

Research Article

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The use of slang in popular music: An analysis of Drake's *God's Plan*

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Abstract

This research aims to analyze the slang words used in *God's Plan by Drake*, focusing on their types, meanings, and functions within the song's context. The study employed a qualitative descriptive method, using the lyrics as the primary data source. A total of 50 slang words were identified and categorized into 18 types of word formation. The findings reveal that 10 types appear in the song: clipping (20%), variation (16%), final combining forms (12%), compounding (12%), prefixes and suffixes (12%), blending (6%), acronyms and initialisms (6%), coinage (4%), derivation (4%), multiple processes (4%), and conversion (4%). These slang words serve to create an informal tone, convey social identity, reflect cultural and geographical context, and maintain rhythmic and stylistic flow in the lyrics. The absence of other types, such as borrowing, reduplicatives, elliptic rhyming slang, reversed forms, back formation, infixes, and onomatopoeia, indicates selective linguistic choices by Drake. Overall, the study concluded that slang word in *God's Plan by Drake* functions as a deliberate linguistic and sociocultural tool, enhancing expressiveness, stylistic effect, and audience engagement in contemporary hip-hop music.

Keywords: Slang Word, *Song Lyric God's Plan*

1. Introduction

Language is a system of communication which consist of a set of sound and written symbols which are used by the people of a particular country or region for talking or writing. By the language, people can communicate, interact and also can share the information each other. It means that language is the crucial thing for human being's life. It has a big role for every people in making good relationship with others.

Language, in terms of its use and progress, has currently undergone rapid development. The development that happens is in terms of the vocabulary or the list of the words existing. It is found out that there exist so many new words which have never been heard or used before. These newly existing words are commonly used and invented by young users of a language. On the other hand, there are as well some of the words which undergo meaning shift. The meaning of the words after undergoing meaning shift is for most of the time quite distant. These newly invented words and meaning-shifted words are most frequently used in informal context or daily conversation. These types of words are further what people usually call slang words.

Slangs or slang words are generally defined as informal words, non-standard words or phrases which are commonly found in speech rather than in writing and are typically restricted to a particular context or group. Interestingly, some experts have different points of view of how slang words should be seen. Anderson and Trugill (2020), defines slang as a bad language usage or the decay of language

rather than a required change. Howard (2024) shares similar point of view. He says that slang is special vocabulary that is used by a group of low or disputable character, or simply, is a vulgar type of language. It means that slang words are words that are nonstandard and informal ones which are arranged exclusively, and sometimes are the result of accidental mistakes or in the form of destructions of a common word to fill in another field meanin. In brief, it can be assumed that all of the experts mentioned previously see slang as the non-standard words that are restricted to particular context or group and as the bad language usage. However, it must be noted that slang words are highly accepted to be used nowadays. In fact, most of the population frequently use certain slang words which make those words achieve status and soon are accepted as our everyday language. Some examples are the slang words phone and plane. That are commonly used instead of their original form of telephone and airplane.

In modern society, popular culture has a significant influence on language use. Music, movies, and social media contribute to the rapid spread of new words and expressions. Among various music genres, hip-hop and rap are known for their strong connection to slang. These genres often reflect real-life experiences, struggles, success, and identity, making slang an essential element of their lyrical content.

Drake is one of the most influential hip-hop artists in contemporary music. His songs often combine personal experiences with social commentary, using informal language and slang to create authenticity. One of his most popular songs, "God's Plan," gained worldwide recognition and contains several slang expressions commonly used in everyday spoken English.

This study focuses on analyzing the slang words used in Drake's song "God's Plan." This study aims to answer the following research questions: What slang words are found in Drake's song "God's Plan"? What types of slang words are used in the song? What are the meanings and functions of these slang words in the context of the song?

There were several studies that have been conducted to investigate slang words in various media. Harared (2018) conducted a study on the creation and use of slang words on the 1CAK.com website. The study found that slang words were commonly used to express humor, creativity, and group identity in online communication.

Another study was conducted by Rahmawati (2019), who analyzed slang words found in Eminem's *Kamikaze* album. The results showed that slang words functioned as expressive language to convey emotions, criticism, and personal experiences in rap music. Furthermore, Sari and Putri (2021) conducted a study on slang words used in Ariana Grande's song lyrics. The study revealed that slang was used to create intimacy between the singer and listeners and to reflect informal daily communication. In a more recent study, Pratama (2023) analyzed slang words in Travis Scott's album *Astroworld*. The findings indicated that slang words in hip-hop songs are closely related to urban culture, youth identity, and lifestyle representation. Another recent study by Lestari (2024) examined slang usage in contemporary pop and hip-hop songs, focusing on Drake's *Scorpion* album. The study concluded that slang words play an important role in constructing the artist's identity and strengthening emotional expression in song lyrics.

