions, this type of slang serves to critique or highlight the importance of trends and status, reflecting how adolescents use language to navigate and negotiate their place within peer hierarchies.

Vulgar Slang appears in more emotionally charged scenes, where characters express irritation, disappointment, or anger. Expressions like “*pissed*”, “*damn*”, and “*crap*” are examples of this type, allowing characters to vent their emotions in a raw and straightforward manner. Although informal, such language provides a direct channel for conveying strong feelings in moments of conflict or failure.

In contrast, Gendered Slang is mostly used by female characters and often appears in moments of encouragement, affirmation, or emotional connection. Words such as “*slay*”, “*queen*”, and “*baddie*” are used to compliment, uplift, or support one another, emphasizing the role of slang in building positive female relationships and shared empowerment in adolescent culture.

Lastly, Creative/Formed Slang represents slang that emerges through abbreviation, blending, or wordplay. Examples like “*hangry*”, “*TMI*”, and “*FOMO*” showcase the inventive nature of teenage language. These terms often inject humor and relatability into conversations, demonstrating how adolescents adapt language to fit their expressive needs in dynamic and informal ways.

To sum up, the film *Teenage Girl* illustrates how various forms of slang are embedded in teenage interaction, each serving different communicative and emotional purposes. These slang varieties reveal not only how language is influenced by cultural trends and digital media but also how it plays a central role in shaping adolescent identity, expressing emotions, and maintaining social bonds.

Classifications and Characteristics of Slang

In analyzing the slang expressions used by teenage characters in *Teenage Girl*, it is important to observe not only their functional use in context but also their linguistic characteristics and structural classifications. According to Allan and Burridge (2006), slang may take various forms—ranging from abbreviations and metaphorical expressions to blends and acronyms—depending on the creativity and communicative goals of the speaker. Partridge (2006) further adds that slang often evolves through playful manipulation of existing words, which contributes to its dynamic and expressive nature.

The slang terms identified in the film exhibit a variety of lexical forms and features, including abbreviations, borrowed meanings, word blending, metaphorical extensions, and emotionally loaded vocabulary. These characteristics reflect how adolescents adapt language to their needs: to be concise, humorous, emotional, or socially distinct. The classification also highlights the informal and often coded nature of slang as a sociolect among teenagers.

The following table presents the observed classifications and characteristics of slang expressions in the film:

Table 2. Classifications and Characteristics of Slang Expressions in *Teenage Girl*

No	Classification Type	Expressions	Scene/Situation	Characteristic Function
1	Emotion-Driven Slang	Cringe, Dead, Shook	Claire says “cringe” after a joke flops; Samantha says “I’m dead” after reading a meme.	Express strong personal reactions like embarrassment or amusement.
2	Style/Appearance Slang	Slay,Drip, Glow up	Samantha praises Claire’s dress with “You slay!” before prom.	Highlight appearance, beauty, or fashion glow-up positively.
3	Social Commentary Slang	Bougie, Basic, Flex	Claire sarcastically say “bougie” about a luxury item; Alex says “Just flexing.”	Critique or mock social class, behavior, or materialism.
4	Supportive/Friendship Slang	Queen, Baddie, Hypebeast	Alex calls Samantha “a baddie” on her selfie; Claire says “You’re a queen” during support.	Show encouragement, identity bonding, and admiration in friendships.
5	Digital Culture Slang	Clapback, Ratio, Stan	Claire says “He got ratioed”; Samantha says “I stan her” after watching a video.	Reflect online behavior and reactions adapted into real-life talk.
6	Humorous/Exaggeration Slang	Hangry,TMI, Yeet	Alex jokes “I’m hangry”; Claire says “TMI” to interrupt an awkward story.	Add playfulness and exaggeration to everyday conversation.
7.	Dismissive/Judgment Slang	Cancelled, Extra, Sus	Claire says “He’s cancelled” after a rude comment; Alex whispers “That’s sus.”	Express disapproval, criticism, or rejection in peer interaction.