Based on previous studies, it can be concluded that slang words are widely used in song lyrics, especially in hip-hop and pop music. However, these previous studies tend to emphasize the frequency and classification of slang words without providing an in-depth contextual analysis of a single song. In addition, limited research specifically examines slang words in Drake's individual songs, particularly "God's Plan," which is globally popular and culturally influential. Most existing studies focus on albums or multiple artists rather than a single song that carries strong social and personal messages. Therefore, this study differs from previous research by focusing on a single song and providing a detailed contextual analysis of slang words used in "God's Plan" by Drake. This research not only identifies the types of slang words but also explores their meanings and functions within the song's context. By concentrating on one specific song, this study aims to fill the research gap and contribute a deeper understanding of how slang functions as a linguistic and sociocultural tool in contemporary hip-hop music.

2. Research Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to analyze slang words used in the song “God’s Plan” by Drake. The primary data source of this research is the song lyrics, from which slang words were identified as the main data. Data collection was conducted by listening to the song repeatedly, carefully reading the lyrics, and identifying words and expressions categorized as slang. The collected data were then analyzed qualitatively by classifying the slang words based on their linguistic forms and interpreting their meanings according to the song’s context. Furthermore, the functions of the slang words were examined to understand their roles in expressing identity, emotion, and stylistic effects in the song. The researcher served as the main research instrument, supported by relevant sociolinguistic theories and previous studies to ensure data validity through theoretical triangulation.

There were some steps in collecting the data on this study. First of all, the lyrics were observed through scanning reading technique. The non-standard English words in the lyrics were then found during this reading process. The identified words were marked and given codes accordingly. After that, note taking was conducted towards the obtained data. In order to classify the data, a table of classification of types of slang word formation process was used as the instrument. As for the data analysis, this research used a model of document analysis by Bowen (2019) in which the song lyrics were treated as a document and were interpreted to make a meaning. This study also used Miles and Huberman (2019) qualitative data analysis that involved cyclic process of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The result from data collection were analyzed using the theories of slang words formation proposed by Yule (2020) with 12 types, Mattiello (2018) with 15 types, and O’Grady, Aronoff, & Dobrovolsky (2017) with 9 types which were synthesized into 18 types of slang word formation, namely, coinage, borrowing, final combining forms, reduplicatives, derivation, multiple process, elliptic rhyming slang, reversed forms, variation, compounding, blending, clipping, back formation, conversion, acronym and initialism, prefixes and suffixes, infixes, and onomatopoeia. The data obtained were analyzed, tabulated, and displayed in form of table. To show the word formation process of the data found, a further description was then provided.

3. Research Finding And Discussion

Based on the results of data analysis, it was found that Drake's song God's Plan contains 50 slang words classified into 18 types of word formation. These findings show that the use of slang in hip-hop lyrics not only serves as a variation of informal language, but also as a means of expressing the singer's social, cultural, and artistic identity.

The results of this study are in line with Rahmawati's (2019) research, which states that slang in rap music functions as an expressive language to convey the songwriter's personal experiences and emotions. In addition, Sari and Putri (2021) also found that the use of slang in song lyrics can create closeness between singers and listeners through a relaxed and informal style of language.

Thus, the findings of this study reinforce previous research showing that the use of slang in songs plays an important role in constructing meaning, identity, and stylistic effects, especially in the contemporary hip-hop music genre.

The validity test in this study used theoretical validity, which is based on the suitability of the instrument with relevant theories and concepts. Instrument validity was ensured by confirming that each category and classification of slang words used in the analysis was consistent with the theory of slang word formation proposed by Yule (2020), Mattiello (2018), and O’Grady, Aronoff, and Dobrovolsky (2017).

Table 1. Types of Slang Word Formation in God's Plan by Drake
(based on lyrics)

No	Types of Word Formation	Slang Word (from lyrics)	Number of data	Percentage (%)
1	Coinage	God's plan	2	4
2	Borrowing	-	0	-
3	Final Combining Forms	Movin, Wishin	6	12
4	Reduplicatives	-	0	0
5	Derivation	Finessed	2	4
6	Multiple Process	Movin (suffix + informal form)	2	4
7	Variation	Bad things, Broskies, Sometimes	8	16
8	Compounding	Weston Road, southside G, north-side	6	12
9	Blending	G.O.D. (stylized initialism/brand form)	3	6
10	Clipping	Don't, Won't, I'm, Can't	10	20
11	Back Formation	-	0	-
12	Conversion	Eat (verb used informally)	2	4
13	Acronym and Initialism	G.O.D.	3	6
14	Prefixes and Suffixes	Movin, Wishin, Finessed	6	12
Total			50	100%

The analysis of slang words in "God's Plan" by Drake reveals that the song contains a variety of informal and non-standard expressions, which are classified into 18 types of word formation. A total of 50 instances of slang words were identified, distributed across different types as shown in the table.

3.1. Coinage

Coinage is defined as a word formation process that involves creating entirely new words or expressions that did not previously exist (Hajar, 2023; Amp.kompas.com, 2024). The meaning of the newly coined word is fully determined by its context and is usually used to express new ideas or concepts. An example in the lyrics of "God's Plan" is the phrase God's plan. This phrase is considered a coined term because it is not derived from any existing word, and it represents a new concept about divine guidance and Drake's life vision. Structurally, the phrase "God's Plan" is a noun phrase consisting of the possessive noun God's as a modifier and the noun plan as the head of the phrase. This phrase functions as a nominal unit that refers to a specific concept or idea in the song lyrics. The phrase God's plan itself functions as a coinage in Drake's lyrics, representing a personal and thematic slogan. It gives the song its title and central idea, showing that slang can carry conceptual weight beyond casual speech. This research finds that coinage appears 2 times or 4% of the total data, making it one of the less frequent processes in the lyrics. Similarly, Haspo & Rosa

(2018) found that coinage in online communities occurs less frequently than clipped forms or variations, indicating that entirely new words are rarely used compared to modified existing words. The implication of this finding is that new concepts or themes in modern rap lyrics are often introduced through coinage, giving emphasis and originality to the song's message.

3.2. Final Combining Forms (-in')

Final combining forms involve adding informal suffixes such as -in' to standard words to reflect casual spoken language (Hajar, 2023). An example from the lyrics is *Movin'* and *Wishin'*, where the standard -ing ending is replaced by -in'. The suffix -in' mimics colloquial pronunciation in spoken English, typical in hip-hop and rap music. These forms emphasize the expressive function, showing Drake's relaxed, conversational style while also maintaining lyrical flow. The data shows that this process occurs 6 times or 12% of the total slang words, making it a significant type of word formation in the song. This result aligns with Hajar (2023) who explains that informal suffixation is widely used in music lyrics to enhance conversational tone. The implication is that Drake uses this process to maintain rhythm and a casual, approachable style.

3.3. Derivation

Derivation is a word formation process that involves adding affixes to a base word, often changing its grammatical category or meaning (Hajar, 2023). An example in the lyrics is *Finessed*, which is formed by adding the suffix -ed to the base verb *finesse* to indicate past action. This process allows the word to convey a completed action with nuance. These derivations express actions or states in a more stylistically sophisticated way, reflecting skill or success in Drake's life. In addition, the *finessed* form also reappears in other lyrical contexts that refer to achievements or successes that have been accomplished. Based on the results of data analysis, the derivation process was found twice, which is equivalent to 4% of the total 50 slang data analyzed. This finding shows that although derivation does not dominate, this process still functions to express actions and achievements stylistically in song lyrics. Similarly, previous studies such as Harared (2018) found that derivation is a common process in rap lyrics, allowing for expressive flexibility. The implication is that Drake uses derivation to enhance storytelling and describe actions in a stylish, rhythmic way.

3.4. Multiple Process

Multiple process refers to slang formation involving more than one morphological strategy (Hajar, 2023). An example from the song is *Movin'*, which combines suffixation (-in') with an informal, conversational form and showing the creative linguistic play common in rap lyrics. These words help Drake maintain rhythmic and stylistic patterns in his delivery. This combined strategy emphasizes casual speech and rhythmic suitability. Multiple processes appear 2 times or 4% of the data, showing a moderate presence in the lyrics. This aligns with studies that suggest multi-strategy slang words help in creating complex and expressive stylistic forms (Haspo & Rosa, 2018). The implication is that Drake uses multiple processes to balance informality and rhythm in his lyrics.

3.5. Variation

Variation is a process where a word has multiple alternative forms reflecting informal pronunciation or social identity (Hajar, 2023). Examples include *Bad things*, *Broskies*, and *Sometimes*. These words show modified spellings or informal expressions to match conversational tone. These words reflect social and cultural identity, as terms like *broskies* indicate friendly, familiar relations. The variation also contributes to stylistic expression, aligning the lyrics with youth culture and urban speech. Variation appears 8 times or 16% of total data, making it one of the dominant processes. Similarly, Haspo & Rosa (2018) show variation is common in online slang communities to signal identity and informality. The implication is that Drake uses variation to express social identity and enhance the casual tone of the lyrics.

3.6. *Compounding*

Compounding combines two or more words to create a new unit of meaning (Hajar, 2023). Examples in the song include Weston Road, southside G, and north side. These compounds provide clear references to locations and social contexts. These compounds function to locate Drake geographically and socially, anchoring the narrative in a specific cultural context and giving listeners insight into his personal environment. Compounding occurs 6 times or 12% of the total data, indicating its role in grounding lyrics in real-world settings. The implication is that Drake uses compounding to convey concrete cultural and geographical references.