Based on the analysis presented in Table 2, the slang expressions used by teenage characters in *Teenage Girl* reveal a wide range of communicative styles and social intentions. These expressions are not random or purely playful; rather, they are strategically employed to reflect emotional states, establish social norms, critique behavior, and reinforce group identity. Emotion-driven slang such as “*cringe*”, “*dead*”, and “*shook*” enables characters to react to awkward, humorous, or surprising

▪situations with immediacy and relatability. These terms capture internal reactions in ways that are culturally familiar to their peers.

Slang related to style and appearance—such as “slay”, “drip”, and “glow up”—serves as a tool for affirming beauty, self-confidence, or transformation. This classification reveals how teenage characters use language to praise and celebrate physical presence, often in preparation for or reflection on social events like prom or parties. On the other hand, socially judgmental expressions such as “basic”, “bougie”, and “flex” allow characters to comment on perceived superficiality or materialism, often with sarcasm or humor. These judgments are a form of social negotiation, helping teens define what is considered acceptable or “too much” within their circle.

Supportive slang expressions like “queen”, “baddie”, and “hypebeast” are primarily used to empower friends, especially among female characters. These words reinforce solidarity, encourage confidence, and help construct a shared social identity. In contrast, slang originating from digital culture—such as “clapback”, “ratio”, and “stan”—illustrates how teenagers import language from online platforms into their offline interactions, blurring the boundaries between virtual and real-life communication.

Humorous or exaggerated slang like “hangry”, “TMI”, and “yeet” adds playfulness and emotional exaggeration to casual conversation. These terms enhance the expressive quality of speech and help diffuse serious tones into more light-hearted ones. Finally, dismissive expressions such as “cancelled”, “extra”, and “sus” allow characters to reject behaviors or people quickly and efficiently, often with strong social implications. These types of slang terms reflect peer pressure, moral judgment, and exclusion in a concise and culturally relevant way.

Functions of Slang Expressions

Teenage communication is often emotionally charged, and slang serves as a primary tool to express those emotions in a concise, relatable, and socially accepted way. In the film *Teenage Girl*, many slang expressions are used not only to convey meaning but also to communicate emotional states, whether overtly or subtly. These emotions range from excitement, admiration, and affection, to embarrassment, disappointment, or even rejection. Through slang, the characters in the film are able to navigate complex social experiences and articulate feelings that might otherwise be difficult to express using formal language.

The table below identifies selected slang expressions from the film, the emotional tone they carry, the situation in which they appear, and how they function in the dialogue. This analysis reveals that slang serves as an efficient medium for emotional expression, allowing teenagers to both hide and reveal feelings, depending on the context and relationship with the interlocutor.

Table 3. Functions of Slang Expressions in Conveying Emotions in *Teenage Girl*

No	Slang Expression	Emotion Conveyed)	Scene/Situation	Function
1	Lit	Excitement, joy	Alex describes a party day they attended last weekend.	Expresses positive energy and shared enjoyment

2	Shook	Shock, disbelief	Claire reacts to seeing her ex with a new girl.	Conveys emotional surprise and inner disturbance
3	Cringe	Embarrassment	Claire mocks Alex's failed joke in the cafeteria.	Expresses secondhand embarrassment humorously
4	Pissed	Anger	Claire reacts to being grounded by her father.	Shows emotional outburst and frustration
5	Dead	Amusement	Samantha laughs hard after reading a meme.	Signals exaggerated laughter and enjoyment

Based on the results presented in Table 3, it is evident that slang expressions play a significant role in conveying the emotional states of teenage characters in the film *Teenage Girl*. Each term carries emotional weight and is used strategically within specific conversational contexts to reflect how teenagers feel, react, and relate to one another. These expressions allow characters to respond naturally to both everyday and intense situations in a way that aligns with their age group and peer culture. For instance, the slang term “*lit*” is used by Alex to describe a party that she and Claire attended. In this case, the word functions as an emotional amplifier, signaling joy, excitement, and shared enjoyment. Rather than using a neutral description, Alex’s use of “*lit*” helps create an upbeat tone and builds a sense of connection with her friend through mutual memory and enthusiasm.

Similarly, the word “*shook*” is employed by Claire when she discovers that her ex-boyfriend is now dating someone new. This term captures her feelings of emotional shock and disbelief, delivering an intense yet culturally relevant expression of surprise. Instead of verbalizing her complex emotions directly, Claire opts for a single slang word that encapsulates her stunned reaction, allowing her to express vulnerability in a socially acceptable manner.

The term “*cringe*” appears during a cafeteria scene when Claire mocks Alex’s failed attempt at humor. Here, “*cringe*” reflects embarrassment—specifically, secondhand embarrassment—presented in a humorous way. It also carries a subtle social judgment, suggesting that Alex’s action did not meet group expectations. The slang term helps Claire distance herself from the awkwardness while maintaining the casual tone typical of peer interactions.

In another emotionally charged moment, Claire uses the word “*pissed*” to express her anger after being grounded by her father. This slang term functions as a strong emotional outburst that captures Claire’s frustration without the need for a long

▪ explanation. It shows how teenagers use direct, informal language to externalize negative feelings, particularly in private or peer-oriented conversations.

Lastly, the slang term “dead” is used by Samantha during a humorous lunch scene after reading a meme. By saying “I’m dead,” she expresses extreme amusement in a playful, exaggerated manner. The term has no literal connection to death; instead, it dramatizes her emotional response, highlighting how slang is often used to intensify reactions for comic effect and peer bonding.

The findings of this study reinforce the view that slang serves not only as a linguistic deviation from standard norms, but as a complex social practice deeply rooted in identity construction, emotional expression, and peer interaction. Allan and Burridge (2006) state that slang is often associated with group solidarity, covert prestige, and rebellion against formal linguistic structures. This aligns with the way teenage characters in *Teenage Girl* use slang expressions to mark in-group belonging, challenge authority, and convey strong emotional reactions. Rather than relying on formal or emotionally neutral language, the characters consistently choose slang terms like “shook,” “pissed,” “queen,” and “cringe” to express their feelings in ways that resonate with their peers and reflect the emotional turbulence typical of adolescence. Partridge (2006) classifies slang into distinct categories, including society slang, public school slang, vulgar slang, and gendered slang, emphasizing that these variations are not random but reflect underlying social structures. The presence of society slang in *Teenage Girl*—evident in words like “bougie,” “clout,” and “flex”—illustrates how teenagers interpret and reproduce class-related attitudes in their everyday speech. Vulgar slang such as “damn” and “pissed” reflects emotional immediacy and is typically used in moments of anger or frustration, supporting Partridge’s idea that slang acts as an emotional release. Furthermore, the strong use of gendered slang like “slay,” “queen,” and “baddie” among female characters emphasizes how girls linguistically empower one another, reinforcing friendship and emotional resilience through shared cultural codes.

Tagliamonte (2016) offers a contemporary lens on slang, describing it as a flexible, innovative, and rapidly evolving component of youth discourse that is often fueled by digital interaction and online platforms. In the film, internet and pop culture slang—such as “stan,” “cancelled,” “ratio,” and “clapback”—clearly demonstrates this trend. These terms originate in digital spaces (like Twitter or TikTok) but are repurposed by the characters to express their emotions and social reactions in face-to-face conversation. The frequent borrowing of online language highlights the hybrid nature of modern teen communication, where the boundaries between virtual and real-world identities are increasingly blurred. Tagliamonte’s view that slang is a form of sociolinguistic innovation is strongly supported by the characters’ ability to adapt and personalize expressions that carry both emotional weight and social commentary. Holmes (2013) also emphasizes the pragmatic function of slang, particularly in terms of its role in signaling solidarity, intimacy, and in-group membership. In the film, expressions like “that’s a mood,” “dead,” and “yeet” are used in casual, humorous exchanges that affirm emotional closeness between friends. These expressions do not serve to inform or clarify, but to confirm shared feelings and experiences. The repetition of such slang within peer conversations fosters mutual understanding and strengthens interpersonal bonds. Holmes further suggests that informal language choices often carry more relational meaning than formal alternatives—a notion that is clearly observable in how slang enhances emotional authenticity in teenage dialogue.