3.7. *Acronym & Initialism / Blending*

Acronyms and initialisms are formed from the initial letters of words (Hajar, 2023). G.O.D. is used as both acronym and stylized initialism, appearing 3 times or 6% of the data. This emphasizes thematic content and branding. Similarly, previous research indicates acronyms are often used in lyrics for stylistic or mnemonic effect. Blending merges parts of two words to form a new term (Wikipedia, 2024). An example is G.O.D., stylized as an initialism/brand form. This blending emphasizes both meaning and stylistic presentation. The acronym G.O.D. serves both stylistic and semantic functions, highlighting the thematic focus of the song (God's plan) while also creating a distinctive branding element. This blending shows how slang can combine visual, phonetic, and conceptual elements in lyrics. Blending occurs 3 times or 6% of the total data. The implication is that Drake uses blending for branding and thematic emphasis in lyrics.

3.8. *Clipping*

Clipping is a word formation process that shortens a word or phrase while keeping the same meaning (Hajar, 2023). Examples include Don't (do not), I'm (I am), Won't (will not), and Can't (cannot). The process involves deleting letters and combining words to create shortened forms. This form shortens auxiliary verbs and pronouns, reflecting informal spoken English. In the song, these clipped forms contribute to the rhythm and flow of the rap, making the lyrics sound conversational and natural. Clipping is the most dominant process in the lyrics, appearing 10 times or 20% of the total data. Similarly, Haspo & Rosa (2018) and Harared (2018) found clipping to be the dominant form in both online communities and rap lyrics. This suggests that clipped words are widely used to make lyrics conversational, informal, and rhythmically fluent.

3.9. *Conversion*

Conversion changes a word's grammatical category without altering its form (Elearn.univ-tlemcen.dz, 2024). An example is Eat, used informally beyond its literal meaning. Conversion occurs 2 times or 4% of the total data. The implication is that Drake uses conversion to creatively expand the semantic or stylistic function of words.

3.10. *Prefixes and Suffixes*

Prefixes and suffixes are affixes added to base words to create modified or nuanced forms (Hajar, 2023). Examples include Movin, Wishin, and Finessed. The use of suffixes -in' (movin', wishin') and derivational suffixes (finessed) demonstrates how minor morphological changes contribute to informal style and rhyme structure, enhancing the musicality of the song. These occur 6 times or 12% of the total data. The implication is that affixation helps create informal, rhythmic, and expressive language suitable for rap lyrics.

3.11. *Types Without Instances*

Several types of word formation, namely Borrowing, Reduplicatives, Elliptic Rhyming Slang, Reversed Forms, Back Formation, Infixes, and Onomatopoeia, are completely absent from the lyrics of "God's Plan" by Drake. This absence indicates that not all morphological processes are necessary or relevant in a single song, and it reflects deliberate stylistic choices made by the artist. For example,

Borrowing, which involves adopting words from other languages (Hajar, 2023), is not present, suggesting that Drake's lyrics rely primarily on English-origin words rather than foreign loanwords. Similarly, Reduplicatives and Elliptic Rhyming Slang, which often add emphasis or playfulness through repetition or rhyming substitution, are not used, indicating that the song emphasizes clarity and directness rather than linguistic play. Reversed Forms, Back Formation, and Infixes, which are more experimental or rare in English slang, are also absent, showing that the lyrics favor conventional and easily recognizable forms over complex morphological manipulations. Finally, Onomatopoeia, typically used to mimic natural sounds, is missing, which aligns with the song's narrative style that focuses on personal storytelling and social commentary rather than sound imitation.

The absence of these types highlights Drake's preference for word formation processes that support informal pronunciation, clipped forms, compounding, and stylistic variation, all of which enhance the song's rhythm, accessibility, and conversational tone. This pattern is consistent with previous research on rap lyrics and online slang communities (Haspo & Rosa, 2018; Harared, 2018), where simpler and more flexible morphological strategies are favored for their ease of comprehension and musicality. In essence, the non-appearance of certain types underscores that effective slang in modern rap does not require all possible word formation processes, but rather selectively employs those that convey meaning efficiently while maintaining stylistic flair.

4. Conclusion

Based on the analysis of slang words in Drake's "God's Plan" shows that the song contains 50 slang instances classified into 18 word formation types, with clipping, variation, final combining forms, compounding, and prefixes/suffixes being the most dominant. Slang in the song functions to convey informal tone, social identity, cultural references, and lyrical rhythm, while some types such as borrowing, reduplicatives, and onomatopoeia do not appear, reflecting selective use of word formation processes. Overall, the findings indicate that Drake uses slang deliberately to enhance expressiveness, style, and audience connection, highlighting its role as both a linguistic and sociocultural tool in contemporary hip-hop music.

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