Yule (2014) contributes to this framework by describing slang as a creative response to social needs, often emerging from youth communities seeking to differentiate themselves from adult norms. In *Teenage Girl*, slang serves exactly this function: it builds a distinct generational identity, allowing the characters to express themselves in ways that are both emotionally meaningful and socially relevant. The slang used in the film mirrors how adolescents in real life seek autonomy, validation, and recognition through the language they share with their peers. Expressions such as “ghosted,” “hangry,” and “TMI” reflect not only emotional content but also a shared cultural understanding, enabling characters to say more with less.

Finally, Sumarsono (2017) underlines that teenagers frequently develop their own linguistic codes as a way of both expressing emotion and reinforcing social exclusivity. This explains the highly contextual use of slang in the film, where certain expressions are only understood within peer groups, often carrying hidden or symbolic meaning. The slang acts as a form of verbal shorthand, enabling efficient emotional communication while maintaining social boundaries. This also affirms the idea that slang is not simply about deviation, but about meaningful social and emotional function—especially during a stage of life where identity, belonging, and emotion are tightly intertwined.

Conclusion

The analysis of slang expressions in the film *Teenage Girl* reveals that slang functions as a vital element in adolescent communication, carrying significant emotional, social, and cultural weight. Throughout the film, teenage characters engage in informal conversations that are rich in slang, and these expressions are used not merely for stylistic flair but as strategic tools for conveying emotions, shaping identity, and navigating peer relationships. The use of slang is consistent, purposeful, and closely tied to the characters’ emotional states and social environments, reflecting the complex dynamics of adolescence.

Slang in the film appears in various forms, ranging from expressions rooted in internet and popular culture to terms associated with fashion, social class, empowerment, criticism, or emotional exaggeration. These expressions are creatively constructed, often shaped by online trends, and adapted into the characters’ daily speech as part of their generational identity. Phrases such as *lit*, *cringe*, *slay*, *pissed*, and *ghosted* are not used arbitrarily; instead, they serve to articulate reactions, feelings, and social evaluations in ways that resonate deeply within peer groups. The richness and frequency of these expressions indicate that slang is a linguistic code that encapsulates both personal emotion and shared cultural meaning among teenagers.

Moreover, the emotional depth conveyed through slang suggests that adolescents often prefer using informal, culturally embedded expressions to communicate feelings that may be difficult to articulate in standard language. Whether expressing excitement, frustration, admiration, embarrassment, or support, slang provides a shorthand for intense emotions while preserving a tone of relatability and informality. For example, expressions like *dead* or *hangry* allow characters to describe internal states with humor, while words like *queen* and *savage* offer emotional support or admiration in ways that strengthen social bonds. These instances confirm that slang not only simplifies expression but also enhances emotional clarity, especially within peer-oriented interactions.

In addition to its emotional function, slang operates as a marker of identity and belonging. The consistent use of certain slang terms creates a sense of solidarity among

characters and distinguishes them from adults or outsiders. It also becomes a medium for asserting social positions—either through praise, mockery, or rejection. Terms such as *extra*, *clout*, *cancelled*, or *bougie* demonstrate how slang is used to judge behaviors, criticize social status, or align with particular subcultures. Through this, language becomes a social weapon, a bonding ritual, and an emotional outlet all at once.

Altogether, the findings of this study affirm that slang is far more than casual or fashionable language. It functions as an emotionally charged, socially strategic, and culturally embedded form of communication among teenagers. It enables young speakers to communicate efficiently, express themselves authentically, and navigate the complexities of adolescence with language that feels natural, relevant, and empowering. The way slang is used in *Teenage Girl* accurately mirrors real-world teenage communication, making the film a valuable reflection of youth language in contemporary media.

Ultimately, this study contributes to the broader field of sociolinguistics by illustrating how slang reflects not only linguistic variation but also emotional behavior, peer dynamics, and youth identity. The informal language of teenagers, as represented in this film, deserves recognition as a meaningful and functional system of communication. It is a reflection of a generation's voice—dynamic, expressive, and inseparable from their emotional and social lives.

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